

Practicing Democracy with Teachers: A Multicase Analysis of the Foxfire Course for Teachers

By

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

Doctor of Philosophy

(Curriculum and Instruction)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MADISON

2016

Date of final oral examination: 4/18/2016

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many dissertations begin with an acknowledgement of the combined contributions to the project of the many friends, family members, colleagues, mentors and critics who supported the author along the way toward completion. While I have understood this intellectually for some time, it is only through the process of writing my own dissertation that I've come to emotionally understand the degree to which this dissertation and my career in general has been propelled along by the people who care about me and my intellectual work. The dissertation that follows would not be possible without the contributions of many people.

To begin, this dissertation has been significantly shaped through the mentorship of my graduate advisor and members of my dissertation committee. My graduate advisor, Michael Apple, is a giant in the world of critical educational studies. Before I began my graduate studies with him, my educational viewpoint, values, and practice as an educator was shaped by his writing and activism. Throughout graduate school, his intellectual and political leadership in coursework, during the Friday Seminar, and in our personal interactions has impacted the direction of my professional and political growth immensely. Among many lessons, Michael taught me that the task of the critical scholar activist goes beyond simply criticizing schools for reproducing inequality. Without this perspective, it would have never occurred to me to commit so much time and energy to studying the Foxfire Course for Teachers. Alice Udvari-Solner has been an exemplary teacher, collaborator, mentor and friend. Through the process of teaching and writing with Alice, I have learned much about what it means to be an excellent teacher educator. I cannot imagine what my graduate school experience would have been without the three years that we co-taught together. Dawnene Hassett hooked me on her literacy coursework early in my graduate studies and continued to support and challenge me over the years. More than anyone, she provided moral support and continually encouraged my ideas and helped shape my research from the beginning stages. Nancy Kendall's wisdom in the area of research methodology and valuable research and coursework on the research process provided me with the skill set I longed for when I began graduate school. In all future research, her impact on me will be felt. Through her research in schools and her friendly engagement with my research ambitions, Simone Schweber has been a vital mentor during my graduate studies. In the hallway of the Teacher Education Building or over a meal at her house, she would raise questions about my research that would linger in my mind and ultimately shape the direction of this project.

I am also indebted to the many graduate students who shared classrooms with me during my time at UW. In particular, my interactions with fellow graduate students in Michael Apple's Friday Seminar have contributed much to this research. Ru Dawley-Carr, Brian Gibbs, Sara Lam, Eleni Schirmer, Beth Sondel, and Quentin Wheeler-Bell challenged my thinking, so much so that despite our distance, I still hear their voices in my head and see their ideas in my writing. I am also grateful for the friendship and support of Jorge Rodriguez, Katy Swalwell, Assaf Meshulam, Mi Ok Kang, Min Yu, Chris Crowley, Derria Byrd, Lena Batt, Kristen Papoi, Katie Payne, Lauren Gatti, Denise Oen, Shameka Powell, Kevin Lawrence Henry, and Lionel Lim.

My graduate studies would also be unimaginably worse without the friendship and support of many of the members of the academic and administrative staff in the department of Curriculum and Instruction. I am grateful to Marilyn Fearn, Pam Odorizzi, Chris Kruger, Cathy O'Sullivan, Elham Milani, Bee Powers, and Joyce Zander.

My friends Tim Catlin, Andy Fox, Aaron King, John Moore, Matthew Webster and Kevin Whelan helped me survive the stress of graduate school and writing this dissertation. Without their friendship and council along the way, this would not have been possible.

Hilton Smith and Sara Alice Tucker supported my research and opened their home to me during my data collection in Georgia. They both model in their lives and teaching a genuineness I strive toward. To the participants in this research study, I am grateful to you for opening up the Foxfire Course to me and allowing me to take so much of your time. This research would literally not exist without your charitable attitudes toward me and my work.

To my colleagues at the University of Minnesota, Morris, thank you for supporting me through the completion of this dissertation and remaining patient with me. In particular, thank you to Gwen Rudney and Michelle Page. Both showed an interest in my research that helped me reach the finish line despite being away from UW and busy with teaching and parenting two young children.

Thank you to the St. John's Abbey Guesthouse in Collegeville, MN. Without the peace provided by your tranquil surroundings, I may not have finished the final chapters of this dissertation. Perhaps if I had found you earlier, this dissertation would have been finished sooner.

I am most in debt to my family who have been a constant source of support during the writing of this dissertation. My parents, Ellen and Kent, taught me early on the value of education and encouraged me to continue to follow my interests wherever they may lead. Without their guidance, I would not have left K12 teaching to pursue graduate studies. Though my father did not survive to see me finish this project, I know he would be proud of me and interested to see what I do next. My brother and sister, Dustin and Allison, paved the way before me and encouraged me throughout. My daughters, Ella and Lucy, were both born during my graduate studies. In my mind, this period in my life will always be entangled equally between the stress and satisfaction of graduate school and the joy of parenting. Ella and Lucy provided me with a distraction from my studies and a venue for my love and silliness. My mother-in-law, Garrienne Lam, made being a parent during graduate school possible by selflessly moving in with us to help care for the girls. Without her, either parenting or graduate school would have been postponed. I shudder to think how my life might be different.

I am most indebted to my partner Sara Lam. I can't imagine my life without her.

Abstract

This study investigates the democratic teacher education practices employed by the Foxfire Course for Teachers, a one-week residential teacher professional development retreat that occurs each summer in rural Georgia. Using a conception of democratic teacher education that draws upon research in deliberative democracy and reflective teaching, the study presents three separate case studies of different iterations of the Foxfire Course for Teachers. In this qualitative multicase analysis, five course facilitators and thirty-nine participants were interviewed and ethnographic field methods were employed during the separate iterations of the course included in this study. Finally, the distinct case reports are compared and analyzed collectively in order to present findings on how the Foxfire Course for Teachers conceptualizes democratic teacher education, promotes deliberative decision-making and critical reflection, and impacts the professional lives of the participants in the course.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction	1
The Lasting Significance of Foxfire	3
Why Study the Foxfire Course for Teachers?.....	6
Overview of Dissertation	7
Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework	10
Introduction.....	10
Reflective Teaching	10
Deliberative Democracy	21
Democratic Teacher Education.....	31
Chapter 3 – Research Methodology	34
Introduction.....	34
The Tradition of Case Study Research in the Social Sciences	34
What is Case Study Research?.....	36
Robert E. Stake’s View of Case Study Research.....	37
Sharan B. Merriam’s View of Case Study Research	41
Robert K. Yin’s View of Case Study Research	42
Bent Flyvbjerg’s View of Case Study Research – Addressing Misconceptions	45
Foxfire Teacher Education as a Case of Democratic Teacher Education.....	49
Research Questions.....	50
Participants.....	52
Data Collection	52
Data Analysis	61
Researcher Positionality.....	66
Chapter 4 – History and Context of the Foxfire Course for Teachers	70
Introduction.....	70
The History of Foxfire	71
The Foxfire Course for Teachers Today	80
Chapter 5 – Case Report #1	83
Course Overview	83
Facilitator and Participant Backgrounds.....	87
Reasons for Participating in the Foxfire Course for Teachers	88

Deliberating about the Givens	94
Reflecting on the Foxfire Approach and <i>Experience and Education</i>	104
Deliberation: Event vs. Ethos	116
Chapter 6 – Case Report #2	118
Introduction.....	118
Overview of the Week	119
Creating an Equitable and Inclusive Community	124
Spaces for Student Choice	131
Social Control in Democratic Education	143
The Reflective Exchange of Ideas	150
Take-Aways from the Foxfire Course for Teachers	155
Chapter 7 – Case Report #3	164
Introduction:.....	164
Course Overview	166
Reflective Co-Facilitation.....	170
Student Choice as Reflective Inquiry	178
Community Building and Decision Making.....	182
Working through Disagreement and Tension.....	183
Insights Gained by Practicing Democracy.....	190
Chapter 8 – Multicase Analysis	193
Introduction.....	193
How is democratic teacher education practiced during the Foxfire Course for Teachers?	194
How is democratic teacher education supported by course design and facilitation?.....	202
How does this experience of participating in the Foxfire Course for Teachers impact participants’ understanding of their teaching and professional lives?	207
Chapter 9 – Conclusion	211
Introduction.....	211
The Tasks of the Critical Scholar/Activist.....	211
What can Critical Educators learn from the Foxfire Course for Teachers?.....	213
References.....	216

Chapter 1 – Introduction

“Just in taking this course, I have been able to work with at least six different people on an extended basis, face-to-face in a way that never would have happened otherwise. I mean, there are just too many other things dragging our schedules in different ways. And, to be able to sit down with Renae for two hours yesterday and talk about her action plan and work on each other's projects; that would never be possible in another format... And the reading groups where we come up in the afternoon and just sit on the porch and just work through the text; those are great things that can only happen in this kind of format... The other perspective is, as a teacher, we're going to spend 180 hours over the next ten months with a group of thirty kids. And so, anything we can do to practice consensus building skills, that community negotiation, all that stuff, any practice we can get with doing things like that is just good stuff.”

The above quotation comes from an interview with Harvey, a middle school social studies teacher, who was participating in the Foxfire Course for Teachers with fourteen others from around the state of Georgia. He was sitting in a rocking chair on the porch of the Guest House at the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center explaining the unique experience of spending a week with other teachers reflecting together on their teaching practice, the work of John Dewey and the Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning. Earlier in the evening, he had been joined on the porch by two other teachers. Together they took turns reading aloud a chapter in *Experience and Education* by John Dewey, stopping periodically to ask questions, clarify meaning, and most importantly, relate the text to their myriad experiences as classroom teachers. In other corners of the Foxfire Center, similar groups of teachers were engaging with the same ideas in different ways.

When not reading, working in small groups, or socializing, Harvey and the other participants in the Foxfire Course for Teachers sat together in a large oval in the Long House discussing the Foxfire Approach and how to bring it to life in their own classrooms from which the course had provided them some distance. Unlike other education courses or professional

development programs, this course put them in the collective drivers' seat. During the first class session, the facilitators had explained the three broad requirements for the course, but provided no plan for how they would be completed over the next six days. Instead, they explained that the group would deliberate about how to spend their time together in order to complete the course requirements. By taking this unconventional approach to the student-teacher relationship, the participants would gain a deeper understanding of the Foxfire Approach. This experience would help them revise their teaching to include elements of the Foxfire Approach in their classrooms. After some confusion, several false starts, and a little bit of arguing, the group created a plan for the week that gave structure to their discussions of the required readings and provided spaces for small groups to work together to figure out what the Foxfire Approach could look like in their classrooms.

Harvey, like the majority of participants, was taking the course for credit toward his master's degree in education. He explained that he chose Foxfire as an elective because he was starting at a new school in the fall and was looking for ways to improve his approach to teaching history. As a white teacher preparing to teach at a school with a majority non-white student population, he believed that the Foxfire Approach would help him come up with ideas about how to create more interest in the state's history and ownership over how they were learning about it. By the end of the week, Harvey presented an action plan to his peers that outlined a unit in which his new students would research individuals from different social classes and backgrounds during different historical periods as a way to supplement the history provided by the course's textbook. The other participants presented their own action plans that were similar in the sense that they were inspired by the Foxfire Approach but unique in that they were rooted in their classroom contexts and the goals they brought with them to the course. As Harvey indicated in

the opening quotation, these action plans were the result of deep reflection among groups of teachers made possible by the unique format of the Foxfire Course for Teachers.

What I have described in this brief portrait is one iteration of the Foxfire Course for Teachers. Each summer multiple groups of teachers come together and experience the same open structure, allowing each group to create a weeklong educational retreat designed to model the Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning.

The Lasting Significance of Foxfire

Just up the road from where Harvey and his colleagues were engaging in the Foxfire Course for Teachers, fifty years earlier a transplant English teacher from New England was struggling to connect with his students. One day in class, in an act of desperation, he announced to his students that what they had been doing together was not working. He explained that, in order to make their time spent together more enjoyable and productive, he was going to let them decide what they would read and write about. This prompted a series of brainstorming sessions and subsequent deliberative discussions about what they could do with their new found freedom and responsibility. The students elected to write, edit, publish and distribute a magazine that they named Foxfire, after the bioluminescent fungi that grew on rotting wood in the thick forests that surrounded their schools. Foxfire featured articles about Appalachian art, handy crafts and culture drawn primarily from interviews the students conducted with local people.

Though initially only distributed locally, Foxfire soon became a nationally distributed magazine with readers in many parts of the country and abroad. Benefitting from the cultural zeitgeist of the 1960s, Foxfire appealed to members of the countercultural movements of the time. In particular, hippies and those interested or involved in the back-to-the-land movement saw a value in what the students were doing by telling the story of rural life and cultural practice

from a “simpler” time. After only six years of quarterly publication, the Foxfire magazine became anthologized in *The Foxfire Book* which quickly became a national best-seller. The success of this book prompted many subsequent anthologies that have been published as recently as five years ago.

In addition to drawing general interest through the magazine and books, the work of this teacher and his students attracted the attention of many teachers interested in replicating the magazine project and its stunning results. With the blessing and support of the teacher and his students, cultural journalism magazine projects similar to Foxfire sprung up in hundreds of schools. Unlike Foxfire, the majority of these publications never got off the ground or folded after a short time. Upon reflection, those centrally involved with the Foxfire magazine came to recognize an error in their approach to expanding the program. The Foxfire Magazine was the product of student decision-making, experimentation and hard work. The copycat projects had attempted to recreate the *product* without paying attention to the *process*. Thus began the development of the Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning, a general approach to democratizing classrooms.

Unlike the earlier attempts at replicating the magazine, the efforts to develop and promote the Foxfire Approach has been a lasting success. Recognizing the centrality of democratic decision-making and practical experimentation in classrooms, the development and revision of the Foxfire Approach has involved thousands of teachers trying out different practices in their classrooms and sharing the results. Whereas the original magazine project had empowered students to make decisions about their learning, the Foxfire Approach encouraged teachers to take more control over their own professional development. At the height of its popularity, the Foxfire Fund, Inc., the non-profit organization charged with promoting the Foxfire Approach,

supported twenty-two networks of teachers experimenting with democratizing their teaching. Publishing magazines of their own to share their successes and failures, the Foxfire Teacher Networks became an exemplar of action research and inquiry-driven teacher professional development.

At the heart of popularizing the Foxfire Approach, stood the Foxfire Course for Teachers, a week-long retreat wherein teachers of different subjects and from different schools come together to learn about the Foxfire Approach. Teachers involved in this course experience the Foxfire Approach in practice as they deliberate about how to spend their time together while also fulfilling the requirements of the course. Beyond learning about the original magazine project and hearing about how other inspired teachers have transformed their classrooms, the participating teachers are invited to think about what the Foxfire Approach might look like in their teaching context. The course is designed to send them back to their classrooms with initial ideas about how they might democratize their classroom over time.

In the fifty years of history since the Foxfire magazine began, much ink has been spilled about the original classroom and the events that led to the creation of a student-run magazine that has a longer history than many of its commercially produced competitors. The Foxfire Course for Teachers, on the other hand, has received much less attention. In the thirty years of its history, the Foxfire Course for Teachers has been experienced by thousands of educators ranging from preschool classrooms up to the college lecture hall. It continues to inspire teachers to give up some control in their classrooms while simultaneously taking more ownership over their professional development and growth as a teacher. A program with this unique approach to teacher education and lasting legacy deserves the attention of researchers.

Why Study the Foxfire Course for Teachers?

A new era of accountability and centralized control has swept across the United States since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001 (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2005; Apple, 2006; Giroux & Schmidt, 2004). While these trends have often been studied in terms of effects on classroom practice, assessment and teacher evaluation, they have also had significant impacts on teacher professional development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). Instead of providing teachers with general practices that can be broadly applied and tailored to specific situations, many professional development programs can be accurately called “product implementation training”. These trainings are typically concerned with narrow, technical teaching skills and are primarily focused on improving achievement test scores. In many schools, training modules replace the richer in-service professional development that teachers might otherwise receive. Beyond this, many states and school districts have circumscribed what trainings and courses can count for teacher professional development credits necessary for maintaining teaching credentials. The endorsed trainings tend to be similar to the product implementation training described above, leaving teachers with limited opportunities to pursue more meaningful professional development. Together, these trends in teacher professional development reflect a de-skilling of the teaching profession (Apple, 2006; 2013).

Researchers working in the critical tradition should act as “critical scholar/activists” by documenting the efforts of progressive practitioners and activists (Apple, 2010, 2013; Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2009). In the wake of such dramatic changes to teacher professional development, it is important to examine cases that counter regressive educational trends. In particular, professional development opportunities that are democratic in structure and reflective in practice may provide a way forward for those teacher educators that wish to interrupt the deskilling of the

teaching profession. The Foxfire Courses for Teachers are an example of professional development opportunities that foreground progressive educational ideals such as reflective practice, community research, active and collaborative learning strategies, facilitation and learner choice. By examining such a program, teacher educators can gain better insight into how to counter the regressive trends in teacher education that are currently dominant in the United States.

Overview of Dissertation

An understanding of the democratic teacher education practices promoted by the Foxfire Courses for Teachers is missing from the conversation about democratizing the teaching profession. Despite the connection to the original Foxfire magazine program, which received much attention from teachers and researchers alike, the Foxfire Courses for Teachers have been the subject of very little research (Smith, 1991; 1994). The little research that has been done on the program, has mostly been done by individuals internal to the program who either work as advisors to the organization or who are facilitators of the courses themselves. For this reason, this dissertation aims to open up a conversation about how democratic teacher education is practiced at the Foxfire Course for Teachers by analyzing three separate iterations of the course. The specific questions guiding this research are as follows:

1. How is democratic teacher education practiced during the Foxfire Courses for Teachers?
2. How is this supported by program design and facilitation?
3. How does this experience impact participants' understandings of their teaching and professional lives?

In the chapter that follows (Chapter 2), I present a theoretical discussion of democratic teacher education. I argue that any robust vision of democratic teacher education must draw upon the traditions of reflective teaching and deliberative democracy. I start by tracing the tradition of

reflective teaching from the early work of John Dewey with the goal of showing the potential of certain forms of reflective teaching to promote democratic professionalism among teachers.

Drawing upon the work of Ken Zeichner, I argue that democratic teacher education must promote teacher reflection that is a social activity wherein teachers contribute to the collective knowledge of teaching as well as consider the aims of education and the larger social context of schooling. In the latter half of the chapter, I provide a summary of the normative commitments that undergird deliberative democracy. Whereas many discussions about democratic education fail to adequately define democracy, this section of the chapter defines democracy in terms of its deliberative form and argues that this branch of democratic theory is most suitable for conceptualizing democratic teacher education. Finally, the chapter concludes with a synthesis of reflective teaching and deliberative democracy as the basis for clarifying democratic teacher education.

In the next chapter (Chapter 3), I provide a theoretical discussion of the methodology of multiple case study analysis as well as a description of the specific methods employed in this study. In particular, this section is concerned with issues of generalizability and transferability because the larger project is focused on promoting democratic teacher education by providing in-depth case studies of the Foxfire Courses for Teachers. Next, I describe in detail the specific data collection and data analysis methods used in the study. Finally, I situate myself and my own positionality in relation to the research project in a brief description of my background and my concerns in regards to education and social change.

The next chapter (Chapter 4) focuses on the history and context of the Foxfire Courses for Teachers. It has been nearly fifty years since the inception of Foxfire. Providing a detailed account of this complicated history is clearly beyond the scope of this study and these studies

exist elsewhere¹. For the purposes of this dissertation, a brief history is provided as a background against which the reader can understand the three separate case reports of the Foxfire Course for Teachers. The second half of this chapter focuses on the context of the Foxfire Course for Teachers as it exists today. By design, each iteration of the Foxfire Course for Teachers is uniquely shaped by the participants and facilitators and their approach to deliberating about the course. Despite this radical individuality, the Foxfire Course for Teachers has elements such as a location, content, and course requirements that are shared. This section of the dissertation presents these shared features along with a description of the Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning (FATL).

In the subsequent three chapters (Chapters 5 – 7), I provide detailed case reports of three iterations of the Foxfire Course for Teachers. The next chapter (Chapter 8) is a cross-case analysis of the findings of the three previous case reports. This chapter is organized around the central research questions in the study. In the concluding chapter of this dissertation (Chapter 9), I return to issues of generalizability and transferability and provide an explanation of the ways in which researchers and practitioners in the field of teacher education can apply the insights of this research to a population of cases larger than the single program investigated in this study. Drawing upon the work of Michael Apple on the “tasks of the critical scholar/activist”, I attempt to answer the question: “What can critical educators learn from the Foxfire Courses for Teachers?”

¹ For example, John Puckett’s (1991) ethno-history of the first twenty-five years of Foxfire is an invaluable resource for those interested in the history of the program and its many off-shoots. More recently, Julie Oliver (2011) has completed a dissertation on the program’s history with a particular focus on its impact on the educational landscape and its durability in the era of accountability and standards-based education reform.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The theoretical framework for analyzing the data in this study is built from theory and literature from two distinct disciplinary traditions in the service of better understanding and furthering democratic education. From education, I build upon the research in teacher education that promotes reflective teaching as an avenue for teacher professional development. From political theory, I borrow the theory of deliberative democracy as a tool for adding clarity to the discussion of democratic education. In the final section of this chapter, I bring these two bodies of thought together in a conceptual framework designed to begin the process of understanding the Foxfire Course for Teachers as an alternative arrangement for supporting teachers to become more reflective and democratic in their teaching practice.

Reflective Teaching

Reflective teaching has been a prominent agenda item both in teacher education research and the goals of teacher education programs for decades. To an outsider to the field, this may seem like a confusing phenomenon. Viewed one way, some level of reflection is required for any task. In fact, people cannot help but reflect upon their actions. On the other hand, reflection can mean something much more robust. It can refer to systematic interrogation of both the means and ends of action; the setting aside of time and energy for investigating routines, traditions and outcomes. Many researchers and teacher educators have employed the term “reflection” in ways that preserve this expansive continuum. For the past thirty-five years, however, teacher educators working in the progressive and critical traditions have spilled much ink in their efforts to clarify this more robust vision of reflective teaching, often linking the idea of reflective thought and action to the concepts of democratic education and teacher professionalism (Zeichner & Liston,

1996; Brookfield, 1995). From this perspective, promoting reflection among teachers is crucial, particularly among in-service teachers as they are ultimately responsible for much of the direction in their professional development and growth. This is particularly true from the perspective of teaching as a professional enterprise wherein teachers have the autonomy and knowledge base to make meaningful decisions about curriculum, instruction, and their classroom community and environment.

John Dewey's Reflective Action

Reflective teaching has deep roots in educational research dating back to the time of John Dewey's early education writing in the beginning of the twentieth century. While he certainly wrote about reflection in his earliest work on education (Dewey, 1904) and promoted a form of it at his laboratory school in Chicago (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936), his definitive account on reflection was *How We Think*² (Dewey, 1933). In this work, Dewey provides his most commonly cited definition of reflection. He describes it as an "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, 1933, pg. 6). Dewey distinguished between routine action and reflective action. While the former is dictated by tradition, authority, and technical considerations, the latter involves active investigation through the process of both identifying problems and developing solutions to them. Dewey's five step³ model of reflective action started with the apprehension of a problem and then, through an iterative process of inquiry, terminated

² In later works such as *Logic: the Theory of Inquiry* (1938), Dewey expands his writing on reflective action; however, this is a more philosophical book and is not focused on the role of reflection in the work of teaching per se. Throughout this book, he appears to use the terms inquiry and reflection interchangeably.

³ Despite using the analogy of steps, Dewey did not intend for this to be followed like a rulebook. Liston and Zeichner (1996) make this clear in their introductory text on reflective teaching: "According to Dewey, reflection does not consist of a series of steps or procedures to be used by teachers. Rather it is a holistic way of meeting and responding to problems, a way of being as a teacher."

in a provisional solution that could then be tested in further action. This process is not unlike the experience of shifting between doubt and belief described in other writing in the pragmatist tradition (see, for example, Pierce, 1934). Describing Dewey's concept of reflective thought, Hatton and Smith (1995) write:

“Reflection may be seen as an active and deliberative cognitive process, involving sequences of interconnected ideas which take account of underlying beliefs and knowledge. Reflective thinking generally addresses practical problems, allowing for doubt and perplexity before possible solutions are reached” (pg. 34).

This quotation reiterates several important aspects of Dewey's reflective thinking. For Dewey, reflection is a process of interrogating prior beliefs in order to reach a provisional solution to a practical problem that can be tested out and fed back into the process of inquiry.

Dewey's reflective action is promoted and sustained by three attitudes toward the work of teaching. The first of these attitudes is open-mindedness which characterizes the teacher's stance toward their own accumulated knowledge and experience. Open-mindedness is the “desire to listen to more than one side of an issue, to give attention to alternative views, and to recognize that even firmest beliefs may be questioned” (Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000, pg. 40). Responsibility, Dewey's second integral attitude for reflective teachers, describes the teacher's stance toward action and consequences. Reflective teachers do not simply think, they must act in the classroom and wrestle with the consequences of their actions. Liston and Zeichner (1996) write, “Responsible teachers ask themselves why they are doing what they are doing in a way that goes beyond questions of immediate utility (i.e. does it work) to consider the ways in which it is working, why it is working and for whom it is working” (pg. 11). The final attitude of reflective teachers according to Dewey is whole-heartedness. This attitude describes the teacher's stance toward the other two attitudes (ibid). By being whole-hearted, Dewey meant “that open-mindedness and responsibility must be central components in the professional life of

the reflective teacher” (ibid). In essence, the emphasis on inquiry that is characterized by reevaluating beliefs and revising actions based on consequences should pervade all aspects of a reflective teacher’s practice.

Reflective Teaching in the 1980s and 1990s

Despite these early roots in education, reflective teaching did not receive a tremendous amount of attention until a revival in the 1980s (see, for example, Kemmis & Carr, 1983; Beyer, 1984; Tom, 1985; Zeichner, 1987; Tanner, 1988; Munby & Russell, 1989; Henderson, 1989; Smyth, 1992). Valli (1992) explains this reemergence as the result of a number of converging factors⁴. In addition to a shift toward cognitive psychology and away from behavioral psychology, there was a broader interest in teacher thinking and understanding “local meaning” that is associated with interpretive research genres (Borko, Whitcomb, & Byrnes, 2007). This research emphasis was also bolstered by the work of critical, feminist and multicultural researchers whose work helped legitimize ethnographic and other naturalistic research methodologies and helped renew attention to the moral basis of education (Valli, 1992). From these perspectives, education is a moral pursuit and not strictly a technical one. When taking the moral components of education seriously, it is worthwhile to investigate how teachers think about their actions in a classroom.

Second only to John Dewey in the literature about reflective action, Donald Schon helped reinvigorate the discussion of reflective teaching with the publication of his influential text *The Reflective Practitioner* in 1984. Schon’s view of reflection was both informed by Dewey’s work⁵

⁴ Elsewhere this convergence of factors is conceived of as a shift away from “teacher education as a training problem” to “teacher education as a learning problem” (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005).

⁵ Schon’s dissertation focused on Dewey’s theory of inquiry. This is almost certainly where his pragmatic views on reflection derive from (Farrell, 2012).

and extended it by drawing a distinction between types of reflection employed by professionals in various fields. For Schon, it is relevant to consider when the reflection is happening in relation to professional practice⁶. Reflection-on-action is the systematic thinking that occurs either *before or after* action. In the realm of teaching, reflection-on-action would include the thought processes that go into planning units and lessons as well as the reflective debriefing that should occur after implementing plans. Reflection-in-action, on the other hand, refers to thinking that occurs *during* action as the practitioner attempts to frame and solve problems in real time. This too is familiar to educators who practice reflection-in-action when they adjust their lesson plans to accommodate unforeseen difficulties with content or an unanticipated but relevant question posed by a student.

Importantly, Schon's contributions to the development of reflective teaching do not only discriminate along temporal lines, but also make meaningful distinctions between the types of knowledge practitioners are employing when they reflecting-on-action and reflecting-in-action. As a critique of technical rationality which promotes hard and fast lines between theory and practice, Schon's view blurs these lines and places value on tacit understanding (Liston & Zeichner, 1996). For Schon, practitioners are not simply translating theory and "best practice" that originate with researchers in universities to their classroom context. Instead, teachers develop knowledge-in-action as they "think on their feet" and begin to answer many of the thorny practical problems that arise in their day-to-day work. This knowledge-in-action accumulates and mixes with traditional theories and forms into practical theories about teaching. The process of reflection (both in and on action) subjects the teacher's knowledge and practical

⁶Though his work has been incredibly influential in education, Schon did not write explicitly about teachers (Farrell, 2012).

theories to criticism. Through the iterative process of thinking and acting, teachers are able to develop in ways that help them better realize their educational values.

As should be evident from the above discussion of theory and practice, those using the language of reflective teaching in this era were largely in opposition to top-down reforms that were being pursued in education that promoted the view of teacher-as-technician. The idea of reflective teaching was seen as standing in opposition to conservative trends and promoted the development of teachers as professionals who create and use their own knowledge and act with relative autonomy to serve their students and communities. For these reasons, reflective teaching became attached to many teacher education programs around the country and the world. Despite the shared goals, even before the end of the 1980s reflective teaching had become an attenuated and disarticulated idea that masked a tremendous variety of conceptual commitments (Calderhead, 1989). While there was great variation within the meanings, reflective teaching became ubiquitous throughout teacher education research, programs, and materials (Feiman-Nemser, 1990).

Following up on the prevalence of ambiguous work being done in the name of reflective teaching throughout the 1980s, Zeichner (1993) systematically investigated the work of education programs that claimed to foreground reflective practice. During this study he found that many programs were employing a usage of the term that undercut the genuine development of teachers as professionals. He criticized the programs along two lines. The first category of criticism related to the oft-cited theory and practice divide in education. He found that, instead of being empowering and creating a dialogic exchange of both theory and practice between teachers and universities, the teachers in these programs were being asked to reflect on how better to implement the curriculum and instruction developed at the university. While the idea of

reflective teaching was supposed to interrupt the idea of teacher-as-technician, by employing it in such a narrow sense, these programs were reinforcing it and thus undermining the nuanced view of knowledge generation promoted by Schon and others. Zeichner also found that these programs limited reflection to issues of practice. In essence, teachers were encouraged to reflect on the *means* of education, while leaving the *ends* to schools of education and professional researchers.

The other category of Zeichner's criticism involves what he called the "individualist bias" (1993; p. 8). He found that the programs that employed the language of reflective teaching routinely conceived of reflection as an individual practice. First of all, teachers were encouraged to reflect on their own classrooms at the neglect of the larger systems their classroom were situated within. Much like the philosophical ends of education, the social context of schooling was placed out-of-bounds for teacher reflection in these programs. Secondly, reflection was promoted as an individual activity instead of one to be pursued in a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Reflection thus conceived, is more a Cartesian meditation than a Socratic dialogue.

Zeichner's critiques about the generation of knowledge in many programs claiming to promote reflective teaching were prefigured in Schon's criticism of technical rationality. Zeichner's "individualist bias" critiques, on the other hand, apply to Schon's view of reflection. Despite his progressive contributions to the generative work of teaching practice, Schon conceived of reflection as a largely solitary task⁷. Further developing the critique over a decade later, Liston and Zeichner (1996) write, "Apart from the context of mentoring, reflection is portrayed by Schon as largely a solitary process involving a teacher and his or her situation, and

⁷ For a developed criticism of Schon's emphasis on individual reflection, see Day, 1993.

not as a social process taking place within a learning community” (pg. 18). Interestingly, while Schon furthered much of the work of Dewey in relation to reflective teaching, he did not adopt his emphasize on the social aspect of inquiry. According to Carol Rodgers (2002), "Dewey knew that merely to think without ever having to express what one thought is an incomplete act. He recognized that having to express oneself to others, so that others truly understand one's ideas, reveals both the strengths and the holes in one's thinking⁸" (pg. 856).

Schon’s conception of reflection also fails to consider the social aspect of reflection as it pertains to the social context of schools. By failing to encourage practitioners to consider the larger institutional contexts that shape the teaching profession and instead focus inwardly on their individual practice, “Schon is encouraging a submissive response to the institutional conditions and roles in which teachers find themselves” (Liston & Zeichner, 1996, pg. 19). Instead, Liston and Zeichner argue that “teachers should be encouraged to focus both internally on their own practices, and externally on the social conditions of their practice, and that their action plans should involve efforts to improve both individual practice and their situations” (ibid). This view is much more consistent with teaching as a traditional profession in which teachers are not simply agents of the state, but rather have a responsibility to consider the context of schools as a whole. It also echoes the commitments of critical educators who are not only worried about the students in their classrooms, but also struggle to interrupt the reproduction of inequalities in schools and view education as having a role in the social reconstruction of society.

⁸ The same social mechanism in Dewey’s thinking about reflection pervades his contributions to democratic theory. It is on epistemic grounds that Dewey values the reasoning and justifications that arise during deliberation in a democratic community.

Teacher Self-Study

In the wake of these criticisms, reflective teaching practices have developed that aspire more directly to the empowering potential initially ascribed to the movement. In particular, teacher research⁹ stands in opposition to the shortcomings described by Zeichner in relation to the enforced divide between theory and practice. In fact, he referred to this branch of reflective teaching as “the most significant development ever in the field of teacher education research” (Zeichner, 1999, p. 8). The shift toward teacher research draws such attention because it avoids the shortcomings of other models of reflective teaching by reversing the direction that knowledge usually circulates in teacher education and places the people actually doing the teaching in positions to contribute to research. This approach to reflective teaching is also a social process because the research is often being conducted by groups of teachers and the findings are being shared with other practitioners and researchers. In fact, increasingly academic journals are accepting and, in some cases, even seeking out practitioner research¹⁰. In addition to this attention, Cochran-Smith and Lytle edit a long-running *Practitioner Inquiry Series* with Teachers College Press. This series publishes research by working teachers while also producing books that help practitioners learn how to better conduct their own research (see, for example, Zeni, 2000; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Bruce & Pine, 2010). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) see this shift away from earlier forms of reflective teaching toward practitioner research as a renewal of Dewey’s understanding of reflection that holds promise for improving education, creating supportive networks for teachers, and interrupting the hierarchical power relations that characterize the work of teaching.

⁹ Work in this research genre goes under many names including practitioner research, teacher action research, teacher inquiry, and teacher self-study.

¹⁰ *Teacher Education Quarterly*, published by the California Council on Teacher Education, is one such journal.

Todd Dinkelman (2003) argues that teacher self-study has a unique role to play in the development of reflective teaching practices among pre-service teachers by serving dual purposes. First, promoting teacher self-study promotes reflective teaching among teachers and provides them with opportunities to reflect in communities and witness modeling of reflective practice. This also begins to partially answer the question of vagueness that has plagued reflective teaching by providing a straight-forward programmatic model. Secondly, Dinkelman argues that teacher self-study raises the reflective process to the level of knowledge production and responds to Liston and Zeichner's criticisms about the theory and practice divide that is reproduced by some forms of reflective teaching. The knowledge produced via teacher self-study has value for both the local contexts in which it is produced as well as the larger research community. Dinkelman writes, "the knowledge yielded by self-study not only provides insight into the particular issue under investigation but also helps us to recast our future efforts to encourage reflective growth in preservice teachers" (pg. 9). While some point to tensions involved with foregrounding teacher self-study in the production of knowledge about teaching such as the rigor of inquiry (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015), proponents of this approach argue that it elevates the role of the teacher and validates their professional knowledge. Perhaps most importantly, putting teacher self-study at the center of teacher education requires something more than an additive approach. It instead calls for a fundamental redesign of how teachers are inducted into the profession and supported as they develop.

Professional Learning Communities and Critical Friends Groups

Another innovation in the realm of reflective teaching has been the development of communities of teachers working together to reflect about their teaching practice and innovate in their schools and classrooms. While these groups vary tremendously in how they function, they

are mostly grouped under the heading of professional learning communities (PLCs). Stoll et al. (2006) point out that there is no universal definition for PLCs, but “there appears to be broad international consensus that [PLCs] suggest a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, [and] growth-promoting way. Hord (1997) describes PLCs as groups “in which the teachers in a school and its administrators continuously seek and share learning, and act on their learning.”

Another innovation in the realm of social reflection among teachers comes in the form of Critical Friends Groups (CFGs). CFGs are groups of teachers that come together to critically interrogate aspects of their teaching practice through the use of structured protocols (McDonald et al., 2012). In 1994, the National School Reform Faculty, the professional development group of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, convened a conference designed to create innovative approaches to professional development (Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000). This group, being dissatisfied with many traditional approaches to professional development in which an instructor leads a scripted workshop or gives a motivational presentation while the teachers remain largely passive, developed an approach based on protocols for teachers to build community and develop their practical teaching knowledge. Many of the protocols used in CFGs focus on building community by setting norms and sharing experiences or using student work or lesson plans as objects of inquiry for the group to use as jumping off points for their reflection.

While CFGs are arguably a form of PLC, they have a different focus. Marnie Curry (2008) describes the ethos of CFGs in terms of reflection and teacher learning:

“Together, CFG members seek to increase student learning and achievement through ongoing practice-centered collegial conversations about teaching and learning. By focusing on the triangle of learning (the relationship between student, teacher, and subject matter), CFGs rest on the premise that classrooms ought to be the center of school reform efforts and that teachers should lead

educational change. Undergirding CFGs is the proposition that schools cannot be intellectually engaging places for students unless their teachers are likewise actively engaged in learning, thinking, reading, and discussing. (pg. 735)

Curry goes on to distinguish the approach of CFGs as differing from current reform efforts:

“Given these philosophical orientations, CFGs stand apart from high stakes accountability reforms, which tend toward top-down mandates and the treatment of teachers as technicians to implement the ideas of others” (ibid). These definitions suggest that this model of teacher reflection directly addresses the social aspects of Liston and Zeichner’s criticism. Teachers in CFGs come together to reflect on their work and revise their action in the wake of the insights they gain through the reflective process.

One way to promote the types of reflective teaching practice advocated by people like Liston and Zeichner and practice such as the work of CFGs is to link reflective practice with a focus on democratic teacher education. In order to do this, the concept of “democracy” itself must be clarified and its normative commitments outlined. In the next section I examine deliberative forms of democracy. In the final section, I put this together with critical reflection to form the theoretical framework for understanding and evaluating the work of the Foxfire Courses for Teachers.

Deliberative Democracy

In modern American political life, democracy is often equated with voting and representation. Every so often, the enfranchised citizenry privately weigh the arguments of adversarial candidates and cast a vote for one of them to represent them in public policy decisions. If asked, many American citizens would likely describe American democracy in these terms. Beyond the layperson, many political scientists would also describe democracy in a similar way, as essentially an adversarial process of competitive elections. From this perspective,

democracy is strengthened when those previously denied the ballot are given access to it. While this inclusive reform is absolutely fundamental to legitimate democratic governance, increasingly theorists and activists are arguing that democracy can be deepened beyond universal suffrage. According to Zsuzsanna Chappell (2012), the most prominent work in democratic thought recently has focused on deepening democracy by making it more deliberative in nature. The theoretical and practical work on making democracy more deliberative has been coined deliberative democracy. Given the prominence of this work, democratic theory has been described as taking a “deliberative turn” in recent decades (Dryzek, 2000) as theorists come to view democracy not only as a process of counting votes, but as a deeper engagement in communication, collective reasoning and reflection among citizens.

In order to explicate the foundations of deliberative democracy, it is instructive to first examine how democratic decision-making occurs under non-deliberative conceptions of democracy. While there is much diversity among non-deliberative theories of democracy, they can be reasonably grouped together because they are all essentially aggregative in nature. Aggregative models of democracy view the process of legitimating policy decisions and choosing public officials as one of aggregating the preferences of individuals. Simple accounting of stated preferences then determines what decision is made. Legitimation of the decision comes from the utilitarian logic that it is consistent with the preferences of the majority of participants. Beyond the assumption that legitimacy comes from majority opinion, aggregative models of democracy also make important assumptions about the preferences of individuals themselves. Aggregative models take individual preferences as a given and are not concerned about where preferences come from or how they are shaped during the political process. In essence, democracy, viewed this way, is the process of aggregating private interests and personal

preferences, regardless of their validity, to determine the decision that would be acceptable to the greatest number of people.

Unlike aggregative forms of democracy, deliberative democracy involves more than counting votes and makes different assumptions about individual preferences. Deliberation about the means and ends of collective action lies at the heart of democratic decision making. While voting may occur in deliberative democracy, the primary mechanism is an exchange of ideas and justifications by the individuals impacted by the decision being considered. The goal of deliberation is to determine which preferences are supported by the “best reasons” according to the collective as opposed to simply determining “what preferences have the greatest numerical support” (Young, 2000, pg. 23). In essence, deliberative democracy pulls back the curtain of preferences to reveal the reasons in support of them.

Deliberative democracy also makes important distinctions about how preferences are affected by the decision-making process. Whereas aggregative models pay little attention to the origins and validity of preferences, deliberative democrats believe that preferences are transformed via the educative process of giving and receiving justifications for preferences. By hearing from other people concerned about the same issue, individuals gain new information and learn about different experiences of other people. Through engaging in this process, individuals are able to re-evaluate their own perspectives and see potential areas of consensus.

Micro and Macro Level Deliberation

Though it requires very different institutional arrangements and procedures, deliberative democracy can occur at both micro and macro levels. At the micro level, deliberative democracy may look very similar to experiences that normally occur between friends, family members, and members of community organizations when they come together to make a decision about a

shared resource. Macro deliberation, on the other hand, is “the ongoing, disaggregated process of discussion in the public sphere” (Chappell, 2012, pg. 12). Whereas micro deliberation is effectively confined to the number of people that can communicate effectively and contemporaneously in a shared space, macro deliberation may occur at the level of the nation state or even internationally and be facilitated by the media and communication technology. In addition to requiring different procedures, micro and macro deliberation also serve very different functions. While micro deliberation is suitable for actual decision making, either through reaching consensus or by using a procedure such as voting after deliberation has occurred, macro deliberation is more conducive to agenda setting and publicity functions (ibid, pg. 14).

The micro and macro levels of deliberation are necessarily linked and no discussion of deepening democracy on a national level can occur without the serious consideration of institutional arrangements and procedures on the macro level (Chappell, 2010). A two-pronged approach is necessary for deepening democracy in general; however, when considering the issue of democratic education, micro deliberation is much more relevant. A classroom of students making decisions together about the content, processes and products of their learning is a micro deliberative context. This is a suitable place for students to practice the skills necessary for democratic participation. The issue of democratic skills has been studied extensively and various lists exist; however, essentially all lists include:

- Effective communication skills (written and oral) in a variety of contexts among diverse groups of people
- Effective dialogue, deliberation, public reasoning, and collaborative decision-making skills
- Competent understanding and critical analysis of knowledge and information (Thomas, 2010, pg. 4)

In addition to promoting these necessary skills for democratic participation, micro deliberation can also play an important role in deepening democracy and fostering macro

deliberation by exposing students to “debate along ideal normative standards” (Chappell, 2012, pg. 14). In part, this is due to the fact that the normative standards of deliberative democracy are much easier to realize and evaluate at the micro level. For instance, in a room of twenty people, it is much easier to evaluate whether or not individuals or groups of students are being excluded from the deliberation as opposed to macro deliberation where individuals and groups are more easily hidden from sight. In fact, much of the influential work on deliberative democracy in general grows out of empirical studies on micro deliberative contexts (see Mansbridge, 1980; Gutmann and Thompson, 2009; Ackermann & Fishkin, 2004; Fung 2009; Fung & Wright, 2003; Fishkin, 2009). Following in this tradition, this study examines the Foxfire Courses for Teachers as micro deliberative events.

Normative Commitments of Deliberative Democracy

In a way deliberative conceptions of democracy make the study and monitoring of democracy much more difficult. In aggregative forms, you simply evaluate who is allowed to vote and ensure that their votes are secure and counted correctly. In deliberative democracy, on the other hand, the problems are much thornier. It is for this reason that some critics argue that deliberative models are simply unworkable. Others argue that while the normative commitments of deliberative democrats will almost certainly never be fully realized in practice, it is a worthy goal. In this final section on deliberative democracy, I enumerate and clarify the normative commitments underlying deliberative democracy.

Deliberative democracy is “uncoerced, other-regarding, reasoned, inclusive and equal debate” (Chappell, 2012, pg. 7). This definition stays clear of many relevant questions about the practical implementation of deliberative democracy. For instance, it does not provide institutional arrangements or procedures, nor does it indicate which issues should be subject to

deliberation. Instead, this definition provides the basic normative commitments that are held by deliberative democrats. While many theorists have created their own lists of normative commitments, Chappell has selected this definition because non-coercion, inclusion, equality, and other-regarding reciprocal debate are agreed upon standards among the vast majority of deliberative democrats.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity lies at the heart of deliberation. In order for democracy to be deliberative, theorists agree that participants must be in a reciprocal relationship where they both share and listen to reasons that justify their positions (Mansbridge, 1980; Benhabib, 1996; Gutmann & Thompson, 2009; Rawls, 2009; Bohman, 2000; Young, 2000; Fung, 2004; Forst, 2012; Chappell, 2012). According to Forst (2012), deliberative democracy is based on a right to justification. In deliberative democracy, any person who is affected by a decision has the right to demand justification, while those making or defending decisions have an obligation to justify their positions. It is through this process of demanding and giving of justification that public decisions are legitimated. The reciprocity in deliberation is geared toward understanding. In other words, justifications of positions are given and clarified through a back and forth exchange in order to make sure that all participants fully understand the different positions. It is this reciprocal element of deliberation that makes it an educative process.

It is through the reciprocal exchange of ideas and justifications that deliberative democracy takes on its quality of reason and rationality. According to Chappell, “reciprocity defines the kinds of reasons that are acceptable for...justifications” (2012, pg. 48). For Gutmann and Thompson (2009), reasons meet the standard of acceptability when they could plausibly be

accepted publicly by participants regardless of their comprehensive doctrine¹¹ and when the reasons appeal to evidence that can be tested via reliable methods of inquiry. Their first criterion is echoed by James Bohman (2000) in his use of the term “public reasons” to define the acceptability of justifications in deliberative democracy. He states

“The public character of a reason depends on its intended audience. Citizens deliberate together before the audience of all other citizens, who must be addressed as political equals. This audience sets certain constraints on reasons that are public. They must be communicated in such a way that any other citizen might be able to understand them, accept them, and freely respond to them on his or her own terms” (2000, pg. 26).

The second criterion from Gutmann and Thompson tracks more closely with a traditional definition of reason, wherein ongoing debate and collective inquiry refine what is considered “truth” via a process of provisional acceptance and reevaluation. Provisionality is an essential element of reciprocity because it allows for growth of knowledge and revision of decisions in the wake of new information or revised values. They state “citizens should acknowledge the possibility that the rejected may be shown to be correct in the future. This acknowledgment has implications not only for the way citizens should treat their opponents but also for the way they regard their own views” (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, pg. 111). Thus, provisionality is two-fold in deliberative democracy. First, any decisions made through deliberative democracy are provisional in the sense that they can be reversed or adjusted at some future date. For instance, after deciding on a method of distributing some shared resource, deliberators may come back together to evaluate the effectiveness of the system in light of new information gained through enacting a plan. Secondly, individual preferences are provisional in the sense that, through the reciprocal exchange of public reasons, significant transformation may occur.

¹¹¹¹ This term comes from the work of John Rawls and generally means “worldview” or “system of belief”. This terminology is used widely throughout discussions of deliberative democracy.

Other-Regarding Preferences

Other-regarding preferences are “non-selfish preferences that take account of the effects of decisions on the well-being of others” (Chappell, 2012, pg. 49). Under ideal deliberative conditions, all members of the deliberation would be considering both the preferences of others as well as the potential effects their own preferences might have on others. According to Chappell (2012), this normative commitment of deliberative democracy assumes that people have the capacity to be empathetic. This means they are able to understand the feelings of other people *and* have a motivation to act on that understanding in order to reduce harm. In addition to being an ideal of deliberative democracy, many theorists believe that participation in reciprocal debate also promotes the development of other-regarding preferences among participants. Through participation, dispositions toward others are transformed to become “more public-spirited, more tolerant, more knowledgeable, more attentive to the interests of others, and more probing of their own interests” (Warren, 1996, pg. 241). According to Stitzlein, promoting deliberative democracy in the educational realm can lead to a development of other-regarding preferences among students. She argues that this “builds empathy and an awareness of social issues effecting people different from one’s self, thereby moving away from individualism and toward collective appreciation of diversity, conflict resolution and a common (as opposed to purchased) good” (Stitzlein, 2010, pg. 5).

Inclusion

Inclusion means “all citizens who are substantially affected by a decision or policy have the right and the opportunity to participate, and all relevant arguments have an opportunity to be presented in the deliberative process” (Chappell, 2012, pg. 72). Inclusivity of people, arguments and ideas is central to securing the legitimacy of the decisions being made via deliberative

democracy. Securing inclusion in deliberation is not a straight-forward task and different thinkers approach the issue from different perspectives. For Iris Marion Young (2000), using the heuristic of external and internal inclusion is instructive. External inclusion refers to how the deliberative body is constituted. As Chappell's quotation above implied, this goes beyond who has a formal right to participate, but is also concerned about the opportunities different people and groups have to participate. For instance, lacking free time or transportation may, in practice, externally exclude certain populations from participating in deliberative processes.

Internal inclusion, on the other hand, is a much trickier ideal in deliberative democracy. Internal inclusion refers to the full participation and influence experienced by all people once the deliberative body has been constituted. In aggregative democracy, internal inclusion is essentially an irrelevant issue because of the assumptions made about individual preferences. In deliberative democracy, internal inclusion becomes incredibly important because the primary goal is communicating and clarifying political positions to others. In particular, the emphasis on reason and rationality at the heart of deliberative democracy complicates internal inclusion because the tradition of deliberative spaces has tended to privilege certain forms of communication, such as dispassionate speech, that have been established and promoted by the cultural elite. For this reason, Young (2000) has proposed greeting, narrative and rhetoric as additional forms of communication in addition to argumentation that should be included and valued in the deliberative space. By including these different types of communication in the deliberative process, marginalization of non-elites can be reduced.

Equality

Equality, like inclusion, can also be thought of as being desirable at two different levels. Chappell (2012) uses the distinction between formal equality and substantive equality. Formal

equality refers to formal rights being granted to all people that are substantially affected by a policy decision under consideration. In traditionally aggregative forms of democracy, this can be ensured by granting universal suffrage. In deliberative democracy, other mechanisms must be considered given the reciprocal nature of the process. For instance, all members in a deliberative debate may be granted the same amount of time to address the collective. While this would ensure formal equality, it fails to consider certain characteristics that some members of the body may experience thus making equal time unfair in practice. For example, a person who stutters or speaks slowly for some other reason may need additional time to make this procedure substantially equal. While this is a fairly straight-forward example, there are many other more difficult scenarios that are raised when thinking about substantive equality. For instance, issues of educational level and socio-economic status may also result in significant barriers to equal participation in the deliberative process.

An important distinction exists between the normative ideals of inclusion and equality. Whereas inclusivity is extended to include ideas and arguments, equality cannot and should not be extended beyond the people involved in the deliberation. To do so would undercut the reasonability and rationality that is the ultimate goal of deliberative decision-making. Essentially, the act of deliberative decision-making is about determining which ideas and arguments are better, at least on a provisional basis.

Lack of Coercion

The final normative commitment shared among deliberative democrats is lack of coercion during the deliberative process. Coercion is defined as persuading someone to do something by using force or the threat of reprisal. If certain members or groups are unable to present their views in the deliberative space because they are worried about what will happen to

them or if certain individuals are threatened into presenting an argument or idea that they do not hold, the deliberative process is perverted. In addition to undercutting the reasonability of deliberation by adulterating the reciprocity involved, coercion also effectively negates the possibility of inclusion and equality being attained. According to Chappell, “Non-coercion is a background condition that is necessary to ensure equality and inclusion” (2012, pg. 71).

As with the other normative commitments discussed above, non-coercion is arguably more difficult to monitor and secure in deliberative democratic models than it is in aggregative ones. In the latter, the use of secret ballots is the most widely used procedure to prevent coercion¹² in the electoral process. In fact, this practice has been in place in the United States for over one hundred years and “the United Nations’ *Civil and Political Covenant* lists the secret ballot as a crucial component of a fair electoral process” (Gerber et al, 2012, pg. 77). In the realm of deliberative democracy, secrecy of this sort would be diametrically opposed to the reciprocal exchange of arguments and justifications. While a secret ballot could still be used by participants in a deliberative democracy for selecting a decision *after* deliberation has concluded, no such secrecy would be workable in the deliberation itself. On the contrary, publicity is a feature of deliberative democracy that promotes other normative commitments such as regard for others.

Democratic Teacher Education

Democratic teacher education can take many forms; however, any robust version must tend to the commitments of reflective teaching and deliberative democracy expressed above. Though these theories and research traditions have different origins, there is considerable overlap. As was shown earlier in this chapter, John Dewey is considered a father of the reflective

¹² In addition to preventing coercion, this procedure is also seen as a preventative measure against bribery, a related concern. Regardless of what you pay someone to vote a certain way, the system of secret ballots prevents the bribe-giver from monitoring how the bribe-receiver actually votes.

teaching tradition; however, his other work deals directly with issues of deliberation and inquiry in governance¹³. Similarly, Jürgen Habermas, a giant in the world of deliberative democracy, is regularly referenced in discussions of reflective teaching¹⁴. This is because both reflective teaching and deliberative democracy require inquiry-driven experimentation in the search for better solutions to problems.

The provisionality of decisions is a thread that runs through both reflective teaching and deliberative democracy. The reflective teacher identifies a problem in their teaching and makes initial guesses about how to address it. These guesses are provisional in the sense that they will be tried out in action and reevaluated. They are submitted to criticism, ideally in a group of other professionals who collectively inquire into the problem and possible solutions and together decide on next steps. In this way, reflective teaching takes on its generative quality. Through inquiry, teachers are learning things about their practice and discover new approaches to teaching. Provisionality is also at the heart of deliberative democracy. It is because deliberation is on-going and corrective that participants in deliberation are willing to agree to provisional decisions. The dissenting voices are not shut out forever once a decision is reached. Instead, provisional decisions have time horizons and are revisited with the added insights gained from implementing a provisional plan.

Reflective teaching and deliberative democracy are also connected in the way in which power is distributed broadly as opposed to being monopolized by an individual or small group. The reflective teacher is the author of their own professional development. They have power

¹³ For instance, Dewey's 1927 text *The Public and its Problems* is often referenced in contemporary discussions of deliberative democracy.

¹⁴ For instance, Hatton & Smith, 1995 and Morrison, 1995 both draw upon the work of Habermas in their attempts to bring clarity to discussions around reflective teaching.

over the direction in which they choose to focus their attention. The deliberative body, too, has the power to decide both on setting the problems and the process by which they are addressed. For these reasons, democratic teacher education requires autonomy. It requires autonomy on the level of the teacher to reflect on their own practice and guide their development. It also requires autonomy at the level of the profession. Teachers need to come together to deliberate on their in-service professional growth. In fact, this is one way in which some of the standards laid out by Zeichner and others concerned about the authenticity of reflection can help provide a framework for supporting social, generative reflection that also considers the social context of schooling and the aims of education.

Reflective teaching and deliberative democracy also share a line of criticism. Both have been criticized for being unworkable because they are thought to demand too much time and energy for contemplation and discussion leaving participants paralyzed to act. However, neither reflective teaching nor deliberative democracy intend to be contemplative or deliberative black holes into which all energy is poured. Instead, there should be a balance between reflection and action and deliberation and decision making. From the perspective of democratic teacher education, it seems the alternative is a much greater threat. The need to teach lessons every day is much more likely consume all time for reflection and deliberation among teachers. For this reason, democratic teacher education must open up spaces for teachers to step away from their immediate concerns in the classroom in order to reflect upon their practice and deliberate with their colleagues about the direction of their teaching.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented a theoretical discussion of reflective teaching and deliberative democracy as they relate to the project of democratic teacher education. In this chapter, I begin with a continuation of these theoretical concerns as they relate to research methodology. This theoretical grounding of research methodology is necessary for understanding the myriad decisions that I have made in the design and execution of the herein research program. This chapter provides a detailed description of case study research with a particular focus on the logic of this methodology as it applies to issues of generalizability and transferability. In order to explicate these features of case study research, I begin by analyzing and critiquing the methodological contributions of several often cited research methodologists in the field of case study research. After reviewing this literature, the second half of the chapter provides a detailed description of case selection, data collection and data analysis as it applies to this study. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I return to issues of generalizability and transferability and provide an explanation of the ways in which researchers and practitioners in the field of teacher education can apply the insights of this research to a population of cases larger than the single program investigated in this study.

The Tradition of Case Study Research in the Social Sciences

Case study has a long and storied past in social science research with roots in various disciplinary traditions. Like so much in case study research, there is not a consensus; different methodological theorists trace the origins of the case study to different research traditions. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) trace the origins to the earliest work in modern psychology. Freud and others working in the psychoanalytic tradition pioneered the clinical case study as the central

research design of their discipline. In these studies, the individual patient was a bounded case. While this approach relied heavily on in-depth clinical interviewing as the primary source of data, it also relied on observation, interviews with family and friends, and other psychometric instruments that were employed in a laboratory setting. Modern case study research is now primarily naturalistic in its approach, but these studies were still consistent with the focus on multiple sources of data which is a defining feature of case study research as it is now practiced.

Other methodologists (Platt, 1992; Hamel, 1992; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Tight, 2010) trace the origins of the modern social science case study through the disciplines of anthropology and sociology. While anthropologists tended to focus on culture and enculturation and sociologists focused on society and socialization, both disciplines developed an early affinity for studying relatively-bounded communities in their natural settings. Though many anthropologists would likely resist the characterization of their work as case study research, many ethnographic studies do fit the defining characteristics of case study research: they are bounded, contemporary, naturalistic, and rely on multiple sources of data.

Early sociologists, particularly those working in the Chicago School tradition in the 1920s and 1930s, produced many case studies employing methods that were similar to anthropologists, though often with a much shorter window of field research (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Despite these early parallels to modern case study research, both anthropology and sociology have significantly diversified both their methods used and their objects of study. With the rise of globalization, anthropologists focus less on the boundaries of their research. Sociology, on the other hand, has become sharply divided along qualitative and quantitative lines. While much sociological work now uses statistical methods to examine sociological

phenomenon on the macro scale, the case study method is still employed; however, many in the discipline continue to view it as “barely better than journalism” (Stoecker, 1991, p. 88).

This approach to inquiry has also had a prolonged and prominent presence in a range of applied disciplines, particularly education. While there have been recent efforts to push educational research toward experimental and quasi-experimental design structures (Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, 2007), the case study approach remains a method of choice for many researchers who investigate educational experiences situated within classrooms and school buildings. Because it is well-suited for studying innovations and interventions (Lancy, 1993), case study is common among studies of the implementation of new curricula or the work of exemplary teachers (see, for example, Hess, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Swalwell, 2013). Given the increasing role of federal policy in education, case studies have also proven useful for understanding how policies translate from the federal level to specific schools districts (see, for example, Koyama, 2010). From the perspective of practitioners, case study research has the capacity to capture practices as they actually are in all their messy and particular detail, instead of stripping away all nuance in the pursuit of clean variables.

What is Case Study Research?

Despite the long history of case study research in the social sciences, it was only in the last thirty years that research methodologists have started to write about case study as a unique approach with defining features and applications¹⁵. According to Merriam (2008), most social science research textbooks before the 1980s focused almost exclusively on experimental design and statistical methods for description and inference (p. 39). When case study was mentioned, it

¹⁵ Similarly, in the early decades of ethnographic research, there was very little emphasis on research methodology. Many ethnographers learned their trade through apprenticeships with experienced anthropologists or were simply left to “figure it out” once they arrived at their field site (Van Maanen, 2011)

was described as a catch-all approach for in-depth studies of a single phenomenon. Echoing this observation, Yin (2009) adds that in the few instances when case study was addressed in methods writing, it was treated as a method of conducting pilot studies or it was folded into larger generic discussions about field work (p. 17). Starting in the 1980s, these characterizations began to be challenged by educational researchers who wrote articles and books specifically about case study methodology (see, for example, Stake, 1978; Yin, 1981, 1989; Stake & Trumbull, 1982; Merriam, 1988). While these pursuits did not produce a consensus on case study approaches, and perhaps this is not to be expected, there is considerable overlap in the case study literature. In this section, I trace the different conceptual usages of case study approaches through the major methodological writing in educational research, paying particular attention to differences, inconsistencies and confusion surrounding concepts such as generalizability.

Robert E. Stake's View of Case Study Research

Robert Stake is among the most often cited researchers writing about case study methodology, with a particular focus on qualitative¹⁶ case study. His book *The Art of Case Study Research* has been cited in over ten thousand books, articles, and paper presentations since its publication in 1995. Stake's influence goes beyond this; however, as many textbooks on qualitative research in general¹⁷ draw heavily upon his work to introduce case study research (see, for example, Lancy, 1993; Creswell, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2008). Stake (2005) defines case study by its object of study arguing that, unlike other forms of research, case

¹⁶ Stake (1995) cites a number of qualitative research traditions that he draws upon in his writing on case study research. These traditions include "naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, and biographic research methods" (p. xi). He specifically downplays his interest in case study research in medicine and special education that draw upon the collection of descriptive quantitative data.

¹⁷ Stake is also the only author writing on case study methodology included in the hugely influential *SAGE Handbook on Qualitative Research* in both its 2nd (2000) and 3rd (2005) editions. In the most recent 4th edition (2011), the issue of case study research is addressed by Bent Flyvbjerg. His work on case study research will be examined in a later section of this paper.

study is defined by interest in an individual case, not by any specific set of methods used (p. 443). Given this focus, a case must be something that can be clearly delimited as a bounded system, a “specific, complex, functioning thing” (1995, p. 2). Citing examples of people and programs as most promising candidates for case study research, Stake (1995, 2005) makes the clear argument that not all things are cases and many research questions are not best answered by case study designs. Though any case is situated in a larger world of phenomena, in case study the research design is guided primarily by an interest in understanding a singular case; this is the first priority of the case study researcher (Stake, 2005, p. 443).

While each case is a unique entity to be understood on its own, Stake (1995; 2005; 2006) provides a framework for thinking about different kinds of case studies. His framework includes three types of case studies: intrinsic case studies, instrumental case studies, and collective case studies¹⁸. The intrinsic case is one in which the researcher is interested in the case in particular (2005, p. 445). The researcher selects these cases because they interest them in all their complexity and uniqueness, not because the case represents some larger trait or problem. He equates this type of case with that of a doctor studying a particular patient (ibid). The doctor is interested in the patient because they are *their* patient, not because they represent some larger class of issues. A teacher is intrinsically interested in understanding their classroom, because it is *their* classroom. Similarly, most program evaluation reports are constructed as intrinsic case studies (ibid, p. 461, footnote 6). As it were, intrinsic case studies are often assigned to the researcher or are of prominent interest *before* any formal study begins. Stake writes, “We are

¹⁸ Elsewhere, Stake (2006) refers to collective case study as multiple case study analysis. Others sometimes refer to this as cross-case analysis. Merriam (2008) refers to multi-site case studies (p. 49).

interested in it, not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case” (1995, p. 3).

Instrumental cases, on the other hand, usually have to be chosen from a universe of possible cases of interest (Stake, 2005, p. 450). Instrumental cases are chosen because they represent some larger issue or problem of interest. The assumption is that a researcher can gain insight into a certain issue or problem by studying a specific site of the issue or problem in great detail (Stake, 1995, p. 3). These researchers’ “use of case study is to understand something else” (ibid). The case study is instrumental in achieving some larger goal, one that may be of intrinsic interest to the researcher. Collective case study is a variation of the instrumental case study. It is a series of instrumental case studies chosen for their relevance to the same issue or problem (Stake, 2006). Regardless of the type of case, for Stake, the researcher has the same obligation to understand the singular case first and foremost. Thus, in collective case study, each case is investigated individually before any cross-case analysis occurs.

Stake’s most interesting contribution to the discussion of case study research is in the area of generalizability. Given the focus on single cases, much has been written about the ability to generalize from case study research (see, for example, Stake & Trumbull, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stoeker, 1991; Ragin & Becker, 1992; Lieberman, 1991, 1992, 1994; Walton, 1992; Harper, 1992; Hamel, Dufour & Fortin, 1993; Stake, 1995, 2005, 2006; Gerring, 2004; Riddin, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 2001, 2006, 2011). Stake contributes to this discussion by pointing out that it is the *reader*, not the researcher, that is responsible for making the majority of generalizations in case study research (2005, pg. 455). Stake acknowledges *petite generalizations*, which are general claims made about a specific case based on limited information gathered during a study,

and *grand generalizations*¹⁹, which modify existing generalized knowledge *across* cases by showing that something else is possible that runs counter to previous understandings. While these are important types of generalization in case study research, it is the idea of *naturalistic generalization* that is Stake's unique contribution. Naturalistic generalization is the type of generalization made by the *reader* of a richly descriptive case study (2005, p. 454). The *reader* or user of the study determines a referent population and application of the case study knowledge²⁰. It is because of this logic that case study reports must present richly descriptive accounts that provide the reader with enough context to make this determination. Naturalistic generalization is not dissimilar to the concept of transferability in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) writing on naturalistic methods of inquiry. They write:

The person who wishes to make a judgment of transferability needs information about *both* contexts to make that judgment well. Now an inquirer cannot know all the contexts to which someone may wish to transfer working hypotheses; one cannot reasonably expect him or her to indicate the range of contexts to which there might be some transferability. But it is entirely reasonable to expect an inquirer to provide sufficient information about the context in which an inquiry is carried out so that anyone else interested in transferability has a base of information appropriate to the judgment. (emphasis in original, p. 124 – 125)

Like with Stake's naturalistic generalization, the validity of transferability relies upon the notion of "thick description" introduced by Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 3 – 33). This ensures that the

¹⁹ Petite and grand generalization is discussed in Stake, 1995, p. 7 – 8. Petite generalization is best illuminated by giving an example. A case study researcher may study a single classroom with predominately white, middle class students. During the study, the researcher may make petite generalizations about a student based on a handful of interactions. For instance, they may witness the student resisting authority of the male teacher during each of their seven observations and then generalize this limited sample to the student's actions beyond this time frame. This is what is meant by petite generalization. While this may remain epistemologically suspect for a number of reasons including possible Hawthorne effects, it is relatively common for case study researchers to generalize in this way.

²⁰ For an interesting and illuminating debate on naturalistic generalization, see Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 119 – 125.

consumer of case study research understands the context in sufficient detail to transfer or generalize the findings.

Sharan B. Merriam's View of Case Study Research

Like Robert Stake, Sharan Merriam (1998a, 1998b, 2002, and 2008) has made significant contributions to case study research methodology and is consistently cited by researchers who produce case studies. Like Stake, Merriam focuses almost exclusively on qualitative case study methodology. She writes, "Qualitative case studies share with other forms of qualitative research the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive" (2008, p. 39). For Merriam, a case study is "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (2008, pg. 40). Echoing Stake, Merriam believes that the defining feature of case study is delimiting the unit of analysis as opposed to determining the topic that defines the case. As an inductive approach, the topic that defines the case may only arise at later points in data collection and analysis. Merriam, like other case study methodologists, does not suggest case study is an approach that is applicable to all questions. As a strategy for determining if a study meets the boundedness criterion of case study research, Merriam suggests contemplating the finite-ness of potential data collection. She writes:

One technique for assessing the boundedness of the topic is to ask how finite the data collection would be, that is, whether there is a limit to the number of people involved who could be interviewed or a finite time for observations. If there is no end, actually or theoretically, to the number of people who could be interviewed or the observations that could be conducted, then the phenomenon is not bounded enough to qualify as a case. (2008, p. 41).

While much of Merriam's writing on case study research draws heavily from other case study researchers (for example, Stake, 1995; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2008) and qualitative research methodologists in general (for example, Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007), she has further defined case study in her own work by presenting three special features of case study research (2008, p. 43 – 45). First of all, case studies are *particularistic* in the sense that they study singular bounded systems and are often practical in their orientations. Secondly, case studies are *descriptive* and attempt to gather wide amounts and types of data. While many research designs reduce description down to general features, case study researchers can and should view the descriptive elements of their work as among the findings of the research. Finally, case studies are *heuristic*, meaning they are designed to give the reader a deeper understanding of a given phenomenon. This feature is similar to naturalistic generalization in Stake's work in the sense that it is built on the assumption that the reader brings an understanding of different contexts to the case study and their previous knowledge is transformed during the interaction with the case knowledge.

Robert K. Yin's View of Case Study Research

Robert Yin's work on case study research design and methods comes from a different perspective from the work of Stake and Merriam. Because Yin's work is not limited to qualitative research design, he has a greater influence across many disciplinary traditions. His book *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* has been cited nearly twenty thousand times since the publication of the 4th edition in 2008. In addition to including quantitative approaches to case study in his analysis, Yin is also considerably more conservative in his approach to research design and analysis. Responding to long-standing criticisms of case study research,

Yin's goal is to provide systematic frameworks for data collection and analysis to add needed rigor to the case study enterprise.

Yin (1981) describes case study as a research strategy as opposed to a methodology in its own right; likening it to an experiment or a history (p. 59). He opposes hierarchical views of different research methods that situate experiments at the top as the only method for doing explanatory or causal inquiries (2009, p. 6 - 8). He believes that any research method can be used for any research purpose; however, case study is best used for answering "how" and "why" questions (ibid). He presents his understanding of case study in a technical definition containing two distinct parts. Because of the interconnectedness of its parts, the technical definition is presented here in its entirety:

1. A case study is an empirical inquiry that
 - a. investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when
 - b. the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident
2. The case study inquiry
 - a. copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
 - b. relies on multiples sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
 - c. benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

Part one of Yin's definition refers to the nature of the case itself and part two refers to the nature of the inquiry required to conduct case study research. Yin's definition of the case itself does not

diverge much from the other definitions examined thus far. Something is to be considered a case if it is contemporary and is embedded in a “real-life” context (1.a). Yin’s discussion of boundedness (1.b) at first appears at odds with Stake and Merriam’s characterizations; however, his usage is not inconsistent with their meanings. In 1.b, Yin’s reference to “boundaries between phenomenon and context” is referring to experimental design in which researchers would remove a phenomenon from its “real-life” context in order to study it with the burden of needing to control for variables associated with the context. Thus, for Yin, case study is appropriate when a phenomenon cannot be separated from its context.

Part two of Yin’s definition shows further similarities with the work of Stake and Merriam; however, it also reveals his conservatism in terms of theory and design. Both Stake (1995, p. 107 – 120) and Merriam (2008, p. 213 – 220) discuss triangulation through the collection of multiple types of data as a way of ensuring validity, however, neither of them suggest the “prior development of theoretical propositions” (2.c) as a requirement in case study research. Yin (2009) goes even further in his full discussion of the role of theory in research design arguing that the prior development of theory is what marks it apart from ethnographic and grounded approaches to research (p. 35). While Yin is concerned by the fact that other research methodologists have conflated field methods associated with ethnographic research (in particular participant-observation) with case study research, by building the prior development of theoretical propositions into his technical definition, he has essentially excluded ethnographic work from case study research. In the introduction to his book (2009), he laments the fact that too many case studies in the past have lacked rigor and systematic methods of data collection (p. 14). This is likely the source of his suspicion of ethnographic field methods which are often

subject to criticisms that they fail to meet the criteria of systematic data collection²¹. A similar conservatism is shown in his discussion of limiting bias and his criticism of those who seek to do advocacy work through case study research (2009, p. 72).

Bent Flyvbjerg's View of Case Study Research – Addressing Misconceptions

Despite the efforts of research methodologists such as Stake, Merriam, and Yin, many misconceptions about case study research still remain and are perpetuated both by methodology texts and research published in case study formats. Some of the latter is almost certainly related to the publication formats that are available and their inconsistencies with the needs of case study reporting. Often peer-reviewed journals have page limits that are detrimental to the “thick description” associated with well-conducted case study research. As a consequence, little space is given to address methodology. In a meta-analysis of fifty-four peer-reviewed journal articles on sustainability in higher education, Corcoran, Walker and Wals (2004) found that very few articles addressed methodology beyond a single citation to a methodology textbook and many of the articles gave no information about how the data was gathered. Given the constraints and the accompanying norms of case study research reporting, it is no wonder that confusion and criticism continue to plague case study research.

Recently, Bent Flyvbjerg (2001, 2006, 2011) has attempted to add theoretical weight to the discussion of case study research by highlighting the misleading and inappropriate comparisons between the social sciences and natural sciences. He does this by linking case

²¹ Another inconsistency between Yin's view of case study and ethnographic methods involves the use of previous substantive writing on the issues being studied. Certain traditions of ethnographic research do not review existing research at the outset of the research process. Similarly, grounded approaches also often avoid existing research during this stage. This concern with systematic literature review is reflective of his concern for rigorous research. For his discussion of literature review, see Yin, 2009, chapter 3.

knowledge with Aristotle's intellectual virtue of *phronesis*²² which is geared toward acting in particular situations as opposed to identifying universal principles. Flyvbjerg connects the development of case knowledge to the learning theory elaborated by Dreyfus and Dreyfus in their 1988 book *Mind over Machine* wherein they explain the development of human expertise as a process of increasing knowledge of individual cases. They argue that human expertise is not a process of following general rules in the way a computer program does, but rather knowledge of and experience with a tremendous amount of cases allows an expert to exercise prudent action given the practical considerations in any context. This view is consistent with Aristotle's *phronesis*. Flyvbjerg's learning theory approach to understanding cases has interesting parallels to Stake's discussion of intrinsic case study. Whereas for Stake a teacher has an intrinsic interest in understanding their classroom and students as cases, each experience for Flyvbjerg contributes to expertise via the development of practical wisdom. Taking this to its logical end, case studies contribute to the slow accumulation of knowledge by showing particular cases instead of providing general, context-independent theory. For Flyvbjerg, this is what distinguishes social science from natural science.

In addition to Flyvbjerg's theoretical contribution of resituating case study research, he has also contributed a careful examination of five specific misunderstandings about case study research that speak to theory, reliability, and validity (2001, p. 66 – 87). These misunderstandings and the criticism that arise from them threaten the heart of case study research as a scientific method of inquiry (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 67). In order to correct these misunderstandings, Flyvbjerg presents a restatement for each misunderstanding showing how

²² *Phronesis* is a concept developed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Irwin, 1999). This term is sometimes translated as *practical wisdom* or *prudence*.

case study can be salvaged as a scientific enterprise. Figure 3.1 presents the misunderstandings and their restatements²³ in table form:

Misunderstanding	Restatement
M1. General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge	R1. Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is, therefore, more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals.
M2. One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development	R2. One can often generalize on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as supplement or alternative to other methods. But formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas “the force of example” is underestimated.
M3. The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, while other methods are more suitable for hypothesis testing and theory building	R3. The case study is useful for both generating and testing of hypotheses but is not limited to these research activities alone.
M4. The case study contains bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions	R4. The case study contains no greater bias toward verification of the researcher’s preconceived notions than other methods of inquiry. On the contrary, experience indicates that the case study contains a greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than toward verification.
M5. It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific cases.	R5. It is correct that summarizing case studies is often difficult, especially as concerns case process. It is less correct as regards case outcomes. The problems in summarizing case studies, however, are due more often to the properties of the reality studied than to the case study as a research method. Often it is not desirable to summarize and generalize case studies.

²³ The misunderstandings as they are presented in Figure 1 are reflective of Flyvbjerg’s most recent writing on this topic, where he has slightly altered his discussion in M5 and R5.

Flyvbjerg's correction to misunderstandings in case study research echoes many of the features of case study design discussed by Stake, Merriam, and Yin; however, he makes explicit a few assumptions that are not present in other writing on case study research. Like Merriam's emphasis on the particularistic in case study, in R1 Flyvbjerg emphasizes the relative value of context-dependent case knowledge over general theory. In R2, Flyvbjerg defends the ability to generalize via case study research in a similar fashion to Yin. He argues that case study should be understood as a research strategy similar to an experiment, arguing that they are "generalizable to the theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (Yin, 2009, p. 15). Flyvbjerg, picking up on this same idea, shows that Galileo was able to disprove Aristotle's theory of gravity with a single well-chosen experiment which he views as a case. Instead of using a representative sample of all the objects that could be employed in the experiment, Galileo instead chose what Flyvbjerg likens to a critical case. This idea of theoretical generalization is similar to Stake's grand generalization as well. Flyvbjerg's justification of R3 is closely connected to R2. Because one can generalize based on a single case, it is a suitable method for any stage of the research process. This echoes Yin's sentiment that case study research is a valuable strategy for any of the purposes of research, be it exploratory, descriptive or explanatory (2009, p. 7 – 8).

Flyvbjerg's R4 and R5 speak more to practical concerns than to the nature of case study research as a viable form of scientific inquiry. The argument that case study is especially subject to criticism relies on the premise that there is a tendency for researchers to confirm their preconceived notions during the course of a study. In part this comes from the conflation between case study and other methodologies where the researcher is the primary instrument,

such as participant observation. Yin argues that much of the case study corpus is in fact weak because it is not rigorous enough in its design. He essentially concedes this argument and then presents an approach to avoid this problem in the future. Flyvbjerg's approach to this issue is different in the sense that he basically approaches it as an empirical question. Through a review of well-done case studies, he argues that the tendency is actually to falsify pre-conceived notions. This is consistent with field accounts of ethnographic studies where the researcher explains the experience of being completely wrong about their interpretation until much time has passed in the field. Finally, R5 speaks to the practical concern of reporting the in-depth findings of case study research. Flyvbjerg flips this criticism and argues that other approaches simplify reality too much, essentially arguing that the length and complexity of case study reports is a virtue. This view is consistent with Stake and Merriam's view, but appears at odds with Yin's. Many researchers have discussed the difficulty of reporting case study findings and have suggested ways of tailoring reports for certain audiences and intentions (see, for example, Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). Yin, unlike Flyvbjerg, suggests that the difficulty of reporting can be avoided by building a study on a clear conceptual framework and even suggests that "a case study narrative may be replaced by a series of answers to a set of open-ended questions" (Yin, 1991, p. 64).

Foxfire Teacher Education as a Case of Democratic Teacher Education

I conceive of Foxfire Teacher Education as a case of democratic teacher education. Given my interest in democratic teacher education, as defined by reflective teaching practice and deliberative democracy in the previous chapter, I selected to study Foxfire Teacher Education because it represents one approach to realizing these ideals in an actually existing program for teacher development. This program is a good candidate for case study research because it is a

unique approach to teacher education that cannot be separated from its context in order to be studied. While I do make *petite generalizations* about the program itself, this research is designed to provide rich descriptions and analyses of the program so that the intended audiences, teacher educators and other educational practitioners, can make naturalistic generalizations about the applicability of this approach to their own teaching contexts.

Foxfire Teacher Education primarily exists in its iterations during the week long, residential courses that are offered each summer in Rabun County, Georgia. These courses are designed to provide tremendous opportunity for teachers to create their own learning activities and goals for the course. Given this pedagogical structure, each iteration of the course is unique and is contingent upon the participating teachers and facilitators. Because each week of the course is diverse in how participating teachers engage with the material and design their learning activities, my study conceptualizes each of the week long courses as instrumental cases of Foxfire Teacher Education.

While the courses themselves look and feel quite different, they are in fact cases of the same phenomenon, Foxfire Teacher Education. They share the same history, curricular materials and site as well as the same “givens” that the participating teachers must complete while engaged with the course. These shared features are described and analyzed in the next chapter on the history and context of the program.

Research Questions

“A multicase study is organized around at least one research question. It asks what is most important for understanding the quintain. It may focus on the binding concept or idea that holds the cases together. It is the conceptual infrastructure for building the study” (Stake, 2006, pg. 9).

Intrinsic case studies are radically singular. The researcher often enters the field with research questions that basically amount to “What is this a case of?” or “What is going on here?” In multicase studies, like the one herein, the “multi” refers to multiple instrumental case studies. The multiple cases are cases of the same thing and the researcher approaches that subject with specific questions she hopes to answer through deep investigation. For this study, the three primary questions are as follows:

4. How is democratic teacher education practiced during the Foxfire Courses for Teachers?
5. How is this supported by course design and facilitation?
6. How does this experience impact participants’ understandings of their teaching and professional lives?

Through investigating three separate cases of the Foxfire Course for Teachers, this study begins the process of answering these larger research questions. This is not to say that there is not a tension between understanding the individual cases and the quintain. Robert Stake describes the quintain in multiple case study as “a target—but not the bull’s eye” (2006, p. 6). The nature of this type of research and the phenomena it seeks to study is that there is not a straight-forward or direct way in which to understand the quintain. In this study, to answer the above research questions about Foxfire Teacher Education, the quintain for my purposes, I first look at individual instances of the Foxfire Course for Teachers. Stake (2006) continues,

“To understand [the quintain] better, we study some of its single cases – its sites or manifestations. But it is the quintain we see to understand. We study what is similar and different about the cases in order to understand the quintain better” (pg. 6).

For the purposes of doing this, I first present rich descriptions of each of the sessions of the Foxfire Course for Teachers in chapters five through seven. From there I move to a multicase

analysis in chapter eight that revisits the research questions with an eye toward making larger claims about Foxfire Teacher Education.

Participants

My research program is designed to provide an understanding of Foxfire Teacher Education as it is practiced by the facilitators and participating teachers who collaborate together during the week-long, residential courses. Given this approach, the pool of potential participants for this study was limited to the facilitators and participating teachers who enrolled in the three separate iterations of the course that occurred during the window for data collection. Each of the three courses were comprised of two facilitators and fifteen or sixteen participating teachers. All of the facilitators and 39 of the participating teachers agreed to participate in this study. The facilitators were all either university faculty or secondary school teachers. The participating teachers themselves ranged from pre-service k-12 teachers who were completing initial certification master's degree programs to in-service teachers working in classrooms ranging from pre-kindergarten up through post-secondary. The vast majority of the participants were graduate students at one of two campuses of the same private liberal arts college. In some cases, participants were members of a regional cohort of teachers who all worked in the same school district. Additional information about study participants can be found in each of the three case study chapters later in this dissertation as the individuals involved are best understood in the context of their iteration of the course.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected using three methods: participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and document analysis. I lived at the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center during the duration of the summer courses and all of the data for this study was collected during or

shortly after the three courses concluded. Unlike many quantitative approaches to research, in this study I served as the primary instrument by which the data was collected and analyzed (Merriam, 2009, pg. 15). Consequently these data sources interacted and influenced each other during the collection process. Often while collecting one type of data, I gained insights and interests that influenced the collection of other types of data. This interactive and multifaceted approach to data collection aids in the process of triangulation (Mathison, 1988) that strengthens the validity of research findings like the ones included in this dissertation.

Participant Observation

A primary source of data in this study comes from field notes collected during each of the three courses. During each of the twenty-one days that the Foxfire Courses for Teachers were in session, I conducted participant observation for the majority of the day's activities. It was not uncommon for this data collection to begin early in the morning before participants ate breakfast, long before any formal sessions began and continue into the evening during dinner and informal discussions that often occurred late into the evening. While the participants themselves were housed into separate residential buildings (the Guest House and the Long House), they completed all formal sessions together in a meeting room on the ground level of the Long House. Along with roughly half of the participants in each session, I lived in the Guest House in a room arranged for me by the course facilitators. While I was able to conduct participant observation during all formal sessions, my data is skewed toward events that occurred in the Guest House during informal times such as late night conversations and meal times. Because of the extended time and my proximity to these participants, my rapport also became stronger with participants living in the Guest House.

As described in the previous paragraphs, I understand participant observation as a method that occurs along a continuum spanning from complete participation on one end to complete observation on the other end. The theoretical ends of the continuum represent ideals and are never fully achieved. As is the case with any qualitative researcher working in this tradition, the majority of my participant observation occurred somewhere near the middle of this continuum. I made decisions about how to vary my data collection along this continuum depending on the nature of the activity and the feasibility of real-time note taking.

The Foxfire Courses for Teachers can be easily broken up into formal and informal sessions. Formal sessions are activities where the participants and facilitators are together in large or small group settings working on specific agenda items related to the specific “givens” of the course. I define informal sessions as times when participants and/or facilitators are not in formal sessions but are discussing issues relevant to the course or their professional lives as teachers. Given the openness of the program design, the divide between formal and informal sessions and the nature of those activities can vary significantly from week to week. As a general methodological rule, during formal sessions I was acting more as an observer with a primary concern of recording data in my field notes as opposed to being an active participant in the conversation or activity. At points during data collection where I was operating toward the observation end of the continuum, a visitor in the setting would have recognized me as doing something significantly different from the other people in the space, namely frantically typing on a computer and not intervening in the group discussion. For the majority of these formal sessions, I was able to support my typed field notes with the use of digital audio recording.

During informal sessions, I operated more along the participation end of the continuum, throwing off the need to collect field notes in real-time in order to participate in ways more

consistent with the participants and facilitators of the course. As an important aspect of participant observation, these opportunities gave me greater insights into the experiences of participating in this form of teacher education. The informal sessions were often times when people were eating meals, informally discussing the required texts or their teaching contexts, or debriefing on the experience of participating in the retreat. During these times I was often engaged in discussion and was not taking real-time notes. A visitor during these times would not have been able to easily tell the difference between my participation and that of the participants in the course. When possible I collected some hand-written notes that were later transferred and expanded into Microsoft Word documents to include additional remembered information at the earliest possible opportunity. Because of my obligation to record this data, I did occasionally remove myself from informal sessions in order to ensure that participant observations were recorded and received some initial analysis. To be clear, I did not have access to all informal sessions because participants were not all together during these times and they often self-selected into smaller groups. For instance, some of my participant observation field notes record late night conversations between two or three participants. During these times, the other participants are not present and are potentially involved in other conversations or activities beyond my view. While these constraints limit the relevant data I was able to collect, they were unavoidable in a research design executed by a single researcher. Furthermore, the experience of spending time in smaller groups away from the formal large group sessions is an element of all participants' experiences during the Foxfire Course for Teachers and thus the research is more complete for collecting some data during these times, albeit incomplete.

The decision rule for selecting a place to work along the participant observation continuum based on formal and informal sessions was generally followed, there were times

during my data collection when I used other considerations to determine my level of participation. As a rule, when a participant or facilitator asked me explicitly to participate in an activity or directed specific questions toward me during a discussion, I slipped out of an observation stance toward that of a participant. This was a decision that I made before data collection began. I made this decision because I was afraid that participants in the course would see me as too distant of an observer if I was unwilling to participate when invited to and this may have consequently damaged my rapport which was invaluable for individual interviews and participation in informal sessions. To gather data that comes at the cost of rapport is a dangerous game in qualitative research.

There is a designed tension in participant observation between being an observer and being a participant. This manifests itself in a tension between being able to capture data in field notes and being able to experience what it is like to authentically participate in a social activity with other people who do not have the same obligation to record the experience. These tensions are present in the data corpus for this study. As a consequence of my ability to type much faster than I can write by hand, I was able to collect more detail and capture more verbatim quotes during my computer assisted field note writing which happened during formal sessions. I was also freed up during these times to just observe without an obligation to act outwardly or think of how I would contribute to a conversation or activity. As a result my data corpus is skewed toward notes collected during formal sessions. Altogether, I collected over one hundred pages of single-spaced field notes during each of the three separate iterations of the Foxfire Courses for Teachers.

The field notes for this study focus on action and dialogue that an outsider would agree occurred had they been present during the same sessions. This is to say that my goal in the

collection of field notes was to limit the level of inference I was making when recording data. For instance, the field notes include verbatim quotes in the order in which they were spoken as well as actions such as when I person left the room or interrupted another speaker. Higher level inferences such as that a speaker was bored or offended by someone else were avoided in the field notes (Carspecken, 1996). The field notes are also scattered with many audio time stamps designed to facilitate quick and accurate cross-referencing of speech on the audio recordings. Beyond this, my field notes are more heavily weighted toward recording speech acts as opposed to actions because much of the Foxfire Approach is centered on deliberation and discussion. Furthermore, to the extent that the third research question in this study is focused on participants' understandings of their own teaching, data relevant to answering this question is primarily available in through the voices of participants.

Interviewing

The other primary source of data in ethnographic and case study traditions comes from conducting interviews with participants in a social activity or those close to it. A significant portion of the data used in this study comes from interviewing participants and facilitators during each of the three iterations of the Foxfire Course for Teachers. I conducted formal and informal interviews with the majority of participants and facilitators during the three weeks with the majority of interview data coming from in-depth, formal interviews that followed a semi-structured interview protocol. With the exception of four, these formal interviews occurred during each of the courses and were scheduled based on the availability and convenience of the participants and facilitators. Because the Foxfire Course for Teachers is a seven day residential program, the time in which to conduct interviews was constrained by the limited time we lived together during the course. Because of this, each interview occurred at a different point during

the course. For instance, I interviewed some participants during the first three days of the course and others as it was winding down. Naturally, participants' answers to interview questions were partially determined by when I was able to interview them. In most cases, I was able to follow up with participants who were interviewed early in the week to see how their perspectives were changing as the course proceeded and as they completed the course.

With the exception of the four interviews conducted after the courses completed, the formal, semi-structured interviews were primarily conducted under similar conditions. The majority of the interviews were conducted in the evening between 5:30pm and 9:30pm after formal sessions for the day had concluded. These interviews occurred in my private room in the Guest House. Each interview was recorded using two digital audio recorders. In addition to this, I also collected handwritten notes during the interview in my field notebook and on the interview protocol sheet. These notes were transferred to word documents after the interview was completed and a separate document was created that included additional information about the context under which the interview occurred. For instance, I noted if the interview occurred after a large social gathering or if it was cut short because of a need to work with a group on a project for the next day. These context notes also include information about participant body language and my perceptions about how well I thought the interview went. While the interviews themselves varied in practice, all of them depended on the same standardized interview protocol that was developed in anticipation of this study. The interview questions are as follows:

1. *Tell me about your background as an educator. Narrate how you came to be a teacher.*
2. *How does the Foxfire Approach summer course fit into your experience as a teacher?*
3. *How is it different from other educational experiences you've had including professional development?*

4. *What did you know about the Foxfire Approach before coming to participate in the summer course? How has the retreat differed from your expectations?*
5. *What do you think you are taking away from the Foxfire retreat at this point?*
6. *How would you describe the facilitation approach used in this retreat? Does it meet your needs?*
7. *Would you recommend this retreat to other teachers? Why or why not?*
8. *Has any part of the retreat so far stood out to you? Describe it and explain its significance.*
9. *Describe the group dynamics of the retreat so far? Do you feel like this supports your learning and participation?*
10. *Based on your experiences here, are there any suggestions you would give your school leadership or school district about how to conduct professional development?*
11. *Is there anything else you want to share about your experience so far?*

During each formal interview, I asked all eleven of these questions; however, they often were presented in different order and with slightly different wording to match the continuing conversation. Beyond these predetermined interview questions, I also asked additional questions about specific events that unfolded during the week. For instance, if an interview participant had just finished leading a group discussion or facilitating an activity, I would ask them about their impression of its reception by the other participants or the experience of preparing for the activity. In this regard, there is a close connection between the interview data and the participant observation data because they are informed by each other. For example, during an interview I was able to read back a quotation that I recorded during an earlier session to get a reaction from a

participant. Similarly, after hearing about a specific experience or perception from a participant during an interview, I was able to turn my attention to them with those added insights while conducting participant observation later. It is this close connection between my participant observation field notes and my interview data that forms the principal basis for the claims that I make in this study.

In total, I conducted 44 separate formal interviews with participants and facilitators for the interview data portion of this study. These interviews ranged in time from 25 minutes up to two hours. Beyond these formal interviews, I also conducted informal interviews with many participants (these same participants and others) at various points during the three courses. In many cases these informal interviews occurred after the formal interview and served a function of letting me follow up with participants later in the week. For instance, a participant who was interviewed during the second night of the course had a much more negative view of the program at that point than when I followed up with her during the sixth day.

Document Analysis

As previously articulated, the data corpus for this study is primarily comprised of participant observation field notes and interview data. A secondary source of data in this study comes from documents and artifacts produced during each of the courses. This is by far the smallest set of data in this study. To the extent that participants created documents and artifacts during the formal and informal sessions, I took digital photographs of these items. In many cases, these documents and artifacts were used to prompt questions during formal and informal interviews as well as informal sessions and served as another source of data for triangulation. In this sense, these data sources were primarily used as a vehicle to gather more and richer data from participant observation and interviewing. It is for this reason that the data chapters that

follow in this dissertation draw almost exclusively from participant observation and interview data.

Data Analysis

It is a difficult task to draw a hard line between data collection and data analysis in qualitative and particularly ethnographic traditions of social research. Because the researcher is herself the instrument of data collection, it is impossible to separate that data from the researcher's analytic mind that longs to categorize and make sense out of what she is seeing. At the very least, the researcher makes myriad decisions about what to observe and report *while* collecting the data. These decisions in many ways can be thought of as the beginning of data analysis in qualitative research. In this regard, my data analysis began long before the data collection in this study concluded. Each day I was making decisions about what to focus my gaze upon and what kinds of questions to ask myself while I was conducting participant observation and interviews. Beyond this simple and unavoidable analytical work, I was also setting aside time in the evenings to write analytic memos before going to bed (Saldana, 2009). Despite the difficulty of separating these movements of analysis in practice, for purposes of clarity, I draw a distinction between analysis that was concurrent with data collection and analysis that occurred after the completion of the data corpus.

Analysis Concurrent with Data Collection

While the analysis that occurred concurrently with data collection is dwarfed by the painstaking analysis that occurred in the many months after the data was collected, the initial analytic insights I gained by thinking through my data as it was being collected has an important place in this study. Social research of this sort is cumulative in the sense that it colors everything that comes after it. For instance, my thinking about the first iteration of the Foxfire Course for

Teachers is something I carried with me into my investigation of the second and third iterations. In addition to shaping the questions and concerns I had going forward in my data collection, it was impossible to separate out my initial understandings with regards to the research questions in this study. Recognizing that analysis of some sort was inevitable during data collection, I made the decision to systematize it as much as possible.

One systematic aspect of data analysis during this phase of the research process was the use of editorial commentary that accompanied my participant observation field notes. As mentioned earlier, my field notes were primarily designed to capture speech and actions as they occurred in the social setting while limited inferences about motivations and meanings. Inevitably outside questions, insights and analyses crept into my mind while recording these notes. When possible, I chose to record them within my field notes, separating them from the field notes proper by using an italicized font. This allowed me to keep my initial analysis separate from my observations of speech and actions. This practice is something that is common among ethnographic researchers (see, for instance, Phil Carpecken's *Critical Ethnography in Education Research*, for a more robust defense of the practice).

Each night, I would expand upon my notes from the previous day as both a process of adding remembered detail to the data corpus and clarifying abbreviated notations. While doing this, I would also look back at my editorial commentary in the field notes and use that as a basis for analytic memo-writing (Saldana, 2009). For many qualitative researchers, this practice is essential during data collection to ensure that insights gained while participating in a social activity are not completely lost to the ether. In most cases my editorial commentary from the day's events would be a jumping off point for me to analyze my emergent understandings about the central research questions in the study. These memos ranged from less than a page to over

five pages and constitute the majority of the systematic analysis that occurred concurrently with data collection. While some of these analytic memos entertained alternative directions my research could have ultimately gone in, others became the precursors of themes that would appear in my final analysis and writing of this research project. While the lines between collection and analysis are blurred in qualitative studies, this process allowed me to create a separation between when I was collecting data and when I was stepping away from that task to begin initial analysis.

Post-Data Collection Analysis

A few days after the third iteration of the Foxfire Course for Teachers concluded in June, my data corpus for this study was complete. The first major task of data analysis that occurred after data collection was the complete transcription of interviews. Despite the tremendous amount of interview data amounting to over twenty-five hours of audio recording, my first step in data analysis post-collection was to fully transcribe all formal interviews. Transcription of interviews served twin purposes. First, it provided me with much more manageable chunks of data that would better allow me to juxtapose participant experiences against each other. For example, I was able to place two interview responses describing the same event back to back against my own observation field notes of the same event. In addition to the triangulation of data, this also allowed me to gain deeper insights into how certain aspects of the course were experienced by different people. Secondly, transcribing all interviews required me to listen to each individual interview at a much slower pace. In addition to generally making me more familiar with my data corpus, this process also made me listen for meaning and nuance that might have been forgotten or overlooked while conducting the interview. During the transcription phase, I was also able to stop the recording to write analytic memos about the

content of individual interviews and begin an initial phase of coding that would later be aided by data analysis software.

Another process that I used to better familiarize myself with the data corpus was a technique of audio reviewing of the recordings made during formal sessions. I selectively re-listened to many sessions from each of the three courses. While doing this, I was able to follow along with my field notes and add additional detail that was not captured during the data collection phase. In several cases, these recordings were used to supplement and correct quotations from participants and facilitators that were either taken down incorrectly or incompletely. Memo writing also accompanied these tasks.

After these processes, I began using NVivo, a qualitative data management and analysis program, as a resource to better organize and more efficiently code data from each of the three sessions. During my initial coding of the interview and participant observation data I used first cycle coding methods (Saldana, 2009). My first round of coding employed structural coding (MacQueen, McLellan-Lemal, Bartholow & Milstein, 2008; Namey, Guest, Thairu & Johnson, 2008). According to Saldana (2009), a structural code is “a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question.” For example, in my research structural codes such as “allowing choice in the classroom” and “frustrations with the Foxfire Approach” were used to better organize data related to these themes and assist in later second cycle coding. In addition to structural coding, I also used descriptive coding during the first cycle. Descriptive coding is a process by which passages of qualitative data are labeled with a topic that allows for sorting and categorization. In addition to allowing for better manipulation of the data for analytic purposes, this process also serves to inventory the topics involved in a study. In the case of this research project, many descriptive

codes were determined beforehand due to the nature of the research questions. For instance, I used descriptive codes to label any passages that were directly related to individual or multiple Foxfire Core Practices, such as “student choice”, “audience” and “reflection”. In addition to these descriptive codes, I also developed a descriptive coding scheme that was not determined before data collection but rather emerged while re-reading field notes and transcripts. Both of these sets of descriptive codes proved invaluable in organizing and analyzing a large qualitative data set. As accompanied all of my data analysis activities, first cycle coding was done concurrently with memo writing.

Second cycle coding followed my initial coding using NVivo software and took on a much more interpretive element. During second cycle coding, I did not approach the data corpus chronologically as I had in first cycle, but rather used the power of the structural and descriptive codes to organize the data in more thematic and topical ways. This allowed me to investigate and draft memos about potential connections in the data that might have been overlooked otherwise. For instance, I was able to see which Foxfire Core Practices were being discussed the most and which core practices were being talked about in conjunction with certain classroom practices. This process was key to understanding the meaning of the Foxfire Approach to different participants in my student. This also led me into theoretical coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006) which is designed for moving beyond mere descriptive into developing new theory by bringing previous separate content into a synthetic relationship. For instance, this cycle of coding helped develop the theme of democratic teacher education by bringing together issues of reflective teaching and deliberative democracy that later on became the central focus of my writing and analysis.

Finally, the writing and re-writing of the individual case chapters (5 – 7) as well as the cross-case analysis chapter (8) and conclusion (9) also constitute a phase in data analysis. As I wrote these findings and linked them to theory and other research on pedagogy, I found myself reanalyzing aspects of the data and coming to new or slightly different interpretations. Much like the process of writing analytic memos during formal data analysis, the drafting of writing for publication is itself an activity of refining and reframing data and findings.

Researcher Positionality

As was discussed earlier in this chapter, in qualitative inquiry of this nature the researcher is herself the instrument of data collection and analysis. Not only is she a singular instrument, she is also changing with each passing day. For these reasons, research of this sort is neither replicable nor controllable. To pretend otherwise is disingenuous and undercuts the value of qualitative inquiry in general. Researchers who deny these basic facts about qualitative research perpetuate mistrust and confusion²⁴ about what constitutes research. Because of this, the qualitative researcher has an obligation to disclose something about their instrument to provide better insights into why the research was undertaken in the first place and how one's background might influence the findings and conclusions drawn from the data collected. In this closing section, I share aspects of my own positionality in an attempt to clarify the motivations for this research and offer up aspects of my personal identity that have inevitably impacted how I collected data and answered the research questions in this study.

My personal identity impacts the work I do as a researcher and an educator. I am a white, cis male who grew up in suburban Minnesota during the 1980s and 1990s. While my family was

²⁴ See Small (2009) for a thoughtful discussion of qualitative research and the problems with viewing it through the lens of quantitative approaches to studying society.

not poor, my parents resisted debt and living beyond their means which at times translated to a feeling of being poorer than many other children in my cohort. Despite this childhood perception, looking back I can say that we were much more privileged than many other Americans. After graduating from a large public high school, I attended a small public liberal arts university in West Central Minnesota. During my undergraduate college career, I became interested in issues of social justice and inequality and this led me to study anthropology and political theory. In addition to becoming very interested in qualitative research methodologies that grow out of fields like anthropology and sociology, I also became increasingly interested in democratic processes and educational issues. Despite not having studied education formally during my undergraduate college experience, I joined Teach For America and became a special education teacher in a middle school within three months of graduating.

My first teaching experiences occurred in Brownsville, TX as part of the 2006 Corps of Teach For America in the Rio Grande Valley. My first two years of teaching were marked by frustration and frantic studying of educational research and practice that I would have learned about in a traditional teacher education program. Despite my inadequacies as a new teacher, I loved teaching and formed close bonds with many of my students. Beyond the classroom, I began working in political organizing with residents of the lower Rio Grande Valley to resist the development of a border wall as authorized under the Secure Fence Act of 2006. Despite my misgivings about Teach For America as a program, I was using the opportunity to further my study of democracy and education.

After leaving Brownsville, TX in 2008, I moved to Shanxi, China and lived in a rural village of roughly five hundred people. While there, I worked for the Rural China Education Foundation as a Teaching Coach. In this position, I taught English classes at an elementary

school, but also worked closely with other local teachers who were interested in transforming their teaching practice. This type of teacher development stood in stark contrast to the trainings I had received while working with Teach For America and I credit this time in my life as critical in revealing to me my love of teacher education. After two years in rural China, I returned to the United States to complete a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. While there, I had many opportunities to study teacher education and work in the field with both pre-service and in-service educators.

I first became aware of Foxfire Teacher Education through my wife who is a teacher and organizer interested in issues of rural education. During the summer of 2009 between my two years working in China, we had an opportunity to participate in the Foxfire Course for Teachers together. In addition to being a positive experience overall, the course had a lasting impact on the work we were doing in China. In the years that followed my participation in the course, I have come to think of myself as an educator with a teaching philosophy very much in line with the Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning. I have always felt there was a connection between the Foxfire Approach and other critical approaches to education that focus on issues of inequality, power and the reproduction of social hierarchies. While this connection was something that I thought about regularly, I did not intend to study it when I came to graduate school.

As a graduate student interested in critical educational studies, I entered graduate school intending to conduct research that critiqued retrogressive approaches to preparing teachers for the classroom. Having experiences with Teach For America, I had intended to study that program with an eye toward exploring the impact such a program has on the teaching profession as a whole. As I moved through my course work in graduate school, I came to realize that I was

more interested in studying a program that had fundamental tenets that I agreed with. This would allow me to judge the program against its own stated values as well as compare it to broader normative commitments of the critical education tradition. The decision was further solidified when I came across the work of Zeichner and Liston who lamented the lack of programmatic examples of democratic teacher education that allowed for the genuine development of teachers. It was the coupling of these events that led me to re-examine the Foxfire Courses for Teachers as a subject of my research.

This brief discussion of my thinking about this research is designed to inform the reader that I am a supportive inquirer into Foxfire Teacher Education. In the language that is often used in Foxfire discussions, I am a “critical friend” of the organization. It is my goal in this research to provide rich descriptions of the Foxfire Courses for Teachers so as to help other teacher educators reimagine their own practice. Responding to the call of Zeichner and Liston, my research attempts to provide insights into a programmatic example of a different way of preparing and supporting teachers. This is very much in line with the “secretarial work” described by Apple in his now often-cited tasks of the critical scholar-activist (Apple, 2013).

Chapter 4 – History and Context of the Foxfire Course for Teachers

Introduction

To many people, Foxfire simply refers to a magazine and book series about country living in rural Appalachia. At the height of its popularity this writing spread far and wide, so much so that these materials are still readily available in many used book stores around the country. It is no wonder that these tangible products have a lasting impression; however, the story of Foxfire cannot be fully understood without close attention to the *process* by which these products were created.

In the first half of this chapter, I trace the history from the original high school English classroom that produced the Foxfire Magazine to the grassroots networks of teachers around the country experimenting with expanding the applicability of Foxfire into different subject areas and contexts. This inquiry-based teaching led to the development and refinement of the Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning (FATL) and its corresponding ten Foxfire Core Practices which now serve as the curricular backbone of the Foxfire Course for Teachers. While the original Foxfire Magazine program continues to run in Rabun County, Georgia and has since its inception in 1966, the history in this chapter breaks away from that thread with the creation of Foxfire teacher outreach programs. The purpose here is to follow the evolution of the FATL up through its centrality in the Foxfire Course for Teachers. The last section of this chapter provides an overview of relevant information about how the Foxfire Course for Teachers is designed including information about the facilities, required texts and course requirements. As was explained in the previous chapter on research methodology, multicase study requires a comparison of a number of cases of the same thing. The shared history, context, and program

design information provided in this chapter tells part of the story of what makes these three distinct cases of a kind.

The History of Foxfire

Eliot Wigginton and the Original Foxfire Program

Eliot Wigginton was a high school English teacher in Rabun County, Georgia at the Rabun-Gap Nacoochee School (RGNS) starting in 1966. He had completed his teaching degree at Cornell University and promptly moved to the region. Rabun County held a special place in his heart because of his time spent there with his father who was a professor at the University of Georgia in Athens, located about 80 miles from where Foxfire was started. Prefiguring his later teaching innovations which would foreground issues of place as a pedagogical tool, it was the idea of place that originally brought him to work in this region. Writing in 1985, he described his intention behind taking the position at RGNS :

I went to Rabun Gap to teach because I wanted to live in Rabun Gap. That's all. No great sense of mission or purpose as far as a school or its students were concerned. No grand scheme playing like a symphony on a tape loop over and over in my mind. I wanted to live in that part of the country and teaching was a legitimate way to get there and support myself (1985, p. 9)

Eliot Wigginton's first experiences as a teacher are not dissimilar from those of many new teachers. John L. Puckett (1989), in his expansive ethno-history of the first twenty-five years of Foxfire, describes a mix of challenges that Wigginton was confronted by in his first year of teaching. He writes:

“Like most novice teachers, Wigginton was overworked and underpaid, saddled with six classes totaling 146 students and no planning period, laboring on a state salary of less than \$400 per month. To make matters worse, he was confronted with hostile, bored and rambunctious students, who made his life a misery” (pg. 17).

In his early months of teaching, Wigginton employed a traditional approach that relied upon the English course textbook. This traditional content was bolstered by a traditional approach to classroom management that drew heavily upon the threat of banishment to the principal's office for any students who misbehaved or challenged the teacher's authority. Before changing his approach, Wigginton instituted a series of graduated consequences that served to breed resentment among his students. Reflecting on his first year teaching, Wigginton described his initial approach like this:

“If I were to finish out the year honorably, it would be necessary to reassert my authority. No teenagers were going to push me around. Besides, my course was too important. First offense would be an ‘X’ in the grade book. Second, a paddling. Third, to the principal. Fourth, out of class for two weeks” (Wigginton, 1968, p. 10).

Writing after this initial period, Wigginton described the fever pitch that led him to reconsider his teaching practice:

“I surveyed the wreckage. My lectern (that's the protective device a teacher cowers behind while giving a lecture nobody's listening to) was scorched from the time Tommy Green tried to set it on fire with his lighter—during class. Charles Henslee had already broken off the blade of his Barlow knife in the floorboards. Every desk was decorated with graffiti. My box of yellow chalk was gone and so were the thumbtacks that had held up the chart of the Globe Theatre. The nine water pistols I had confiscated that very afternoon had been reconfiscated from under my nose. And it was with a deep sigh that, as I launched one of the several paper airplanes within easy reach, I began to ponder greener pastures. Either that or start all over” (ibid, p. 9).

Fortunately for the students in his class, Wigginton selected the latter path and began the process of reinventing his approach to teaching.

The story of the class session or sessions that spawned the Foxfire program is an often told and likely embellished one. What is certain is that the students in Wigginton's English classes began a process of writing and producing a magazine known as Foxfire as a vehicle for practicing language skills associated with the English curriculum. In his first written description

of the inception of the magazine included in *The Foxfire Book* published in 1968, Wigginton provides a straight-forward narrative of the change:

“The next day I walked into class and said, ‘How would you like to throw away the text and start a magazine?’ And that’s how Foxfire began. From the beginning, the idea was to involve everyone... We decided to print one issue put together by all of us as a class and during class time. If that issue did what I hoped it would do for my ailing classes, we might try to make it a regular thing. But for the time being, one issue only” (Wigginton, 1968, pg. 10).

In his longer treatment of the founding story in his teaching memoir, *Sometimes a Shining Moment*, Wigginton revises his story to include student agency.

“On one of the bleakest fall days in 1966, I walked into my first-period class, sat down on top of my desk and crossed my legs, and said, very slowly and very quietly, ‘Look, this isn’t working. You know it isn’t and I know it isn’t. Now what are we going to do together to make it through the rest of this year?’” (Wigginton, 1985, pg. 32).

He goes on to describe the students’ reactions to this radical invitation. Because this account foregrounds the on-going deliberative nature of this type of democratic decision making with students that later became the heart of the FATL, it is worth quoting at length:

“The class was silent. For long minutes we simply stared at each other. And then slowly, quietly, the talk came. Nothing of real consequence got resolved that day in terms of specific classroom activities that they might enjoy more than what I had imposed on them (I realized later how helpless many of them are to come up with brilliant suggestions when, because of the way they’ve been taught for so many years, they can’t even imagine what the options could be; and how wrong teachers are who say, ‘Well, I asked them for their ideas and they couldn’t come up with any good ones so we just went on with the text’) But at least we began the dialogue, and we began to look at each other in a different light. The process of examining ourselves, English and what it’s for, school and what it’s for, and sampling new activities went on all year. In fact, ten years later at Rabun Gap, I and new students were still at it—still tearing things apart and putting them together in different ways. Still experimenting. Still talking. Still testing. And I still do it with my students today at Rabun County’s new consolidated public high school, where I now teach. And, being a slow learner, I still haven’t got it right. But I’m getting there.” (ibid)

This extended account prefigures the important role process would come to play in the FATL. Even though the innovation was a shift away from text-centered curricula to one that was product-focused, the heart of the learning and growth in this approach occurs in the experimental process of figuring out what to do together.

The Foxfire Magazine's content came to focus almost exclusively on cultural journalism conducted in the communities surrounding the high school. Students would identify local community members (often grandparents) who had unique skills or interesting stories related to life in Appalachia. Once identified, small teams of students would record interviews with these people with the goal of turning them into magazine articles. The process of preparing questions, conducting interviews, transcribing and ultimately producing works of polished journalism because the iterative cycle through which the students in Wigginton's class came to learn the language skills he had struggled to teach in his earlier attempts. Because of the salience of the content and the quality of the work, the first issues of the magazine were immediately successful in the local area. This led to a national distribution program (also largely managed by the students) and later a book contract with Anchor Books that ultimately turned into a long-running series.

*The Foxfire Book*²⁵ quickly became a national best-seller. This attention brought with it many benefits, including financial resources that helped expand the program. Less than ten years into the program, the students used funds from the book series to purchase a piece of land that would later become the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center. On the Foxfire Fund website, the organization describes the progression like this:

²⁵ The initial book in this series was simply called *The Foxfire Book*, but later books in this series were numbered (*Foxfire 1*, *Foxfire 2*, etc).

“Foxfire students began interviewing their families, friends, and neighbors in 1966. Many times, these folks would give the students some old tools or the finished hand-crafted items they were discussing or documenting. Very quickly, Foxfire was growing an extensive artifact collection. When *The Foxfire Book* became a national phenomenon, Foxfire gained a source of capital (book royalties) to fund new growth. In 1974, Foxfire students elected to purchase land on Black Rock Mountain and created a physical presence in the community” (The Foxfire Fund, N.D.).

Beyond simply being a place to house artifacts and their growing archives, the Foxfire Center became a place where people could come to learn about Southern Appalachian culture that the magazine and books had been documenting. Later on, this would become a place where teachers would congregate to learn about the Foxfire Approach and its potential to impact their classrooms.

Foxfire Gains Attention from Teachers

The publication of the Foxfire Book did not only result in an influx of money for the Foxfire program, it also gained the attention of many teachers and school leaders. As teachers saw the product of these students’ work and heard about the process by which the magazine articles were written, they began to ask whether or not their students could do something similar. This resulted in the development of many Foxfire-like magazine programs, some of which received direct support from Wigginton and his students. By its height in 1985, John L. Puckett (1989) found that Foxfire had inspired 260 cultural journalism projects in 47 states as well as 13 projects occurring outside of the United States in places as diverse as Japan and Haiti. According to the editors of the *Foxfire Course Book* (Paris, Combs, Wooten, & Moore, 2005), “Too often these replicas failed to realize the level of student learning achieved by the original” (pg. 2). Writing in the *Harvard Educational Review*, Wigginton (1989) explained that these replicas failed because they did not replicate the process of Foxfire which allows for student input and ownership:

“It became apparent that without the benefit of student input, many teachers had simply decided to produce a publication, had secured the necessary support, had solved all the problems, had assigned articles to students for homework, had selected the best for publication, and had completely gutted the activity of all its educational potential and its life” (pg. 25).

As a result of these problems, none of these programs achieved a similar level of success of Foxfire and many of them simply vanished after a short period of time.

The rise and fall of Foxfire-inspired magazine projects prompted a “second major phase” in the expansion of Foxfire (Starnes & Carone, 2002). During this phase, Foxfire curtailed efforts to expand cultural journalism and instead emphasized promoting an understanding of the *process* that led Wigginton’s students to choose to write and publish a magazine. According to the *Foxfire Course Book*, in order to help teachers learn the right lessons from Foxfire, “students, teachers, and [Foxfire] staff began to identify and articulate the elements that had given rise to their success. (Paris, Combs, Wooten, & Moore 2005, pg. 2). This process resulted in producing the Foxfire Core Practices which form the basis for the FATL. The Foxfire Core Practices²⁶ are as follows:

1. From the beginning, **learner choice**, design, and revision infuses the work teachers and learners do together.
2. The work teachers and learners do together clearly manifests **the attributes of the academic disciplines** involved, so those attributes become **habits of mind**.
3. The work teachers and students do together enables learners to make **connections between the classroom work, the surrounding communities, and the world beyond their communities**.
4. The teacher serves as **facilitator** and collaborator.
5. **Active learning** characterizes classroom activities.

²⁶ The provided list of the Foxfire Core Practices represents their current incarnation. Because the FATL is, by design, revised through inquiry-based teaching and the feedback of teachers, the list has taken different forms at different points in the history of the program. According to Starnes and Carone (2002), “Hundreds of classroom teachers over several years continued to develop, edit and revise the Core Practices to reflect new understandings and lessons learned through implementation.” (pg. 5).

6. The learning process entails **imagination and creativity**.
7. Classroom work includes **peer teaching, small group work, and teamwork**.
8. The work of the classroom serves **audiences beyond the teacher**, thereby evoking the best efforts by the learners and providing feedback for improving subsequent performances.
9. The work teachers and learners do together includes rigorous, ongoing **assessment and evaluation**.
10. **Reflection**, an essential activity, takes place at key points throughout the work.

Instead of promoting a method for producing student journalism, Foxfire started to take on its current form as the FATL, an approach to reinvigorate teaching in student-centered ways through experimentation in the classroom.

The Foxfire Core Practices became the curricular foundation of the Foxfire Course for Teachers which began during this period in the 1980s. These courses were offered in partnership with universities and school districts in a variety of settings around the country. During this course, teachers were invited to imagine what the Foxfire Approach would look like if implemented in their classroom contexts. To aid in this process, Dewey's *Experience and Education* was added as a reading for the course. Though Dewey was not the foundation for Wigginton's original instructional decisions, he discovered it later on and found a tremendous similarity between Dewey's educational philosophy and the practice of Foxfire. In his book, Wigginton (1985) described the experience of reading *Experience and Education* for the first time many years into his teaching the Foxfire class:

“One paragraph into *Experience and Education* by John Dewey and things began to crystallize. By the time I finished it, I was shaking my head in amazement....All of those discoveries I thought I had made about education, Dewey had elucidated into complete clarity fifty years and more before. And he had showed me how incomplete my own philosophy still was” (pg. 280).

By using *Experience and Education* as a text in the Foxfire Course for Teachers, participants in the course were able to link the practice of Foxfire with the broader theory of democratic education. According to Bobby Ann Starnes, the president of the Foxfire Fund non-profit organization in the early 2000s, the connection between theory and practice represented by Dewey and the Foxfire Core Practices in the course helped participants better understand that the Foxfire Approach was not about producing magazines, but rather about letting students make choices about their learning. She writes, “With the connection between theory and practice clear, teaching staff and teachers became able to think and talk about the Foxfire Approach in broader terms and to more effectively assist others in understanding the difference between the magazine, which was the decision...and the fact that learners had made a decision” (2002, pg. 5).

Through these early iterations of the Foxfire Course for Teachers, thousands of teachers around the country participated in bringing the FATL into their own classrooms. This process of experimenting and sharing was formalized in 1987 with the development of Foxfire Teacher Networks²⁷. At their height, there were over twenty formal networks of teachers inspired by Foxfire in different parts of the country working together to reform classroom practice. These networks would often start with a session of the Foxfire Course for Teachers being offered at a local university or school district. Those inspired by the course could then receive support as they experimented with the FATL in their classrooms. Smith, writing about the role of the networks in 1991, described them primarily as a vehicle for teachers to collectively innovate and generate new teaching knowledge through sharing their successes and failures:

“Each individual in the [Foxfire Teacher Networks] has unique teaching assignments and constituencies; each has unique talents and perspectives. What they try in their classrooms needs to be documented, captured and analyzed for

²⁷ See, Smith 1991, 1994 for a more complete description of the Foxfire Teacher Networks.

the benefit of all of us. Whether another ‘shining moment’ or an utter disaster, and anything in between, those efforts need to become part of our shared frame of reference. All of us needed to know what worked and why, what did not work and why” (1991, pg. 9).

These insights were not only shared locally, but also distributed as teaching case studies through *Hands On*, a Foxfire journal for teachers. While much of the primary work of the networks was completed voluntarily by teachers experimenting in their classrooms, The Foxfire Fund provided considerable support in the form of maintaining files on participating teachers’ projects, editing *Hands On*, dispensing grant funds to individual networks and coordinating meetings and evaluation.

Importantly, the Foxfire Teacher Networks were democratic in structure. As such, each network was charged with determining their own norms and priorities. According to Starnes (2002),

“Foxfire didn’t know how the networks would form, organize, or operate. What they did know was that the teachers themselves were the ones to decide those issues....The teachers believed that the networks would have to be teacher-centered in the same way members’ classrooms were student-centered, and for the same reasons” (pg. 5).

The experience of democratic deliberation and decision-making became a central aspect of the FATL and had important consequences for the ability of a teacher to facilitate democratic teaching with children. Smith (1991) writes,

Within the networks, democratic processes – discussion (deliberation, consensus), projection of consequences, and attentiveness to those whose views might not prevail – serve as an organizational means of mediation, thereby setting the direction for actions. If we assert that democracy is the appropriate process for society, and if we are sure that democratic skills and attitudes are best learned by using them, then we should use democracy in our classrooms. Similarly, teacher networks provide an organizational context for teachers to practice democracy....If democracy is right for kids and right for society, it is right for us, because in our capacity as teachers, we also mediate. To be effective mediators in our classrooms, we must understand, through experience democratic processes, not merely talk about them” (pg. 27).

In this way, the networks were providing a space for teachers to come together to generate new knowledge about democratic teaching as well as experience democracy firsthand.

The Foxfire Course for Teachers Today

Despite their size and considerable impact in the lives of the participating teachers, the Foxfire Fund decided in 2000 to stop directly supporting the Foxfire Teacher Networks.

According to the brief history provided in the *Foxfire Course Book*,

“Foxfire began a strategic planning process to reflect on its past work and plan for its future. Working together, the Board of Directors and staff, developed a series of guidelines and priorities that redirected and refocused Foxfire’s efforts, beginning in January 2001, on Georgia and surrounding states” (2005, pg. 2).

As a result of this change in priorities, the Foxfire Course for Teachers became a course only offered during the summers and only available at the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center.

While this represented a significant shift away from their efforts at school reform on a national scale, many of the insights from their earlier history are present in the design of the course in its current form.

The Foxfire Course for Teachers, as it exists today, is designed to promote deep engagement with the FATL. According to the Foxfire Fund website,

“The Foxfire Course for Teachers is an in-depth examination of each of the [Foxfire] Core Practices and their applications. During the course, teachers will identify their existing perceptions of the relationships between teachers, learners, and the curriculum. Those perceptions will be challenged, and the teachers will begin to redefine their own teaching philosophies to include the Core Practices and merge them back into their own teaching practices” (The Foxfire Fund, n.d.).

During the weeklong residential course at the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center, approximately fifteen participants and two facilitators work together to critically engage with the Foxfire Core Practices. Most of the participants are working teachers pursuing their master’s degrees who are taking the course as an elective. For non-degree seeking students, the course can

be taken for a fraction of the cost paid directly to the Foxfire Fund. Each week of the course attracts participants from different schools, different grade levels and different subject areas.

Participants in the course spend the majority of the week together in two buildings at the Foxfire Center. The “Guest House” and the “Long House” are located on the grounds of the museum and heritage center; however, they are closed off to the public and reserved exclusively for use by the participants during the course. Both buildings have large communal spaces for meals and large group discussions as well as dorm-style rooms for each of the participants. The promotional materials for the course describe the facilities as “rustic, but comfortable” which causes some confusion among participants in terms of what to expect. They are often surprised to find private bathrooms and showers as well as full kitchens stocked with food for preparing their own breakfast and lunch each day of the course. Dinner is not provided and participants often either cook together or leave the Foxfire Center to patronize the many bars and restaurants into nearby Clayton, Georgia.

The course has three “givens” that the participants must complete during their week together at the Foxfire Center. The first two givens of the course require students to “critically engage” with the *Foxfire Course Book* and *Experience and Education* by John Dewey. The *Foxfire Course Book* is organized around the ten Foxfire Core Practices and includes many teacher narratives taken from *Hands On* about their experiences using and contributing to the Foxfire Approach. In this way, the course maintains its connection to the original work done by the Foxfire Teacher Networks. Similarly, *Experience and Education*, which provided theoretical support to Wigginton and the Foxfire Teacher Networks in the development of the FATL, continues to be an object of reflection for participants. By switching back and forth between these two texts, the participants and facilitators collectively attempt to understand how the

Foxfire Approach has been implemented in different contexts and how it fits into the larger project of democratic education. Finally, the last given requires each participant to present an action plan to their peers that explains how they will integrate aspects of the Foxfire Approach into their teaching. In this way, each participant is required to translate insights gained through their collective engagement to action plans specific to their classrooms. While the first two givens require the participants to look backward, the creation of their own action plan requires them to look forward and contribute the generative work of Foxfire in a way similar to the Foxfire Teacher Networks.

The course is structured to allow the participants to experience the Foxfire Approach and gain insights into what it feels like to be a student in this type of learning environment. As such, only a few unilateral decisions are set before participants arrive at the Foxfire Center, leaving the majority of the time for them to deliberate about and experiment with different instructional approaches. Because of the open structure of the course, each iteration takes a shape of its own as a result of the mix of participants and their goals and interests. Beyond the course texts, the experience of deliberating together about educational decisions becomes an important object of reflection for the participants. Just as the teachers in the Foxfire Teacher Networks gained insights into democratic education by experiencing deliberative democracy, participants in the Foxfire Course for Teachers are expected to deliberate about how they will spend their week together in service of the three course givens. This experience of practicing democracy together is designed to help them understand how their students will experience greater autonomy in a Foxfire-inspired classroom.

Chapter 5 – Case Report #1

Course Overview

On a Sunday afternoon in the beginning of June, Harry and LeAnn, the two facilitators of the summer's first session of the Foxfire Course for Teachers, arranged the tables and chairs in the Long House in anticipation of sixteen participants arriving during the next few hours. As participants began to trickle in, the facilitators directed them to find a room upstairs in the Long House or to make the trek across the gravel clearing that served as a parking lot to find a room in the Guest House. After selecting a room, participants came back into the Long House and talked with Harry and LeAnn about their previous courses together and how their school years had ended. Once all the participants had arrived, Harry and LeAnn passed out the course materials, *The Foxfire Course Book* and *Experience and Education* by John Dewey, and ensured that everyone was comfortable with their rooms and understood basic logistical information about the Foxfire Center such as how to access the gate that was locked when the museum was closed to the public and what to do with trash and recycling.

Unlike the majority of the week, the first afternoon was filled with activities led by LeAnn and Harry. The participants were directed to find a partner and spend twenty minutes taking turns interviewing each other with questions generated by the facilitators. After the interviews were complete, each person gave a presentation about their partner to the large group. Unlike the participants, the facilitators briefly introduced themselves and encouraged the participants to “ask them anything” about their backgrounds, families and interests. This was followed by Harry telling the participants to spend a few minutes quietly writing about memorable learning experiences. These experiences were then shared one by one and discussed while the facilitators lightly commented on each one, paraphrasing them and connecting them to

what others had said. Harry explained that this activity was designed to activate memories about their own educational experiences as a catalyst for creating memorable learning experiences together during the course of the week.

After each person had shared their memorable learning experiences, LeAnn transitioned the group into a discussion of the “givens” for the course. She explained that the participants would be in charge of “critically engaging” with both of the texts that had been distributed earlier and that the group would be deliberating about the course design the next morning. This prompted a brief discussion about the word “critical” and what it should mean with regard to their participation. Harry stressed to the group that they would need to be honest about what he called their “yeah, but” reactions; their feelings that the ideas were good in theory but difficult or impossible in practice. He explained that this would be important for the group to process as they thought about implementing the Foxfire Approach in their classrooms. This prompted LeAnn to bring up the third “given” of the course but encouraged students to not worry about it because they would talk about it more after Wednesday. The first afternoon concluded with Harry and LeAnn explaining to the group that they should spend some time in the evening looking over the texts in anticipation of their planning deliberation the next day.

Monday morning began with a brief discussion about the norms that would be observed throughout the week. The four norms for the week were adapted from a protocol used by the Critical Friends Network and included (1) Step Up (2) Make Room (3) Assume Goodwill and (4) Seek Wisdom. The group discussed what these norms meant and Harry told the group they would be checking in each day to see how well these norms were being observed. This then led the group into their deliberation about the schedule and format of the week facilitated primarily by LeAnn. During the deliberation, the participants were confused about what aspects of the

course they were able to decide on and unclear about their action plan presentations. After some clarification from LeAnn and Harry, the group decided to create small groups charged with leading discussions about three sections of *Experience and Education*. After reading their section in advance, they would be in charge of designing an activity and facilitating a discussion. With regards to the *Foxfire Course Book*, the group decided to spend their lunch period reading the first chapter and then come back together in the afternoon to discuss it as a large group. After their trial run, they decided that they would keep this format for the remainder of the *Foxfire Course Book*. Unlike the sessions on *Experience and Education*, these large group discussions were spontaneously facilitated by a participant that “stepped up” when the group came together.

After the discussion of the first Foxfire Core Practice in the *Foxfire Course Book* on Monday afternoon, the majority of the major decisions about the course schedule and format were set. Minor ad hoc decisions about how much to read each day and whether or not the group was willing to extend their time for a discussion were made quickly and regularly throughout the week. The facilitated discussions on each of the ten Foxfire Core Practices were all very similar in format. Each one was facilitated by a different person who volunteered immediately before the discussion. Often they would start by sharing their reactions to the chapter and reading some underlined passages that they wanted the group to discuss. These discussions varied in length but many of them lasted well over an hour. The discussions focused on classroom practice and were propelled by participants sharing their experiences with and understanding of the Foxfire Core Practices. Harry and LeAnn were less active than many of the participants but would often interject with an example from a Foxfire classroom that served to push the thinking of the participants.

Unlike the Foxfire Core Practice discussions which quickly settled into a format and remained consistent throughout the week, the three organized activities around the Dewey text were varied in format. The first group led a discussion that was very similar to the Foxfire Core Practice discussions. Members of the facilitation team collectively summarized the three chapters and then led the group through prepared discussion questions and prompted their classmates to respond to underlined passages. The second group, in reaction to the whole-group discussion format of both the Foxfire Core Practice discussions and the first Dewey discussion, decided to take their classmates outside to have a stations-based activity in which partners would move from picnic table to picnic table discussing key concepts from *Experience and Education*. After progressing through each station, the whole group came together to have a discussion about the text in relation to the Foxfire Core Practices while roasting hot dogs and marshmallows over a camp fire. Similarly, the final group charged with leading an activity on the final chapters in *Experience and Education* planned and led a partnered activity designed to synthesize their thoughts on Dewey and the Foxfire Approach. After a brief summary of the remaining chapters, participants partnered up and were assigned to design a project-based activity inspired by Foxfire and Dewey that they would have to present and justify to a mock school board played by the facilitation team. In addition to bringing together many of the earlier discussions from the week, this activity also prompted participants to think in terms of concrete actions that could be taken in their classrooms in anticipation of the action plans that occurred on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning.

The final presentations of action plans that occurred during the last two days of the week, were all very similar in their style and format. With the exception of one, all of the participants presented concrete action plans that were inspired by some of the Foxfire Core Practices and

made reference to Dewey's philosophy of education. Each participant shared information about their teaching context and how their plan was designed to change some aspects of their teaching. Because each participant described a different teaching context, their plans reflected different understandings about what the Foxfire Approach would look like in practice. Their plans also varied significantly in terms of scale. Some action plans focused narrowly on a small aspect of their classroom routine, such as opening up spaces for students to regularly reflect on the content they were learning and give feedback to the teacher. Other actions plans were much more ambitious reflecting the large scale project-based approach of the original Foxfire magazine program. After the last presentation occurred on Saturday morning, each participant completed a course evaluation form and left the Foxfire Center.

Facilitator and Participant Backgrounds

LeAnn and Harry, the facilitators of the session of the Foxfire Course for Teachers, are professors of education. Harry, a former high school teacher and educator who worked alongside Eliot Wigginton and coordinated much of the work on the Foxfire Teacher Networks, came to this session with much more experience facilitating the Foxfire Course for Teachers. He helped develop the course and had facilitated it dozens of times with many other co-facilitators. LeAnn, on the other hand, was facilitating the course for the first time. She, like Harry, had been a secondary education teacher but came to the career later in life. Before teaching high school health and physical education, she had worked extensively in community education projects related to healthcare. Although she was new to the work of facilitating the Foxfire Course for Teachers, she had been familiar with Foxfire early on and approached her work, both in community and secondary education, with a similar method of empowering learners to make decisions about their own education. Both Harry and LeAnn were familiar faces to half of the

participants because they had taught other courses in the undergraduate and graduate programs that many of the students had completed. When asked about their teaching styles in other courses, their past students agreed that they both taught in ways consistent with the Foxfire Core Practices.

The participants in this session of the Foxfire Course for Teachers shared many similar characteristics. All of the participants were living and working in Georgia with the majority of them working within fifty miles of the Foxfire Center. All of the participants were enrolled in graduate courses through one of two campuses and were taking the Foxfire Course for Teachers for graduate credit toward their master's degrees. In addition to these similarities, all of the participants identified as White though a majority of them taught in racially diverse school systems.

In other important ways, the group of participants was more balanced. The group was split evenly along gender lines. The students also came evenly from two different college campuses. The levels of experience were also balanced between pre-service teachers (6), teachers with one to five years of teaching experience (4), and teachers with more than five years of teaching experience (4). In terms of grade level teaching diversity, two of the participants had experience in middle schools and the other twelve were split evenly between elementary and high school teaching. Finally, half of the participants had prior experience taking courses taught by either Harry or LeAnn. The other half of the class had not yet had them as instructors.

Reasons for Participating in the Foxfire Course for Teachers

The teachers who enrolled in the Foxfire Course for Teachers did so for various reasons and with wide-ranging expectations for the course. In the following section, I present some of the

major themes that arose when asking participants about their motivation for taking the Foxfire Course for Teachers. It is important to point out that with the exception of a very few cases, no participant explained their motivation to participate in singular terms. Most participants cited more than one of the categories presented as their justification for participating in the Foxfire Course for Teachers. It is also important to emphasize that these explanations of why people participated in the course also provide valuable insights into what the participants expected from the course and what preconceived notions they brought to the program.

“I can do anything for a week”

Many of the participants in the study reported choosing to enroll in the Foxfire Course for Teachers because they perceived it as being a quick and easy way to meet one of their remaining requirements for graduation. Because all of them were enrolled in masters programs, the Foxfire Course for Teachers met one of their elective requirements for each of their degree programs. During the summer session, only one other elective course, which focused on classroom technology, was being offered and all of the participants in this study elected to enroll in the Foxfire Course for Teachers instead of that one. Susan, an early childhood teacher with five years of teaching experience, explained her decision to participate in these terms,

“I had one more class to take along with my capstone course and I could either take a class that met once a week for the whole summer semester or I could take one class and get finished in a week. I said I can do anything for a week so I decided to do Foxfire.”

Daniel, a veteran high school social studies teacher, explained his decision to participate in similar terms:

“I have a real busy summer. You know, you only get ten weeks and I want to spend that time with my family. So I thought, do I want to have every night or every other night taken up with reading and writing papers by taking another

history or sociology class on top of the other two I'm already taking? Or do I want to go ahead and get this credit out of the way in one week? And so I thought, alright, if it's something I'm going to like and I can do it in a week, okay. Deal. I'll do it."

While it would be easy to view these justifications as simple protectiveness of their time on the part of Susan and Daniel, it is important to understand the background against which these decisions were made. Each of these participants was taking additional simultaneous graduate courses during the summer session and had other outside obligations that pushed them in this direction. In the case of Daniel, he was taking two additional classes during the summer session as well as volunteering as a troop leader for his son's Boy Scout troop. Susan was completing her capstone projects for their master's programs during the summer session.

"They both said I would like it. They were right. I'm actually enjoying it."

Many of the participating teachers also explained that the Foxfire Course for Teachers came recommended to them by past participants or instructors in the course. Alisha, a veteran middle school teacher with experience teaching special education courses, explained a positive recommendation that motivated her to participate,

"I think it was last year, a very good friend of mine [Joan] who Susan knows... came last summer. Joan came back. She and I co-taught two years ago for a third grade class. She came back talking about how it had just changed her life. It changed how she approached her classroom and she kept talking about it."

Samantha, a paraprofessional who completed her undergraduate education degree before continuing directly into the master's program, also received persuasive recommendations from her colleagues at the middle school where she worked,

"I re-arranged my schedule a few times to make it a part of my study. And why? People told me to. People said do not graduate without taking this class. People I

work with especially. They're like, 'When do you graduate? Oh, good! You can take the class in the summer.' If I would have graduated in May which I originally thought about doing, I wouldn't have been able to. So I'm like, I'm going to take Foxfire instead of this other dreaded class that I had had in mind and I really looked forward to it all year and I went to the teachers who told me to take it. And I'm like, 'Hey, guess what? I'm taking Foxfire next summer' and they said that it made such a difference in their lives so I looked forward to it."

Much like the recommendations that Alisha and Susan had received from Joan, Samantha's colleagues suggested that she take the course because it had a tremendous impact on their teaching practice.

Steve, a pre-service teacher working on his initial certification master's degree, described a similar recommendation that came from classmates in his graduate cohort who had participated during a previous summer. In addition to receiving a recommendation from his graduate advisor, Steve emphasized the impact the positive student experience had played in his decision making,

"Probably the biggest reason is it was extremely highly recommended to me by my advisor and from peers who had gone through the program in Summer 2011. That summer, just for scheduling reasons, it didn't work for me to go to Foxfire. But after talking to them, they came back and showed me their pictures. I saw their Facebook statuses. I saw that they really came to stronger bonds between them. They really seemed to develop some camaraderie. They were just very enthusiastic when they came back from the program. They said that it helped them a lot and most of all it was just really fun. That they learned a lot and had a really good time and that they would really recommend it, if I had a chance one summer to do the program."

Other participants in the course describe receiving recommendations to participate directly from the Harry and LeAnn, the instructors for the Foxfire Course for Teachers. Daniel, who had previously explained that he was interested in the course because of the one week format, received strong recommendations from Harry and LeAnn,

"I've had Harry and I've had LeAnn. They both said I would like it. They were right. I'm actually enjoying it. I like being outside. I'm very outdoorsy. I like the

social interaction. It's great....I had friends that picked on me and said it's going to be a weeklong Kumbaya. You know, holding hands around a campfire up in the mountains. They had no clue....I had asked LeAnn and Harry and they tried to explain to me about kids who had wrote a newspaper and I didn't know how that had anything to do with what I was going to be teaching in the classroom. So honestly, I was just trying to be open-minded and trust them that I would enjoy it. I mean, even the syllabus. I don't know if you've seen the syllabus, but the syllabus does not tell you anything about the course. You know nothing; nothing about the course. I took Harry's courses and he talked about his experiences with Foxfire so I knew a little bit about what Foxfire, the word was, but I didn't know what this experience was going to be."

"I wanted to go into this year pumped. I wanted to go into this year feeling a lot more confident than I did last year."

Some participating teachers also described being driven to take the course because they believed it would help prepare them to solve specific problems in their classrooms. Harvey was one such participant. After working in engineering and business for over twenty years, Harvey made a transition into teaching right before the economic crisis of 2008. For the past five years, he had been substitute teaching in all grade levels and subject areas while working on completing his certification program and master's degree in education. He described taking Foxfire because it was a potential asset in confronting diversity in his future classroom,

"I knew that whatever school that I was going into was very likely to be very, very diverse. And in fact, my classroom, my best guess on my classroom is going to be 80% to 100% minority. About 50% African American, about 10% African – just African, like recent immigrants. 14% Hispanic, recent immigrants from Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador primarily, and a few White kids scattered in there. And my subject is language arts and social studies. Georgia history and language arts. So we have White guys literature and White guys history. And so, that's a hurdle that I thought this class might help me jump."

Because the original Foxfire Magazine focused on cultural heritage and was developed by a teacher and students who did not share a similar cultural background, Harvey thought that some insights could be gleaned for his classroom.

In a similar vein, Louise believed participating in the course would help prepare her for going back into the classroom by helping her refine her teaching philosophy and inspiring her,

“I could have chosen to take the technology class for example, which I really kind of did need a smidge of that to refresh my knowledge of technology in the classroom, but I wanted this program because I learned that it made you think deeper into your teaching philosophy and gave you new ideas and inspired you. And I wanted that, because I went into last year so nervous and so worried about everything and so stressed out because every area of my life was busy and full to the max. I wanted to go into this year pumped. I wanted to go into this year feeling a lot more confident than I did last year.”

During the previous year, Louise had been a first year teacher, a first year graduate student and was in the middle of planning a large wedding. With these stressors out of the way, she wanted to participate in the Foxfire Course for Teachers to prepare for a school year that she intended to look very different than the previous one.

In this brief discussion of teacher’s motivations to participate in the Foxfire Course for Teachers, I have shown several of the common reasons that people gave for enrolling. The reasons people gave were overlapping and multi-faceted, but generally focused on the one-week format, positive reviews of the course and specific beliefs about what the course would do for them in their future teaching. It is important to point out that no participant talked about wanting to take the course to learn how to better implement democratic teaching in their classroom, nor did many of them express much familiarity with the original Foxfire program despite its fame and prominence in the region. Harvey was the only participant with extensive knowledge of the original program, while others like Alisha and Tricia knew a little bit about it. In referring to the original program, Alisha expressed some knowledge of the program but did not realize its Georgian roots,

“When I would mention the course, lots of people said, ‘Is it related to those books?’ and I would say, ‘I’m not really sure.’ And honestly, it wasn’t until the first day that I saw that it really truly was that same program. I thought they might be something similar, but it was funny to think that this came out of Georgia (pause). I’m sorry. I’m Southern and people always think nothing good comes out of the South so I always assume it comes from somewhere like New York. I didn’t think that it came from a small, tiny town in Georgia. It just never registered that that is where it would have come from.”

Similarly, Tricia was familiar with the cultural heritage aspects of the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center, but did not realize the course would be focused on the teaching approach that gave rise to it,

“My grandmother told me a lot about it because she knows this place. So I thought it was going to be so neat to get to knit and be taught how to do stuff like that, but then it was not like that. She thought we were going to be doing stuff the old ways and that’s what I thought I’d be doing up here.”

Deliberating about the Givens

On Monday morning, LeAnn facilitated a discussion in which participants made decisions about how to meet the givens. The session lasted less than an hour and at the end of it the group had decided on a schedule that was mostly maintained for the duration of the week. The goal of creating a plan for completing the first two givens was not clearly stated at the beginning of the deliberative process and thus the entire session was wrought with confusion and frustration among many of the participating teachers. Their frustration was partially evidenced by their body language, facial expressions and searching questions, and later verified through in-depth reflective interviews. LeAnn opened the session by saying, “What I’m going to do next with you is talk about how you, as a group, are going to decide how to critically engage with *Experience and Education*.” She did not reiterate that this was one of two issues that needed to be decided on during this session nor was there any discussion of how the deliberative process was going to unfold in terms of procedure. LeAnn’s opening statement was immediately

followed by suggestions by students about how to engage with the Dewey text. Some participants immediately started making suggestions about how to split the book up into manageable chunks and others had ideas about creating small groups to be in charge of facilitating discussions of chapters. Only five of the fourteen participants contributed suggestions, and LeAnn mainly paraphrased their suggestions. The other eleven students sat quietly, some of them seemingly following the discussion closely while others looked disengaged or confused.

Twelve minutes into the deliberation, LeAnn revealed to the group that they would be deciding how to critically engage with the *Foxfire Course Book* in addition to the Dewey text. She said,

“Let me go back to the agenda because after we address this, I’m going to ask you how you want to do the Core Practices. And are they going to be separate or do you want to integrate them? So be thinking about that too.”

This slow reveal of additional relevant information is characteristic of the way information was provided during the entire session. As students made suggestions that were unacceptable to the facilitators, either Harry or LeAnn would interject with additional information to clarify the requirements. For instance, when a student made a suggestion about splitting up the chapters among small groups, Harry interrupted to explain that all students would be required to read all parts of the text regardless of whether or not they would be presenting information or leading a discussion about a given section. At another moment, he interrupted the deliberation to explain the expectation that the students work with different people during the course of the week instead of staying in the same small groups for each session.

It was not until nearly thirty minutes into the session that someone suggested creating a visual calendar on butcher-block paper so the group could see what times were available each

day for meeting the requirements of the course. This was a watershed moment in the process because people could better see how the different givens would fit together and how much time would be allowed each day before the presentations would occur. Daniel volunteered to be a recorder for the group and began hanging some poster board on one wall of the Long House. After creating a calendar on the poster board, the group started referring to AM and PM sessions for each day. After participants repeatedly asked about the third given, the requirement to present an action plan based on their teaching context, LeAnn provided some of this information thirty-seven minutes into the session. She said:

“I think there is confusion about what the presentation actually is. On Friday afternoon and Saturday morning, each of you individually, having thought all week about Dewey and the Core Practices, will share some idea that you’re thinking of about what you’re going to do in your classroom that’s related to the Core Practices. Like, how would change something that you’re currently doing to make it fit more with the Core Practices?”

Prior to this clarification, some students had thought the action plan presentation was a final paper. After creating a calendar template of the week and receiving this information about the presentation requirements, the group started quickly making decisions about how to structure the week. Now that they understood the final requirement for the course, they were able to make informed decisions about course design. *Experience and Education* was broken up into three sections roughly comparable in length and split up among groups that were formed by numbering off around the circle. LeAnn wrote down the names of the people and what section of the text they were responsible for. Each small group would be in charge of presenting their section of the Dewey text during the next three days. It would be the group’s responsibility to plan and facilitate a discussion or activity to critically engage with the material.

A provisional decision was made about the *Foxfire Course Book*. After an extended lunch break, everyone would individually read the first chapter focusing on Core Practice #1 – *Student Choice* and return to have a whole group discussion about it during the PM session. At that point, the group would decide together if they wanted to revise the format for discussing the Core Practices or keep it for the remainder of the week. During this decision, Harry responded to inquiries about the allowable formats and indicated that whole group discussion would be an acceptable format for engaging with the *Foxfire Course Book*. Like the decisions around the Dewey text, these decisions were made based on consensus and the acknowledgement of nodding in affirmation among the students.

Before adjourning for lunch and the recently designated reading time, LeAnn invited the students to reflect on the deliberative process that had just concluded. The same students who had been contributing most of the ideas during the deliberation offered their reflections. Some explained that it was frustrating and time-consuming and others acknowledged that the group could be “kinda rigid in our thinking” but that the whole group was “well-mannered” during the process. Robert, a pre-service high school teacher with extensive youth coaching experience, explained that it made him realize that it is “difficult to make informed decisions on limited information.” LeAnn then interjected with a more pointed reflective question. She asked, “As the facilitator of the Foxfire Approach, allowing your students to work through this sort of process, what do you need to be?” Several students said the word “patient” and many of the others around the room nodded in agreement.

The plan that was developed during this initial deliberative session was altered in only minor ways during the remaining days of the course. After discussing the first chapter of the *Foxfire Course Book* during the PM session, the students agreed to continue with whole group

discussions for each of the chapters of that text. Instead of assigning facilitation duties to students in advance, the group decided that a facilitator would volunteer immediately before the discussion began. They would be in charge of sharing some of their ideas about the chapter, raising discussion questions and declaring a close to the session when the topic had been exhausted. The Core Practices would be addressed in order and each day the students would decide how many chapter discussions would be possible based on how far everyone had read and the remaining time for the day. In terms of *Experience and Education*, at some points during the week, the group postponed some of the sessions on this text based on the difficulty of the reading and the need for additional time to complete the reading and plan the discussion activity. These decisions were made on an ad hoc basis during the odd times between sessions and meal times. No time was set aside to reflect on the schedule or revise it based on the experience of following their plan beyond these brief informal moments that often occurred as people were filing out of the Long House.

That first day was brutal because we had no idea what we were going to be accomplishing the whole week. We had nothing. We knew nothing.

Many of the participating teachers had strong reactions to the experience of deliberating about how to schedule the week in order to meet the “givens” of the course. During interviews, many of the participants attributed their frustration to their lack of understanding about what was supposed to be happening during the session. Harvey was one of the participants that was very active in offering ideas about how to split up the reading and how to form groups. After the deliberation had concluded and the group was well into executing its plan, he was able to acutely critique the process by which the week was organized:

“That forty-five minute block where we decided how we were going to skin this cat, from a facilitative view of that, I think the thing we struggled with was we didn't have all the things in place before we started the conversation. Because the question that kept coming up was, ‘You asked us for a schedule, but what is it we have to do? What is it we have to have accomplished?’ And we didn't have that list of standards, that list of goals that we had to accomplish and so we struggled with that for a while.”

Here, Harvey is pointing out the fact that the group was unable to reasonably construct a schedule for the week because the facilitators did not thoroughly explain the goals or “givens” that participants were expected to meet.

While he was critical of the way the deliberation was facilitated, Harvey related the process of deliberating with incomplete information to the practice of deliberating with his students in a classroom,

“That’s a technique you could use intentionally, though it didn't feel like this was intentional. That is a technique you could use intentionally to teach this. You know let your kids flail around for a few minutes figuring out that they didn't know enough to figure it out. Then go back and say, ‘Well, here's what we have to get done.’ You know, as a teaching moment. But I never got the feeling that that was the case here. And it just dawned on me that that's an approach you could use. That's something that they teach you in engineering school; that problem solving technique. But I felt a little, even when we got done with the schedule; I felt like we really didn't understand. We were being asked to set a schedule for a problem we didn't understand.”

Despite his criticisms of the Monday morning session, Harvey came to believe the deliberation and consensus building throughout the week was a meaningful simulation of democratic teaching that would help him facilitate deliberation in his middle school classroom:

“I'm looking at this from a middle school perspective. Middle schoolers desperately want to be treated like adults, and this modeling of how to get classroom consensus, that sort of thing, is going to help me do that in my classroom. Some things we did, you know. Hilton mentioned, this is what it looks like in your classroom. That did not scare me. That sort of made me say, ‘Hey, this is not so bad.’ I can teach them how to do this. And so that modeling for the whole week, how to do that, has just been right on target.”

Daniel and Louise also criticized the facilitation of the deliberation on similar grounds arguing that they did not have enough information to make informed decisions about the week. Daniel shared his prior experiences with this approach to deliberating about how to complete classroom objectives,

“I’ve had Harry before and that’s how every class was. Every class was ‘You guys create the agenda. Daniel, go up to the board and you be the scribe today. Okay, what do we have to accomplish? What have we read?’ I hate that process. It’s cool; I know why he makes us do it. I just hate it because I like checklists. If you tell me to do A, B, and C by these times and dates, I will do it. Other people won’t. But I will, you know. But I understand the process. They are trying to model it for us. Show us how we are supposed to give our students freedom, I just hate that.”

While Daniel understood the process and the goals of doing this work, he criticized the facilitation on Monday morning because the students were not provided with enough information,

“That first day was brutal because we had no idea what we were going to be accomplishing the whole week. We had nothing. We knew nothing. And we were expected to create a schedule for the whole week. I’m like, ‘I just paid you a thousand dollars so that you could tell us what we’re doing. You teach us. How about that?’”

Louise, in a similar line of criticism, argued that the facilitators were not forthcoming enough with necessary information for them to determine how much time they would have to complete the first two givens,

“On Monday, the whole not telling us things like how long they wanted our presentations to last! Because we were trying to just, we were approaching it from the standpoint of, ‘Okay, we’re used to making schedules. How much time do we need to have allotted for this? How much time do we need allotted for that?’ And then we’ll set it up. And they would not tell us anything, so we’re just kind of having to guess and it was so frustrating. Because all of us didn’t know what to guess or what to do. So I think they could have done more to step up and not so much tell us the expectations of the project, but tell us something. Like, ‘Okay, there are fourteen of you. We expect the presentations to last about fifteen

minutes each and they're definitely Friday and Saturday.' So we would know how much time to leave for that. Things like that."

The information about the presentations that Louise is referring to here was of great importance for determining when the first two givens would need to be completed by and how much time the participants would need to prepare for their presentations. LeAnn did not provide this information until thirty-seven minutes into the deliberation and only after several questions by the students. When asked about this decision in an interview after the fact, LeAnn explained that her intent was to emphasize that the participants should not worry about their action plan presentations early in the week because they would fall into place through the process of critical engagement with the texts and deep reflection on their own classrooms.

Other students, such as Alisha and Christy, criticized the deliberative process from the standpoint of communication. Alisha, a participant who remained silent during the entire deliberation session, reported similar feelings of frustration to other students in the course,

"That was frustrating for me. Surprisingly frustrating. I knew we had to talk about it and I expected it wouldn't be an immediate thing; you know we all have this immediate view."

While Alisha anticipated that the discussion would take some time to sort out, she found it confusing and was not able to follow many of the ideas that were being suggested,

"I felt like I wasn't sure exactly what we were doing and it may have just been that there were so many ideas that I kept getting confused. So are we staying with this group or are we going to mix groups? If we are going to mix groups, are we going to mix groups for each chapter? And if we do that, how does that work when you present. Because otherwise some of us might present four times and other people might present zero times?...For me the problem I was having, we were talking about this downstairs, was that I felt like we had too many issues going at once. I felt like we needed to solve one issue. Like, figure out how are we going to do the Dewey book and then move on. And if we needed to then pepper it back in, that would be great. But we kind of needed to...And I thought that could just be me, because that's what my students need. If you got twelve things,

then that's too much for them. They need to focus on one thing and get that solved and move it over and then look at the next thing.”

In her interview, she went on to explain that she had an urge to suggest to the group that they only deal with one issue at a time in order to ensure that everyone was able to follow the discussion and participate in the decision making. However, she did not make this suggestion during the deliberative process:

“I didn't suggest that and I probably should have. I wasn't sure how that was going to be received; if that would be seen as bossy. Um, because I thought I may be the only one that was having that issue. Well, I found out afterwards that I was not the only one who was thinking that.”

Christy had a similar evaluation of the communication that was occurring during the deliberation,

“I think too many people were trying to talk over everybody else instead of just listening to what they had to say. I mean, everybody had to go around the room every other time and share certain things. They should've gone around the room and let everybody kind of chime in and then take everything that was said that was kind of similar and kind of done that. Or just had, I mean, I know the whole approach is for them to not tell us what to do or how we're going to do it. I mean, I know that. But I just felt like a lot of the same things were being said, just in different ways. And that people weren't really listening to what the similarities were.”

Here, Christy is arguing that many of the problems in the deliberation could have been avoided if people were listening more closely for areas of consensus. She proposes a procedure that would have better facilitated this type of communication, but did not suggest it at the time. She goes on in her interview to criticize the fact that no one was writing anything down during the discussion until nearly thirty minutes into the conversation when Daniel suggested he could take notes on a large sheet of paper. She pointed out that once this step was taken, the decision making started to

happen much more quickly. Again, this was a suggestion that she did not raise during the deliberation.

Many of the teachers viewed the experience of deliberating about the givens through the lens of their classroom teaching. Despite being critical of how the session unfolded, they mined the experience for insights into facilitating these types of activities in their classrooms. Susan, who had remained silent during the entire deliberative session, found the process to be unlike anything she had experienced in her schooling,

“Today was just completely different than anything I have experienced in the classroom, where you decide on your schedule and you decide that you’re going to do this and you decide how you want to do that. And I think that was kind of difficult for me, I guess. Because I was never taught that way, so I’m just like, ‘Please just tell me what to do. Tell me when I need to have it done and I will get it done.’ But I don’t want to sit here and listen to this whole room of people discuss what they think is best and what this other person thinks is best. We could be out of here in five minutes if somebody just tells us what to do.”

In this passage, Susan explains that her unfamiliarity with this type of deliberation leads her to want a quick and unilateral decision made about the schedule instead of spending time hearing from the different perspectives in the group. She goes on to explain that the frustration she experienced during the session is similar to what she might experience if she facilitated this type of activity in her classroom,

“It was very frustrating. Which is probably why...that’s why I don’t do a lot of it in my classroom. I find it frustrating, sitting and listening. But still, after reading what we read today talking about how you still have to give them boundaries and you have to set them as boundaries, then I mean, that’s just something that I’m going to have to do, like start working through it on my own. But it was very chaotic and I just...just thinking about first graders doing that makes me anxious.”

Without prompting, Susan related the deliberative experience to her first grade classroom. She then compared this to the reading in the *Foxfire Course Book* on the first Core Practice – *Student Choice*, which emphasizes the importance of setting boundaries around freedom in the classroom. Despite her seemingly negative experience of deliberating over the schedule for the week, Susan suggests she has plans to begin working on creating more deliberative spaces in her classroom.

Tricia, who had not spoken during the deliberation session with the exception of pointing out that she and several other students had outside obligations that would pull them away from the Foxfire Center for several evenings during the week, experienced similar frustration with the process,

“I don't like that. I like structure. I like a schedule. Cause like, with that, everyone is arguing and, I just like structure like what do we need to do by this date. Harry and LeAnn were like, ‘Ya'll choose the schedule.’ We didn't go in order. We didn't set up a fashion where this person speaks and then...everybody was chaos at one time. And I think that you definitely have to have structure in a classroom. Or your classroom management is awful just like what we had down there.”

Tricia also related this experience to her elementary classroom; however, her assessment of the situation was much less positive than Susan's arguing that, “Third graders cannot make a choice for themselves about a schedule. You have got to have a set schedule for third graders otherwise they're going to be so crazy. That's just your classroom management.”

Reflecting on the Foxfire Approach and *Experience and Education*

In general, students enjoyed their engagement with the Foxfire Core Practices as detailed in the *Foxfire Course Book*. When compared with the other required reading, many of the teachers explained that they felt the format of the Foxfire Course Book was more practical for them as teachers. In regards to the book, Susan said,

“I liked it a lot. I mean, Dewey’s not terrible, but I enjoyed reading this much more than *Experience and Education*. I feel like that’s just very wordy and you have to keep re-reading it. Like, what does he really mean? What is he really saying? And I guess the other one is just easier to read.”

While acknowledging what she referred to as “a bias against reading educational theory”, Christy echoed Susan’s feelings, “It’s more layman’s terms and it’s easier to understand and read. And, I just like that it kind gives you step-by-step information. Like this is what you should do first. And it gives teacher commentary as well.”

After completing their first whole group discussion of Core Practice #1 – *Student Choice* on Monday afternoon, the group decided to extend their provisional decision on the discussion format for the nine remaining Core Practice chapters. Instead of fully mapping out when each chapter would be discussed, they decided each day how many chapters would get discussed and when those discussions would occur. This resulted in some shuffling of scheduled meeting times to ensure that everyone had enough time to complete the required reading. Samantha explained her strategy for completing the reading like this,

“I just read as much as I could every night. Most of the time that was everything I needed to read for the next day, but sometimes I thought it was a good idea to push that back. And I feel like it worked the best for the group as a whole to push things back. Like, ‘Hey we’re going to absolutely die if we do four more Core Practices right now. We can’t get through it.’ Of course, we’re going to push that back. Most of it was common-sense changes and as a group we all agreed to push it back. And there were hardly any complaints about schedule changing.”

While the whole group discussions were important venues for engagement with the Core Practices, much of the critical engagement happened in small groups that were self-organized and met at informal times, mostly in the evening. Taking Harry’s suggestion to read aloud in small groups, many of the students got together in groups and read aloud together, stopping periodically to summarize and discuss. Steve, an early and enthusiastic adopter of this method, explained their approach in detail,

“I’ve really enjoyed reading in small groups through the Foxfire Course Book. You know, being able to sort of lay back and read through material and to take your time and to pause to comment and ask questions of the other people around you. And those are in small groups, small being two to four or five people. Reading out loud and stopping every couple of paragraphs and asking, “What did ya’ll get from this?” It’s an active reading; to pause and go back and read. To sort of, in your mind, pick out important points and maybe to actually highlight or underline things. To really just take the time and really engage the other people around you and make sure that you’re all really understanding the same thing, and if not, what someone else might be understanding, you might have misinterpreted. Or it might have just gone over your head because you might have read through it just a little too quickly.”

While not every student shared Steve’s method of reading, many began the week’s readings in this format and most maintained it throughout. Louise explained the format like this,

“I really enjoy reading with my small groups. I feel like that’s where I’ve gotten the best discussions because we would read and then stop right then and talk about our first impressions. Going back over it in class was just more of rediscussing things I’d already discussed before. So it was still great, but not as ‘Oh wow! That’s awesome!’ as reading it the first time had been.”

At the start of each large group discussion about the Core Practices, someone would “step up” and take on the role of facilitator for a discussion that usually lasted between thirty minutes to an hour. Because these discussion leaders were not selected in advance, for the most part their facilitation approach consisted of starting with some general reflections about the chapter and recounting some of the insights that came from their small group discussions. Because people never knew if they would be leading a discussion, they did not use planned protocols for discussion but rather opened up the discussion to the whole group and gently paraphrased comments and asked the occasional clarifying question. In most cases the discussions were ended after the silence between comments and questions became longer. This was usually accompanied by people scanning the faces of their classmates until someone, often the discussion facilitator or LeAnn or Harry, would move to end the discussion. At that point the

group would have a brief ad hoc discussion about if they needed a break or to continue on with another Core Practice discussion. Samantha described the large group discussion format like this,

“I like that we decided that the Core Practices were going to be the whole group. At first I thought that that was a bad idea, and I just went with it because that's what most of the group wanted to do. But once we decided to do it that way, I liked how the facilitator was somebody in class. It wasn't pre-planned. It was just whoever was feeling it at the moment. I volunteered for a chapter that I really felt that I had the biggest understanding of and that I had the most to bring to the table. And then I didn't for the ones that I thought somebody might have more experience with or they felt more comfortable with. So I was fine with them taking the lead and listening to the way that they were going to do it. And it was similar how we did it on every single person's, but it was good because I feel like the people who volunteered for those were the people that felt they were best prepared for those.”

Because there were more participants than Core Practice chapters, not everyone facilitated one of these discussions. No one kept close track of who had facilitated one of these discussions and in most instances, someone “stepped up” quickly. There were a few instances when no one immediately came forward to facilitate. During these times Harry would prompt the group to acknowledge the norms and this was enough to encourage someone to take charge of the discussion. Louise, who was very talkative during every discussion session, felt nervous about volunteering to facilitate because of an early exchange with Harry about her not observing the “make room” norm. She explained this interaction in these terms,

“After the first day, on Tuesday morning before we got started, Hilton specifically asked me to “make sure you're making room. You get really excited and you speak up and you're not giving other people the chance to step up.” When he said he wanted us to “step up” and take charge, that's what I was trying to do and so I took that to mean, that I wasn't supposed to step up. So that's why it took me 'till today [Thursday] to step up and facilitate one of the last Core Practice chapters. And the entire time, I thought he was going to get onto me afterwards. So I was nervous and even LeAnn was like, “Let's let someone else who hasn't facilitated yet.” And I was like, “I haven't facilitated yet.” and she was like, “Oh, well then you can.” and I thought I was in trouble because I thought that I was the exception that I wasn't supposed to step up because I like being in groups and I get animated. I don't feel like I speak any more than some of the other group

members. But I guess I just am very good at getting everyone's attention when I do so it feels like it might be speaking more.”

Reviewing the field notes and audio recordings, it is evident that Louise was talking much more than most of the other participants. This was something others brought up in their interviews.

LeAnn, when asked specifically about any tension in the group, her only concern had to do with Louise’s participation,

“I thought there might be some people that would become aggravated with Louise because she was tending to dominate. But then the group more or less controlled her. She became aware and would...back off a little bit and listen to others. And I didn't, like really pull her aside and talk to her. I didn't feel the need to do that, but I would have if it had gotten to that point.”

While she did not “pull her aside” to address her behavior, she did make several public comments like the one recounted in Louise’s interview.

While most participants did not have concrete expectations before participating in the course, Harvey did and he was surprised that the Core Practices were so pronounced in the curriculum and that they were not directly tied to the original Foxfire Magazine project,

“I knew a fair bit of the history of the magazine and the program at the school. I actually looked it up online and saw the Core Practices and my assumption was that we would look at that program more in-depth than we really have. I was expecting a little more of an in-depth analysis of what was happening up there. How that was reflected in or grew into the Core Practices of the Foxfire Approach. I was kind of assuming that the specifics from that became generalized into the Core Practices. And then we would have an opportunity to re-focus that into our situation, into our individual situations.”

Instead of taking this approach, the Foxfire Course puts the participants more in the driver seat and expects them to generate new knowledge and teaching techniques through a reflective engagement between the text and their own experiences teaching. This reflection was often a social endeavor as individuals would share an example of a Foxfire Core Practice from their own teaching and then someone would build upon it or challenge them to think about it in relation to

other concepts and ideas that had been raised by the text or the previous discussions. Alisha, like many of the participants, enjoyed hearing stories of teaching that connected to the Core Practices,

“Stories, to me, make it more relevant or make me able...I make better connections when someone can take something we've talked about and then relate it to an experience. Sometimes that's what makes me go, ‘Oh, I understand what you're saying now. I see what you did there.’ So yeah, I love that. And I love hearing when other people share their stories. Daniel always apologizes for it but, I'm like, "no, I like them." cause it explains something.”

While many of the participants shared that they liked hearing these types of stories from their peers, some people interpreted this as everyone simply agreeing and it being time to move on in the discussion. Louise viewed it this way,

“I feel like a lot of our discussions would have wrapped up a lot quicker because I think we were all on the same page the entire time. Like I don't think anybody was really disagreeing. We were all expanding on each other and building on each other and grabbing ideas and sharing funny stories and...I feel like there could have been a little more direction.”

On several occasions, Louise tried to explain this perspective to the group in order to move onto another discussion topic, but felt she was unable to because the facilitators wanted the group to dwell longer on the Core Practice,

“There were a couple of us that attempted to, attempted to rein in the conversation and say, ‘So what I'm getting is this and this and this’ but me personally, anytime I did that, I got shut down by one of the facilitators”

During these sessions, Harry and LeAnn were mostly silent, content to let the voices of the students explicate and build upon the Core Practice with examples of their teaching.

Occasionally, Harry interjected more about a topic if he felt like the group was overlooking important aspects of the Core Practice. For instance, in the discussion of Core Practice #3 – *Community Connection* most of the students were sharing stories about field trips that they had

taken their students on or fundraising partnerships they had created with local businesses. After hearing many people sharing these types of examples, Harry shared a story from a past participant in the Foxfire Course who had created a project with her students that thought of “community connection” in different terms,

“I have another example from Gainesville. I don't know how years back, it's maybe ten years back at least. During the summer, a young woman was abducted and it was a horrible situation. And then school starts and we had had this course and one of the teachers in it was from Gainesville. So early in the Fall she was trying to engage her students in some kind of activity that would be hands on, but the discussion, when she opened it up, what was on their minds was this abduction. It was in the papers and all that stuff, and they thought about it and were worried about it....These students in her class decided that they could create some materials that could be disseminated sort of like student-to-student to help the students figure out how to avoid situations and what they should do. And they developed this packet and it was published. And by all accounts it was much more effective and acceptable because it was from students to students and they sort of got it as opposed to the official stuff out there.”

This example not only pushed the students' thinking on “community connection” but also is a strong example of many of the other Core Practices such as “audience” and “student choice”. For the remaining twenty minutes of the discussion, the group brainstormed project ideas that took on a different understanding of community connection. For example, the group generated several project ideas where middle and high school students would visit local elementary schools to help teach content or prepare the younger students for entering the next grade level.

The younger teachers are asking me like I have all the answers

In a similar manner, these conversations about the Core Practices also opened up into larger discussions about other concepts and topics in education. Samantha, a paraprofessional with limited teaching experience, saw great value in making these connections during the large group, particularly with the more experienced teachers in attendance,

“I had heard a lot of this stuff from Foxfire in my other classes, I've heard of, but didn't remember what I was learning because I couldn't make connections with it. For example, my critical thinking class in undergrad was before I had done hardly any classroom experience. So it was cool information but that was about all it was. Umm, and I took certain pieces from it and I actually learned more about that class this week, the course I took years ago. I learned more about it this week because a lot of the people in the class are taking it as a grad program and they're making those connections that they're learning in critical thinking now and Foxfire now. And I'm like, ‘Oh, I remember hearing about that’ but I didn't understand it. But now they're putting it back to the Core Practices and Dewey and other conversations that are being brought up.”

Christy, the most experienced teacher in the group with thirteen years of teaching in the elementary grades, acknowledged that many of the less experienced teachers were benefiting in this way,

“I know there are certain things that I'm stuck in my ways about that I need to kind of open up and step outside of my comfort zone. Where I know a new teacher, she doesn't have a comfort zone yet, so for her all of this would be stuff that she could automatically take into the classroom. Where someone like me, I have a comfort zone. So, I'm learning ways that I could step outside of my comfort zone to sort of incorporate this in my classroom.”

Daniel, also among the most experienced in the group, explained that he thought the Core Practice discussions were meaningful because new teachers and experienced teachers were able to share stories and figure out the teaching approach together,

“The younger teachers are asking me like I have all the answers. And sometimes I feel obligated to talk more because I have answers sometimes. Like reading in there [pointing at the Guest House], two of them asked me something and said, "You know more about this, so you make sure you explain it tomorrow." and I'm thinking I know just as much as you do. We've read the same thing, you know. It's meaningful, it's very meaningful. I think they're starting to feel comfortable to ask and admit that they don't know anything. I'll be the first to tell you that I don't know everything.”

Most of the teachers with less experience emphasized the value of these types of exchanges in their interviews. Tricia, who generally did not enjoy the Foxfire Course for Teachers and would not recommend it, even admitted that this aspect of the course was very meaningful to her,

“I really liked hearing other people's experiences. That has really helped me a lot, especially with new strategies and ways to go about things. Umm, and that will help me with my classroom. I think that we've all been able to learn from each other. I've been able to learn from Christy a lot because she's been in the classroom so long.”

It was our group's decision to make it a little bit on the plain-Jane boring side, so it's our group's fault

In formal and informal interviews that happened later in the week, many of the participants expressed some dissatisfaction and regret about the format they adopted for the discussions about the Foxfire Core Practices. Because the facilitator of each Core Practice discussion was not selected in advance, they were not able to plan much beyond simple discussion questions and prepared passages from the text. As a result, all ten of the Core Practice discussions were basically the same. The participants went through the chapter together clarifying ideas and providing different examples of what the Core Practice might look like in a real classroom. While all participants found the discussions helpful and many of the action plan presentations grew out of ideas shared in these discussions, many of the participants felt the format became stale over time. Louise, like several other participants, had hoped that the facilitators would have pushed them to try different discussions formats during the week:

“I wish we had been forced to try different discussion techniques to expose us to new things while rehashing something we had already done a bunch of times. I expected more outside, team-building type things; those weird kind of activities that demonstrate educational principles that would, you know, teach us a concept. You know something that would teach us the value of communication or something like that. And I was expecting things like that, more creative demonstrations as opposed to just discussing everything to death.”

Despite their dissatisfaction, no one proposed a change in format for the Core Practice discussions.

Wednesday was the best day ever because we finally got to be outside and move around and expand.

Having decided on the format of the Foxfire Core Practice discussions on Monday morning, the majority of the week was set. One place where there were substantial decisions left to be made after the initial deliberation session was in the small groups assigned to plan and lead discussions and activities around sections of *Experience and Education*. These small groups used their power to create activities that were very different from the whole group discussions that had characterized the majority of the week.

The first group to facilitate a discussion based on *Experience and Education* led their session on Tuesday afternoon. At this point in the week, the group had already discussed the first three chapters of the Foxfire Course Book and the participants were not yet tired of the whole group discussion format. Being the first group and leading a discussion during the first half of the week influenced the design of the first discussion of Dewey. This group of five teachers facilitated a discussion on their assigned chapters that was very similar to the previous Core Practice discussions. The facilitators had prepared several discussion questions each and collectively underlined passages that they wanted the other participants to discuss. The format of this discussion was also influenced by the fact that this group had not yet seen any other types of discussion formats modeled during the week.

On Wednesday afternoon, the second group assigned to lead a discussion on *Experience and Education* prepared an activity that was a radical departure from what had come before it. The five members of this small group were all in agreement that they wanted to rebel against the format of the Core Practice discussions. Louise suggested that taking the discussion outside would allow them more space to do different activities and that the change of venue would be

revitalizing for the group. Steve, agreeing with Louise, suggested that they design an activity that would push the participants into a deeper discussion of the philosophy in *Experience and Education* before trying to think about concrete applications in their classrooms. Using these two suggestions as their jumping off point, the group ultimately planned an activity that used stations at various picnic tables located outside the Long House. At each picnic table, there was a piece of butcher block paper with a different concept from the text. As partners moved from table to table, they were required to discuss the concept while making reference to the book. Before leaving their station, they added at least one quotation and page number with a relevant passage that the next group could use in their discussion.

After completing their circulation through all of the stations, the facilitation team announced that they would be taking a brief break to start a camp fire and move the picnic tables so that everyone could eat lunch together and continue their discussions about *Experience and Education*. The facilitation team explained that the goal of the lunch discussion was to move from their theoretical and textual discussion into one that focused on classroom practice. The combined activities lasted several hours and resulted in two discussion sessions on the Foxfire Core Practices being bumped to a later time.

On Thursday morning, LeAnn began the morning session by explaining that she enjoyed the discussion format that the second facilitation team had designed and wanted to share some resources with the group for planning active discussions. She handed out a list of how to lead many different kinds of discussions and facilitated a brief discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of each kind. During this discussion, LeAnn did not explicitly suggest that the group change their Core Practice discussion format nor did any of the participants suggest this.

The final facilitation team led their discussion of the last three chapters in *Experience and Education* on Thursday afternoon. Like the second group, this team approached their planning with the goal of doing something very different from the Core Practice discussions. Because they were the final group to lead a discussion on Experience and Education and because nearly all of the Foxfire Core Practices had been discussed by this point, they decided to create an activity that would synthesize the material they had been reading and discussing. They decided to create partnerships based on grade level and assign them to discuss and plan a project-based activity that would be consistent with Dewey's philosophy of education and the Foxfire Core Practices. After allowing each group thirty minutes to plan out an activity, each partnership presented their plan to a mock school board played by the facilitation team. Their goal in these presentations was to petition the school board for money for the project and to justify it in terms of Dewey and Foxfire. During each partnership's presentation before the school board, the other participants served as an audience. In between each presentation, the whole group stepped out of their roles and discussed the project idea collectively. Like the second facilitation team's activity, the presentations to the mock school board and the interstitial debriefing took much longer than anticipated. Harvey, a member of the facilitation team, was surprised at the quality of the presentations and did not expect them to grow into such a long and involved activity that would take up the entire afternoon. He explained:

"I think the activity this afternoon turned into so much more than I envisioned when our group sat down to that planning. I had no idea that the responses that we got out of each of those groups was going to be so thorough, so detailed, and so well constructed along the Dewey lines. I got a sense of it as I was going around to the groups and sort of prompting them about and circulating before they presented. And then when the presentations came up, it just really went so much beyond what I had expected from that. You know, I hope that the people that come here are always that great and that motivated. But the other part was that it was really a neat summary to see how quickly the Core Practices can get invoked

into what really are some kind of common, rarely done, but commonly accessible activities.”

Deliberation: Event vs. Ethos

During this week of the Foxfire Course for Teachers, the deliberative decision making was primarily contained to the session facilitated by LeAnn on Monday morning. Instead of being an ethos that permeated the entire week, deliberation was viewed more as an event that locked in a schedule to be followed. Despite not knowing much about Foxfire or the purpose behind the structure of the course, the participants collectively decided how the majority of their time together would be spent by electing to discuss each Core Practice in a whole group discussion in the Long House. Over the course of the week, many participants grew wary of the format; however, it was never revisited by the whole group. Beyond this, the facilitators never prompted the group to reflect on their plan and reevaluate it against their experiences. In this sense, it was as though the participants (and facilitators to some degree) did not fully recognize the provisionality of their decision. The decision about how to approach their critical engagement with *Experience and Education*, on the other hand, preserved small spaces for making decisions and postponed the planning of activities until they had more information about Foxfire and how their classmates were feeling about the week. As a result, the activities that were created in these spaces blossomed over the week whereas the Core Practice discussions, though deeply reflective and meaningful by most participants' accounts, remained static and became stale over time.

Despite these criticisms of the deliberative functioning of the group, nearly all of the participants reported feeling that the course, and particularly the collective reflecting on the texts and their classroom experiences, was an incredibly meaningful educational experience. During the many hours spent discussing the Foxfire Core Practices and sharing stories from their classrooms, the participants fleshed out the meaning of the Foxfire Approach in ways consistent

with the intent behind the Foxfire Teacher Networks. The facilitators did not simply train the participants in the method that had been successful for Eliot Wigginton. Instead, they helped guide them through a process of rethinking their teaching philosophy and practice based on sharing and critiquing attempts at empowering students in the classroom.

Chapter 6 – Case Report #2

Introduction

During the third week of June, fifteen teachers from around the state of Georgia came together to complete a course on the Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning (FATL) at the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center. All fifteen of the teachers that participated were taking the course for graduate credit for master's degrees. While a few of the participating teachers were enrolled in traditional masters programs that took place primarily at college campuses in Athens and Demorest, the majority of the participants were enrolled in a cohort-based master's program designed to serve teachers working in parts of the state that are far from the two campuses. The cohort program was designed to bring together small collaborative communities of teachers working in the same school districts; however, due to low enrollment many potential cohorts were consolidated into ones spanning multiple school districts. As a result, much of their course work was online with only semi-regular in-person meetings in centralized locations. At the time of this course, the majority of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with their online course work and collaboration occurring through their cohort programs. The Foxfire Course for Teachers was an elective for these teachers that they chose to take over an online course offered during the same summer term.

The participants in the course represent a great range of teaching experience and backgrounds. Three of the participating teachers were enrolled in initial certification master's programs that would allow them to advance from classroom paraprofessionals to licensed classroom teachers of record. The other thirteen participants were licensed, with experience ranging from one to over twenty years in the classroom. The participants' teaching backgrounds ranged from kindergarten through high school and spanned the subject areas. One participant

worked as an English teacher at an alternative high school in Atlanta for students with disciplinary problems and the other participants all worked in traditional public schools around the state. The ages of the participants ranged from early-twenties through mid-sixties. Two of the participating teachers were men and the others were all women. Two of the participating women were African-American and the rest of the participants and the facilitators were white. More than half of the participants had some familiarity with other members of the groups and a few of the participants knew each other very well from working in the same schools.

The course was taught by two veteran Foxfire facilitators who had previously taught the course together. Because of their success as a partnership, they decided to work together again. Stacy, a high school English teacher from Georgia, had either participated in or facilitated twelve separate sessions of the program, most of which occurred at the Foxfire Center. Cathy, a professor of education from outside Georgia, had participated in two separate Foxfire Courses for Teachers and had also been involved in the Foxfire Teacher Networks in the 1990s. Her previous experience leading a Foxfire Course for Teachers was with Stacy during the previous summer. Both Stacy and Cathy described themselves as being significantly impacted by the FATL and regularly used elements of it in their teaching practice.

Overview of the Week

On Sunday afternoon, the participants arrived in advance of their three o'clock start time and settled into their rustic bedrooms in either the Long House or the Guest House. During this time, Stacy and Cathy were removing tables from the instructional space in the Long House and arranging the desks in a large oval while discussing instructional plans for the week. When the first session began, the facilitators presented a brief introduction of the place and went over logistical issues for the week such as food, showering and disposing of trash. This was followed

by an extended introduction activity in which participants paired up and interviewed each other and created quilt pieces with their names and personal information. These quilt pieces, like many of the artefacts created during the week, remained hung on the walls of the Long House.

The rest of the first afternoon was spent looking specifically at the course content and discussing how the week would be facilitated. Stacy introduced the idea of “the three givens” to the students as the non-negotiable aspects of the course. Participants would need to “critically engage” with both *Experience and Education* by John Dewey and the Foxfire Core Practices as contained in the Foxfire Course Book as well as present an action plan at the end of the week showing how they would implement elements of the FATL in their classrooms. While the givens themselves were set unilaterally in advance of the course, the facilitators explained, how they completed them would be largely up to the participants and decided on during a deliberative discussion the following morning. The facilitators then led a discussion about the classroom norms that would be followed during the course of the week. Participants were encouraged to get into pairs and discuss successful and unsuccessful meetings they had participated in previously as a way to help activate their thinking about what norms would be best for following during the week. This was followed by a whole group discussion in which many classroom norms were discussed and added to a piece of butcher block paper and affixed to the wall across from the quilt.

Monday morning was primarily geared toward making a plan for the week that would ensure that the participants completed the givens in a way that was acceptable to all of them. Before discussing the plan for the week, Cathy and Stacy led the group in a structured discussion about “memorable learning experiences” from their past. This was designed to help them frame the deliberation over the schedule to ensure that they created learning experiences that would be

memorable and meaningful. During the deliberation itself, participants first discussed possible plans for the week in groups of two or three at the suggestion of Cathy and then later discussed potential plans as a large group. Deciding first to address *Experience and Education*, the group quickly reached a consensus that they would break it up by chapter and have groups facilitate discussions about the concepts in the book and the connections to their emerging understanding of the FATL. During the deliberation there was considerable discussion about how the facilitation should be handled. Participants largely coalesced around the ideas of creating guiding questions and planning experiential activities to animate concepts from the book. Participants drew slips of paper from a basket, each with a chapter name written on it. This determined both the group members and their assigned chapters.

As the groups for the Dewey chapters were assigned, they were scheduled onto a large calendar of the week that was previously created by Cathy and Stacy to aid the process by showing the participants unmovable events on the calendar such as a scheduled tour of the Foxfire Center and the presentations of action plans on Friday and Saturday. The group planned to read and discuss the chapters in order, with the first facilitation taking place later that afternoon. During the scheduling of the Dewey chapters, Stacy suggested to the group that the scheduling of the Foxfire Core Practices, given number two, could be postponed temporarily and returned to at a later time. The group agreed to this suggestion.

After the scheduling of the week but before the first group facilitated a discussion of chapter one, Cathy led the group in an extended experiential community building activity based on sharing personal stories called The River of Life. During this activity participants shared personal items by placing them together in a metaphoric river that ran through the Long House. The participants wrote about their significance and their classmates read these reflections

anonymously but aloud to the group. This led into a discussion about vulnerability and the power of getting to know each other in a classroom. It was also held up as an example of the kinds of activities that the assigned chapter groups could use throughout the week to encourage active involvement among their peers. Throughout the week Stacy and Cathy led mini-activities and discussions designed to encourage reflection on aspects of the participants' lives, careers and experiences in the course. In addition to these activities planned and led by the facilitators, several other activities not planned by the course participants occurred including a presentation about the Foxfire Magazine program from current students from Rabun County High School and a presentation about the history of Foxfire.

Throughout the week, groups of two or three participants led experiential activities and facilitated discussions about the chapters in *Experience and Education* with the final group presenting on Wednesday afternoon. The first chapter's presentation, which occurred only hours after the scheduling deliberation, was a whole group discussion focused on defining terms and making connections. The following chapters of the Dewey book were facilitated in increasingly creative and active ways. For instance, during the discussion of chapter two, the student facilitators led their classmates outside and had them look at a living and a dead tree near the edge of the forest surrounding the Long House. The participants were then encouraged to write about and reflect on how these two trees represented traditional and progressive education as described by Dewey. During other chapter facilitations, simulative techniques were used to elucidate the power of a person's previous experiences and the power of social control in a group. The conversations during these sessions focused both on trying to understand the argument that Dewey was making and how the FATL related to their classroom contexts.

While the Dewey text was discussed over several days and received considerable attention from participants and facilitators alike during both formal and informal sessions, the Foxfire Course Book received less attention. On Thursday morning, Cathy and Stacy informed the group that they had made a unilateral decision the previous night about how the Foxfire Course Book would be engaged with during the remaining days. Stacy explained to the group that this decision was a response to time constraints and informed by their prior experiences with the course. In order to save time, students would pair up to read and discuss one of the chapters that focused on a specific Foxfire Core Practice. After reading and discussing, the partnership would create a poster board with thoughts and questions about the Core Practice. After this step, the participants would complete a carousel activity in which they would circulate around all the Core Practice posters distributed at tables around the Long House. During this process they were to discuss the Core Practice and the information on the poster and make comments directly on them. The participants completed these steps on Wednesday morning. Wednesday evening, Stacy and Cathy took the posters and made comments directly on them in order to facilitate a large group discussion about the Foxfire Core Practices that took the entire morning on Thursday. During that morning all ten Foxfire Core Practices were discussed. As the large group moved from poster to poster, the discussion of each Core Practice received less and less time and attention.

The entire day on Friday and the morning on Saturday were set aside for presenting individual action plans about how the FATL would be implemented in the participants' classroom contexts. The presentations each lasted between twenty and thirty minutes. Several of the participants presented concrete plans of how they were going to implement elements of the FATL into their classroom in the upcoming fall semester. The other presentations were less

concrete in terms of instructional change, but rather focused on sharing their personal experience of being in the Foxfire Course for Teachers and the impact it had on their thinking about teaching. During several of the presentations, tears were shed by both the presenters and their classmates. After the final presentation on Saturday morning, Cathy led the group in a smudging ceremony based on indigenous traditions as a closing of the week and the participants left the Foxfire Center.

Creating an Equitable and Inclusive Community

“When I first walked up, I felt sick to my stomach. And I can remember looking at this place, pulling in. I'm like, ‘Where the hell are we? Are you kidding me? This is so old and, I mean, a week? I feel like I've already been gone forever. I don't know these people. I'm so uncomfortable.’

– Janet, 24 year old kindergarten teacher

Recognizing that many of the participants were being put outside of their comfort zones by staying at the Foxfire Center for a week, Cathy and Stacy paid special attention to community building and monitoring the dynamics of the group. This, coupled with their general approach to facilitation and co-teaching, created a classroom community that all of the participants described in positive terms during interviews. Many of the participants expressed concerns about their status in the group for reasons ranging from experience level, age and official title and others were concerned about the value of bringing together a group so diverse in terms of grade level and subject area. The fact that intimidation and skepticism were largely overcome during the week is a significant accomplishment from a facilitation standpoint. While this accomplishment is most certainly the result of a confluence of the setting, the FATL itself and the collective decisions of the facilitators and participants, the intentional community building and thoughtful

facilitation of Stacy and Cathy provided the foundation upon which meaningful collaboration could occur.

The River of Life

“Just close your eyes and breath in the sound you are hearing outside. We need to push the pause button here for a moment. You can see your body language changing. It’s so wonderful to pause for the rain. There are lots of illegal things you can try to bring on a plane, guns and whatnot, but I, for the second year have come across the border with a river. And we’re going to do something with that river.” – Cathy

Perhaps the most impactful community building activity took place on Monday afternoon between the group’s deliberative scheduling and the opening discussion of *Experience and Education*. In addition to creating a safe space for people to share personal stories and get to know each other, this activity served the additional purpose of providing a model of the kinds of experiential activities that could be facilitated during the course. Cathy invited four volunteers to take a large strip of fabric from the coffee table placed in the center of the circle of chairs and stretch it around the room in a path reminiscent of a river. Before arriving at the Foxfire Center, Cathy had tried to email the class participants asking them to bring a small personal item of significance to share in this activity; however, the message was never received. Improvising, Cathy told everyone to find something among their luggage or to simply describe or draw an item that they would have brought to share. Cathy instructed every person to place their item somewhere in the river and then return to their seat. Passing out blank sheets of paper, Cathy provided further instruction, “What I would like you do is write a little bit about why that object is here. It might be a little history about where it came from or who gave it to you. Something about why it’s here with you today. Just think and write a little bit about the object that you brought.” After silently writing for several minutes, Cathy brought the students’ writing time to a

close by saying, “Try to bring closure to the sentence or phrase you’re working on right now. And I’m going to ask you to do something odd. I want you to crush that writing up into a stone with the strength of a giant. Crunch it all up.” Students were then instructed to place their crushed paper stone in the river among the personal items.

“I want you to walk along the river and look at the artefacts. Come up and take a look at the objects that matter to the people in this room and don’t take a stone until you’ve really looked at the items. Examine them. Handle things. Turn over photographs. Wonder about things. And, when you finish perusing, take a stone and see what’s on there.” After circulating around the river for a few minutes, students began selecting stones and returning to their seats to silently read the description of an item that remained in the river. Cathy lingered at the edge of the river longer than anyone else and selected the last remaining stone and returned to her seat. She then explained what would be the concluding step in the activity, “We’re going to be reading these aloud and with sensitivity because you’re going to be reading the words of a colleague.” Participants then took turns reading over their peers’ writing, placing each stone back in the river after it had been read aloud. During the reading, everyone else remained quiet and looked over the items in the river. In between each reading, Cathy would occasionally make a comment about the beauty of the writing or ask the reader to repeat a passage that she found especially moving. No two items were alike; a diamond ring from a grandparent, a map to signify past travel, a cell phone filled with digital photographs, a pendant from a spouse. The writing too, varied greatly. Some chose to write straight-forward descriptions of their items. Others wrote poetic prose about how their lives had been affected by and connected to their item. At several moments during the reading, multiple people around the circle teared up at the descriptions.

During formal class discussions, informal conversations and in individual interviews, people talked about the impact of participating in the River of Life. Ginny, a paraprofessional who had previously worked for years as an accountant, was especially moved by the activity,

“I liked putting in a personal item that means something to you because it allows students to share who they are. Especially when you don't know them. Everybody has different aspects to their life. And to me, the River of Life, it made me think about *me*. And, it let me see that the other students may not have the same past, but they have their stories. I teared up with the other students telling their stories. Everybody brings something different to the table and we're all connected. We're in a class together. And, just hearing their stories, I could almost relate to each person in some aspect. Even though we're all different”

In addition to sharing in an emotional experience together, the sharing of stories also gave the students things to talk about outside of formal sessions. As a result, many participants described feeling close to their classmates quicker than in other educational settings. Ru, a middle school math teacher of ten years, during an interview on Tuesday afternoon was surprised by the pace of the community building,

“It feels like we've known people a lot more than two days. I mean, it really does. I mean, has it really only been two days that we've all been together? That seems to happen a lot faster in this setting. I'll definitely say that.”

Complementary Co-Facilitation

Unlike the River of Life, which was planned and facilitated exclusively by Cathy, most of the time the two facilitators took a more balanced approach to co-facilitating the course. During group discussions, both facilitators made comments, asked questions and shared experiences from their teaching practice. Most of the participants described the two as working very well together and complimented them on their ability to work off of each other's strengths. Janet cited their ability to co-teach together as an inspiration for improving her own relationship with a

paraprofessional who works in her kindergarten classroom. She described Cathy and Stacy's personal connection to each other:

“I feel like they have really taken the time, and I can tell with Cathy's personality and Stacy's personality, they are very genuine and they're genuinely interested in who the other person is and how they do work best. They are very respectful of one another. They just, they just get each other. And, I mean, it's just very evident in the classroom.”

Their relationship was partially on display for the students in the course because they continually shared aspects of their reflective conversations about the course with students. It was not uncommon for the facilitators to begin a morning session by sharing parts of the conversation they had after the previous day concluded. They continually referred to this as “making their process transparent.” In addition to providing a window into each of their perspectives as facilitators it also modeled the work of facilitation by making apparent the many hours spent debriefing on the past day's activities and consequent planning for future activities. In talking about the amount of time the facilitators spent planning and debriefing, the class continually made references to Dewey's argument that progressive education required more work than traditional approaches, despite misconceptions that suggested the opposite.

Many participants described the classroom environment created by Stacy and Cathy as one of the most important aspects of the course and as something they wanted to emulate in their own classrooms. Ross, a middle school English teacher and basketball coach, described the “vibe” of the course as something he needed to think more about as he prepared for his classes in the fall. In response to an interview question about how they created the “vibe”, Ross said:

“They do a good job of pulling the strings without cutting you off or making you feel like what you said was absolutely wrong; or we need to do this next. They transition smoothly and they've got a good form of communication with us. But we all feel, I think we all feel like leaders.”

Similarly, Sean described the classroom environment in terms of “safety” and the facilitator’s efforts to make the participants feel comfortable expressing themselves:

“One of the things that you learn in your classroom, you want to make a safe environment where the kids feel like they can express themselves. I think that this program did that. This program put us teachers in a safe environment right off the bat. And, we were allowed to share”

Ru, a middle school math teacher, also pointed to the welcoming environment they created in the classroom. Speaking specifically about Cathy, Ru described the value of Cathy’s affirmations of student contributions both in terms of the community building it contributed to during the course and as a model of how she could improve her own teaching practice:

“The way that [Cathy] listens to people and the way that she comments as people share things, it’s just so encouraging. She makes everybody feel like their idea was the best idea and it just makes me think that I need to listen to my students like that. If I just said comments that affirmed people’s responses as often as she does...She’s a very responsive listener. And she’ll acknowledge your idea and it stood out to me that I want to do that more. It’s like, ‘Thank you for sharing. That was a great idea. Let’s think about this some more. Does anyone have any other ideas about this?’ You know, just thanking someone for sharing; that’s a big deal. And we don’t; *I don’t* do that enough.”

Ru went on to explain that, for her, seeing a teaching strategy modeled is more valuable than reading about it:

“That’s the number one thing, cause as much as people can tell you what you should do, just seeing somebody do something that’s positive is so much better for me than reading it in Dewey or whatever.”

Equal Participation and the Roles of Grades

Some tension arose among some students in regards to their expectations for the course in relation to grades. During this week of the course, all of the participants were taking the course for credit in their master’s programs. Some students assumed that engaging in the process would

result in “easy A’s” for all the students while others were more concerned about the issue. Ella, a kindergarten teacher in her second year, felt that part of the positive classroom culture was the result of there not being grades or deadlines in the course:

“Maybe we're so used to just going with the flow and everything that's been thrown at us lately, but you know, just coming in one the first day just not having to do a really difficult or crazy thing. Just easy introductions, getting to know each other and chatting with people before coming down here. And, you know, we seem to quickly get to know each other and feel comfortable with one another. You know, this, the whole setting and the fact that it was just....you're not faced with like grades or you know, deadlines. The fact that you have some say-so or choice in that makes it not as stressful.”

Ella, while wrong in her assumption about grades and deadlines, felt put at ease by the open structure of the course and the space for student choice. Jackie, on the other hand, was much more concerned about grades:

“I guess the frustrating part is that you don't really know what's expected of you in the end and, at this point, with those of us who get financial aid and all that and we need to maintain a certain average. You kinda want to know, you know, what your grade depends on. So, and with this all in one week, you don't have a whole lot of time to prove yourself. Whatever you're going to do has to be done within this week.”

The fear of having to prove oneself during open group discussions seems very at-odds with other participants’ experiences of feeling like they could not give a wrong answer. This unaddressed concern contributed to Jackie, and perhaps other participants, feeling less able to contribute to the discussions on equal terms. Despite these concerns among at least some participants, the issue of grades was not something that was problematized and discussed by the large group. While the facilitators discussed the givens for the course continually, they were not connected to course grades or to the differential needs of participants to take grades seriously.

Spaces for Student Choice

Deliberating about the Schedule

“At first I was like ‘oh dear God’ because I’m one of those people that want to just know. Like Monday I’m doing this, and Tuesday I’m doing this. On Sunday, when we walked in, I’m one of those people that would have liked to have seen Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday all laid out. I know what I’m doing. Let’s do it. When Monday comes, we’re going to mark off Sunday. But that’s not what happened” – Liz

While the entire week embodied aspects of democratic education, the deliberative session about scheduling the week that took place on Monday morning most modeled micro-deliberative decision making in the literature on democratic theory. The participants came together to collectively deliberate upon a shared concern (the instructional format of the course) and a shared resource (their time set aside to complete the course). While this activity is a structural feature of Foxfire Course for Teachers and is part of what makes the course democratic, during this session the significance of the activity was undercut in part by the actions of the facilitators.

On Sunday night, Stacy introduced the activity of the deliberative scheduling by explaining the three givens for the course. She informed the students that they would be in charge of scheduling the week to complete the first two givens, critical engagement with *Experience and Education* and the Foxfire Core Practices. She and Cathy had already taken care of scheduling the individual presentations for Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. She pointed to a large piece of rectangular butcher block paper hanging up on one wall of the Long House with a calendar on it showing the days of the course. Friday and Saturday were already blocked out for presentations and several other prescheduled events were listed. She told the students to look over their texts that evening in preparation for the scheduling session the next morning.

On Monday morning before the scheduling session began, Stacy led the group in a thirty minute discussion about memorable learning experiences. Participants paired off to share examples of their most memorable learning experiences. The large group then reformed and shared the qualities that made their experiences memorable. A volunteer served as a scribe and wrote down qualities on a piece of poster board near the calendar. At the conclusion of this activity, Stacy transitioned the group into discussing their plan for the week by framing it in terms of memorable experiences,

“As I stare at these qualities that make an experience memorable and think about our plan that we’re going to discuss in a moment, it makes me think about *what* we can plan. The intentional planning that comes both from facilitators and participants is about ensuring that the experiences are memorable, that they’re challenging and that there is a clear purpose to them. And that we have reciprocal learning in this large group or in small groups. But as I look over this list, there are things that we can do by good, intentional planning that can ensure that we’re having some pretty memorable experiences together this week. So with that being said, do we want to move into our discussion of planning our engagement of Dewey and the Core Practices?”

Cathy then stepped in and asked the large group if anyone had any ideas about how the week could be planned.

“Planning might clear the air. It’s a big discussion. The reason we’re kind of looking at each other and wondering if we want to do that is because it’s a really cerebral activity. Not that the other things we’ve been doing haven’t been, but this is an open time where get together and discuss how we’re going to get into that great big spiral book and we’re open to your thoughts. What are you thinking? Nothing is impossible.”

After nearly a minute of silence, she suggested that smaller groups discuss potential plans with their “elbow partners” as a way to begin the conversation. This invitation, unlike the previous one, resulted in an eruption of talking that lasted ten minutes. As the groups began to quiet down, Stacy brought the large group back together,

“We heard some really specific plans as we were walking around. I think that what would be most beneficial is if you were one of those pairs or groups that feel you have a good idea, let’s just hear it. You know, we may take a piece from your idea and someone else’s idea and put it together to make a plan to proceed.”

Christine was the first student to respond to Stacy’s prompt. She suggested that small groups be assigned chapters of the Dewey text and those participants would then be in charge of facilitating a discussion about the content and its connections to the FATL. Stacy affirmed this suggestion and clarified that all students would need to read the entire Dewey text while the Foxfire Course Book did not need to be read by all students in its entirety. Although the facilitators had used a procedure to generate many ideas about how to engage with the texts, they did not follow up on it by asking multiple partnerships to share out their ideas. Instead, their affirmation of Christine’s initial suggestion contributed to the group’s quick selection of a plan without deliberation about the merits of this approach versus alternatives.

The group then entered into a discussion about what it would mean to facilitate a discussion of the concepts and how they could use experiential approaches to animate concepts from the text. During this discussion, Cathy told the students “you as a small group can decide on the activity for your chapter.” She followed this up by emphasizing the value of experiential methods for leading these discussions,

“Share, show, demonstrate or focus us in some way – it doesn’t have to be just discussion questions. We don’t always need to be sitting in here on our duffs. I’m going to be blunt here. Get us doing and think about how you can creatively show your understanding.”

During the discussion about how the Dewey chapters would be facilitated, Stacy suggested that they table the issue of scheduling the methods of engaging with the Foxfire Core Practices. She said,

“I like the idea of starting with facilitation of the Dewey chapters and splitting that up first possibly. And like Cathy just said, there could be a choice with our guidance, if you want it, about facilitating and sharing your thoughts on *Experience and Education* first. And then the Core Practices.”

At that point, a student suggested that they begin assigning groups. This led to a brief discussion about chapter lengths that resulted in a decision to assign two people to each chapter except for chapters three and eight. Chapter three would have three group members because it is much longer than other chapters. Chapter eight would be discussed as a large group without a facilitator because it is short and it is the final chapter. Slips of paper listed chapters and each person selected one from a basket in the center of the room. This procedure assigned both partners and chapters.

Once the groups were assigned, there was a brief discussion about how the groups should be scheduled. In order to make time for planning presentations, the group decided that they would aim to finish the Dewey chapters by Wednesday afternoon. This decision required the group leading Chapter One to present later that afternoon. The group decided to allow 90 minutes after lunch for everyone to read the chapter and for the first facilitation partnership to plan an activity and discussion questions. The issue of the Foxfire Core Practices was briefly discussed again; however, nothing was decided and no plan to return to this issue was made.

Reactions to scheduling the week

In interviews following the deliberative scheduling activity, participants generally described the process as familiar and not particularly stressful. Many of the participants expressed their surprise when they found out that the majority of the course content would be planned and scheduled collectively after the course began; however, most of the participants described the process as not very different from assigning readings and leading discussions in

their other education courses. When asked about the experience of deliberating about the curriculum and schedule, Liz understood it in relation to her prior classroom experiences,

“It was just okay. Umm, but I am used to that process. We've done that process before in our cohort classes. Where we've broken up something -- you present on this, you present on that. Umm, and I've done that within my classes, so it wasn't anything that I wasn't used to doing or being exposed to.”

Similarly, Jackie, a paraprofessional working on her teaching license, related it to how students sometimes break up readings as a method of studying for an assessment.

“If there is a huge chunk of information to read, we will break up into groups. You know, you read page 1 - 3 and then you read 5 - 8 or whatever, and then we're going to come back together and we have this form that we all have to fill out but you'll present on yours and you'll present on yours. When we get through, the form will be complete. And this is what everybody will have to study from for this assessment. So you know, we've done similar things like that.”

During the course of the interviews about the deliberative scheduling process, most participants quickly shifted to evaluating the method the group selected for breaking up the text as opposed to discussing the process by which that method was selected. This is probably the result of the fact that the process for selecting the method only lasted a few minutes. In fact, no other alternative approaches to planning the week were raised in the large group after the “elbow-partner” discussions. Upon the prompting of Stacy, Christine shared her tentative plan and the group immediately jumped into the logistics of implementing it (e.g. determining appropriate chunks of text, assigning groups, etc). The group did not spend time sharing multiple, different plans for critically engaging with the text and weighing the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Alternative plans were not considered because Christine’s initial plan was quickly validated by both facilitators.

The fact that alternative plans were not discussed before settling on Christine’s is also the result of a lack of imagination or perceived lack of imagination in designing something wholly

different from hers. Ella described adopting Christine's plan as a "natural" process of recreating what they have done in other classrooms:

"Maybe because of the fact that this is not our first semester or our first time you know, doing chapter presentations, almost every masters class we're in has us do something. So everyone, I felt like, honestly had an idea of what they were already doing. And you know, it was very similar to what other professors already had us do. So I guess, we just already had that in mind. Everybody pretty much said the same thing. Let's divide this up. Do partners and let's present together. That's just something that we're already so used to doing. It was a natural thing, I guess. But we've all taken a lot of the same classes."

This quote is striking in part because there is no way for Ella to know what all of the other participants were discussing in their small groups because only Christine's partnership shared their plan. Sean, an elementary teacher who had previously worked as an insurance agent, went even further in his assumptions. He postulated that all other participants in other iterations of the Foxfire Course for Teachers would also roughly come to the same conclusions:

"I predict that all the other classes are doing probably about the same thing. I would think they would all split up the book. Maybe within the book, they would split up their chapter within their group and present a portion of it. I think that would have been the same, as far as how the presentations went. I could see that probably being pretty uniform."

Despite these assumptions, Sean still described the experience as a democratic one, however limited, "I did feel the democratic process, but what else would we have done? Presented them at night? There are not a lot of other options with them." This sentiment points to a lack of imagination that the facilitators did not challenge.

Ru, who like Ella and Sean had discussed a similar plan with her partner, further expressed the ease of settling on this plan because it was so close to her own idea for engaging with the texts:

“Because the group decided on something that I had thought of in the first place, that made it very easy. I really don't know how other groups would have approached this besides let's divide and conquer and team up. So, it just seemed pretty easy to me. I didn't really think anything of it.”

She went on to explain that she would have felt differently about it had the group decided on something different from her plan, particularly if she had thought it was unrealistic or not accomplishable .

“I guess if I would have been stuck with an idea that I didn't think I could have accomplished in any realistic way, then maybe I would have been upset about it, but I liked the idea that we went with. It was accomplishable.”

Had someone in the group raised a very different plan for critical engagement with the texts in addition to Christine's, the group would have been given an opportunity to evaluate them against each other. This would have required participants to share their reasons for supporting one method over the other and thus truly deliberate over the course structure. This did not happen in part because the first suggestion was endorsed by the facilitators.

Postponing Planning for the Second Given

The decision, largely on the part of Stacy, to postpone a discussion of the second given (critical engagement with the Foxfire Core Practices) during the initial deliberation on Monday morning resulted in a unilateral decision being made by the facilitators later on. In effect, this decision was not simply postponed, but rather taken away from the participants in the course. On Wednesday morning, Stacy and Cathy announced to the group that they had been discussing the need to get started on engaging with the Foxfire Core Practices during their debriefing the previous night. Their private discussion led them to the conclusion that the group needed a method to “frontload” some information about the Foxfire Core Practices in order to help the students weave the concepts together with Dewey and to help them decide on a focus for their presentations on Friday and Saturday. To meet this need, Stacy and Cathy developed a carousel

activity in which partners would focus on a specific Foxfire Core Practice and create a poster to represent its meaning. Cathy described their decision to do this in relation to the responsibilities of being a teacher with insights based on previous experience,

“Sometimes as a teacher...as the people who are facilitating and the leaders from behind you, we have an understanding of how this week can become a hurricane. And it can become an incredible hurricane of tension and anxiety over Friday and your presentations...We don't want to snowball ahead without giving you lots of time to plan. That's why we're injecting this thing that we call the carousel.”

Furthermore, the method of critical engagement with the Foxfire Core Practices was not only determined by the facilitators, but also many of the logistics for how it would occur. Cathy went on to explain:

“In order to save time, we feel like we know you well enough at this point, so we've decided which core practice for you to be assigned with...So that there isn't a whole lot of time spent doing the 'whose going to do what' discussion. It's important to get to the nuts and bolts of this stuff instead of deciding who is going to do what”

By taking this choice away from the students, the facilitators were implying that there was no time for them to allow participants to plan and that it is more important to engage with the content of the Foxfire Core Practices than to have choice over the process. This is a contradictory decision given the centrality of student choice in the FATL. In addition to potentially muddling key elements of the FATL, it also concedes to the common criticism of the FATL that oftentimes the spaces to complete the givens are not large enough to allow student choice. It is a particularly dangerous concession to make during the Foxfire Course for Teachers because it has relatively few givens and an excess of time in relation to the teaching contexts of the participants in the course. If participants do not see student choice as realistic in the Foxfire Course for Teachers, than they will certainly not see it as a realistic way to approach teaching in a public school which has many more givens and considerable constraints.

A secondary result of the postponing and then unilateral planning of the second given by the facilitators, was weaker engagement with the Foxfire Core Practices than with *Experience and Education*. During interviews many participants described this problem. Liz said,

“I feel like the Core Practices kind of lost some of their significance by being at the end of the week. It was Dewey, Dewey, Dewey...we all put so much thought and so much effort and time into reading that book and then thinking about our presentations. Here we are at the end of the week, ‘Oh my gosh, let's run through these last five core practices’. And that would be my biggest, probably my biggest negative about this. We just didn't spend much time on that. Not as much as I thought. I figured that we would start with [the Foxfire Course Book] and Dewey would kind of be intertwined into that. Instead, it was Dewey with Core Practice intertwined.”

Christine echoed the same sentiment:

“I feel like, there is a huge amount of Dewey in this week and not as much Foxfire Approach. We got separated, we did our little posters and it was so rushed today because it was the end of the week.”

Jackie was one of the few participants that came to the Foxfire Course for Teachers with a prior understanding of the history of the Foxfire Magazine. She decided to participate because of a recommendation from a trusted professor and her own interest in creating activities similar to the Foxfire Magazine as a way to get to know her students and show that their experiences were relevant. Like Liz and Christine, Jackie felt that their engagement with Dewey came to overpower the Foxfire Core Practices,

“I don't really see a whole lot of connection between the tour and the actual teaching of what they're trying to get us to learn from Dewey. You know, and that goes back to what I said before. If they could find a way to tie the actual Foxfire Magazine, the Foxfire books, tie the past into what they're trying to get us to learn from this, because it almost seems like it's more Dewey that they're teaching than it is the actual Foxfire.”

As a result of this imbalance, the connection between the two was not immediately clear to her.

Student Choice in Facilitating Chapter Discussions

While important aspects of student choice in the large group planning of the week were curtailed in significant ways, students still came away from the course feeling like they had exercised a lot of choice over their own learning. One area where students exercised choice was in their facilitation of their assigned chapters in Dewey. As Cathy indicated during the scheduling deliberation on Monday, the small group facilitation was a place for two to three students to exercise their choice in planning an experiential activity for their peers. In many ways, this considerably smaller space was a place where students discussed very different approaches to teaching and evaluated their strengths and weaknesses. Like many of the participants, Ginny described the small group planning in positive terms. She valued,

“sharing of all the different ideas that everyone has. The creativity that it's just bringing out in everyone. Because I was thinking it's going to be hard for us to all present something with something new because no one is doing the same thing. Everyone is doing something new in that short time frame. Because we really have only a couple of hours to come up with something. It's allowing me to be more creative. Think outside the box.”

Ginny was in a group with Ross and Jackie charged with facilitating a discussion on chapter three in *Experience and Education* which outlines the “criteria of experience” and its relevance to educational planning. After individually reading the chapter, the group came together the night before their facilitation and planned for several hours. After discussing many different ways to animate the concepts from the text, they settled on a simulative activity designed to evoke past experiences in their classmates. They would start their discussion with a taste test of Pepsi and Coke. This was designed to get students thinking about their previous experiences with these beverages. In addition to this activity, they also re-arranged the room into columns and rows and facilitated an opening activity in an authoritative and traditional way. This too was designed to activate past memories by reminding students of the experience of sitting in rows with

unresponsive teachers after a week of sitting in a circle. Ross described their planning process like this:

“We sat down and Jackie was kind of the moderator. She kind of sat and listened to what we had to say first. I was throwing out ideas and Ginny threw out ideas. And Jackie would throw in an idea here and there. Umm, we did a lot of different ones. We did the Pepsi versus Coke -- your experience with one or the other. I liked that...we worked for a couple of hours and agreed on something. The beauty of it was that, our points from that chapter, which was very lengthy, they opened up so much discussion because it was the criteria of experience. Well, what is experience? And everybody had a little something to say about that. Which is always one of the positives about this thing in general. People always have some kind of valuable input. They shared a lot of it for us. And we didn't even do all the things we were going to do.

This planning format allowed the students to deliberate about what experiential activities would be best for elucidating the concepts from the text. In addition to this, their deliberation pushed them to discuss the concepts deeply to better evaluate how well the activities would promote deep discussion.

The student choice exercised by partners and small groups during the planning and facilitation of the chapters in *Experience and Education* produced meaningful, experiential activities that helped animate the educational theory; however, to equate this small group planning with the concept of student choice as it exists in the FATL seems disingenuous. The process of planning with one or two other teachers more closely resembles co-planning and co-teaching than student choice that requires students to make decisions together and then evaluate the outcomes through a process of reflective inquiry.

Ad Hoc Decision-making

Beyond the student choice described in the previous sections, there were many times during the course where students were invited by the facilitators to make ad hoc choices about aspects of the course. Oftentimes, the facilitators would be reflecting aloud with each other while

in the whole group and thus inviting the students to express their ideas and help shape decisions going forward. For instance, early in the week the facilitators were approached by members of an outside art education course that wanted to visit to learn a little bit about the FATL. In this instance, Cathy and Stacy described the situation in the large group and indicated that they were leaning away from letting them observe because they had not been involved in the community building with the group up to that point. By having this conversation aloud in front of the group, participants were invited to share their opinions on the matter. During the course of that conversation, the participants decided to allow some of the art educators to visit during their presentations on Friday afternoon.

Unlike the scheduling deliberation which was not a very significant event in the minds of most participants, the facilitators' invitations for students to participate in ad hoc decision making was something that many members of the course found novel and meaningful. Ginny, in particular, appreciated this aspect of the course because it invited students to be creative and use their critical thinking skills:

“I like it because it allows me to think instead of somebody telling me how to think. I like structure in my life, but I like the flexibility that they're giving us. They're saying, this is the **given** which you must meet, but use your creativity. Use your brain instead of us telling you how to do it. What do you want to do? I really like that. And, that's what I really want to incorporate in my class, is the critical thinking strategies that I think a lot of kids have, but they don't build on what they have. And that allows them to build and to think and to share ideas. And, ah, I love what they do. [Cathy and Stacy] are amazing.”

Ross explained that these openings for ad hoc decision making were valuable because it helped him come to understand what the FATL is all about and also to see some ways that it would be possible to implement it in a classroom.

“I like the choice. I mean, it seems all based in Foxfire. I kinda get annoyed with all the ‘This is the Foxfire way. This is the Foxfire way.’ I don't like buzzwords,

but I understand it's an approach. The choice, --- choice, choice, choice, choice, 'You guys ready to take a break, where do you wanna go for lunch? Do you wanna cook out?' I like some of that. And it kind of drives the points home when they talk about that to us and it's not just a bunch of bullshit. Because they're like, if you do this then you can give them choices. And I'm like, 'Oh, that's not a big empty idea.' You can really do that. That's probably what I've gotten the most."

A similar sentiment was expressed by Ru, who though critical of the open structure, appreciated that the FATL was being faithfully modeled in this aspect of the facilitation:

"It's a little too laid back to me. I wish there was some type of...a little bit more structure. I wish there was a little bit more clear,...you know, just tell me a little bit about what you want us to do. But I feel like they at least practice what they preach which you can respect from a teaching standpoint. It's not a class about freedom in the classroom and I'm telling you every single thing that you need to do"

Social Control in Democratic Education

Following the development of the criteria of experience in chapter three of *Experience and Education*, Dewey presents his perspective on social control in relation to the progressive classroom. He argues that everyone experiences social control and it does not necessarily represent authoritarian control. Dewey uses the metaphor of a game with rules to explain that social control is not necessarily experienced as a negative loss of freedom. A child playing a game does not feel their freedom being impinged upon simply because the game has rules. On the contrary, the game is defined by its rules. Dewey's explanation is in the service of countering earlier misinterpretations of his educational writing that led some educators to assume that progressive education was a free-for-all where students learned free from all forms of control.

Ella and Bernice, a kindergarten teacher and paraprofessional respectively, were charged with facilitating the discussion of Dewey's theory of social control as explained in chapter four. During their planning of the activity, they quickly latched onto Dewey's game metaphor and decided to initiate their discussion with a simulation involving inviting their classmates to play a

game outside. When Ella and Bernice brought their classmates to a clearing outside the Long House, they immediately formed into a circle the way they had been arranged during all of the previous sessions in the Long House (excepting the simulative experience led by the facilitators of chapter three). Ella announced to the group that they would be playing a game, but did not give specific instructions. Instead, she simply said, “Here’s a ball; y’all play a game” and Bernice gently tossed a soccer ball to one of the participants in the circle. After a moment of silence and confused looks being shared around the circle, the ball was tossed to a person on the other side of the circle while announcing that person’s name. This pattern continued for approximately a minute before Ross muttered under his breath “maybe we need some rules.” In response to this, the person holding the ball announced the following rule: “When you catch the ball, say a word or sentence that describes the craziest thing that has happened to you this week.” This explicit rule, coupled with the earlier organic rule of announcing the intended recipient’s name before throwing the ball, dictated the game for its remaining five minutes of play until Ella brought the game to a close.

After the conclusion of the game, Ella and Bernice initiated a discussion about the role of rules in a democratic classroom. During the discussion, the group commented upon both the relationship between rules of a game and the givens in a classroom as well as debriefed on the emergent game they created. This prompted a discussion of the types of social control that were being experienced as participants in the Foxfire Course for Teachers. Much of the conversation that followed focused on how the group had recreated the circle arrangement from the Long House sessions and had developed a game that was more cooperative and dependent on reflective sharing of experiences than many more competitive alternatives. This aspect of the

activity surprised Ella and Bernice who had anticipated the group playing soccer because they had provided a soccer ball and located the class in an area large enough to play it.

During the Foxfire Course for Teachers, aspects of mild social control emerged that dictated certain norms and behaviors on the part of the participants. Despite the loose constraints placed on the participants by the givens, they still showed tremendous motivation to wrestle with the content, remain engaged with their classmates and continue their conversations about teaching in relation to the FATL long after formal sessions had concluded. This suggests that teachers are able to hold themselves accountable even in the absence of outside forces monitoring their involvement for accountability sake. It also points to the value of bringing together a group of teachers for an extended period of collective reflection on educational theory and practice.

Experiencing Social Obligation to the Group

One mechanism that encouraged deep engagement with the content of the course that was talked about in several informal discussions and during many formal individual interviews was the feeling of social obligation to the members of the group. When discussing the small group facilitation of the Dewey chapters, many students described feeling motivated to do something at least as creative and experiential as the previous groups. Ross, a middle school English teacher and basketball coach, described taking this work seriously despite the fact that he felt there would likely be little or no consequence had someone shirked off during the course:

“I think everybody came pretty prepared out of respect for the group. But you know, to be quite honest, I don't think honestly...I think you could come in there and not have read a word from it and figure it out. But I think at this point in people's lives and their careers they don't want to....they're not 19 years old going to keg parties thinking ‘we gotta get outta here’ you know. It's like, we're here. We're here to learn and to get better. That and it's just a dynamic of the group.

We're all here, you know, not only to get a credit. If we didn't want to be here, we wouldn't be here. We would be sitting at home doing an online course.”

Ross went onto explain that this sense of responsibility went beyond the group facilitation of the chapters in *Experience and Education* also applying to the presentations they would individually give at the end of the course. While acknowledging his ability to spend very little time on his final presentation to the group, he decided against this strategy in part because he respected his classmates' serious engagement during the week:

“Tomorrow we've got this little presentation. I know that pretty much whatever I do is going to be accepted by the group and it's not going to be shot down. So, in theory I could just absolutely create nothing. Stand up there for just two minutes and just ramble on. But I have more respect for the group after this week than to do that.”

Ultimately, Ross spent many hours planning and rehearsing his final presentation despite his perception that the facilitators would not be holding him accountable for lesser work.

In an individual interview, Sean described the other side of the coin. Not only are the participants in the course taking their work seriously, they are also cheering on their peers as they engage with difficult concepts. He described the experience of facilitating chapter two of *Experience and Education* like this:

“We're kinda cheering each other on. We're watching out for each other. You're helping support each other out here. You know, if it was an instructor up there, you would take it for granted that they knew what they were doing. They got it down. Let's keep our mouths shut. They're the expert; we're not. But when we're the person, they know we're not the expert. They know we're trying to figure this thing out together. And so they're supportive and you see that.”

A similar attitude was expressed by many of his peers both during individual interviews and during whole group discussions. Christine described a similar experience with facilitating an activity:

“I hate presenting in front of adults and my peers. I'll talk all day long in front of little kids. And people don't understand, like how can you talk in front of kids all day and you can't present. It's intimidating and yesterday when Jean and I were doing our presentation, I was still like nervous and anxious, but I felt so comfortable. Like, I didn't feel like anybody was...I mean, of course, they're going to critique, you're going to critique the presentations, but you know, no judgement really.”

She went on to explain that this comfort level of working with her peers was the result of classroom community created by Cathy and Stacy. She said,

“And I think that, from the minute we walked in here, that the atmosphere...that the facilitators...created for us helped make that comfort level there and that has made all of us more comfortable to be open about how we feel and what we think. Our opinions and you know, not being scared to say what we think and how we feel.”

Discussions of Content Continuing Far Beyond the Formal Sessions

Another surprising aspect of the course for many participants was the length of time they ended up investing in it. While the formal sessions tended to last between five and seven hours each day (except Sunday and Saturday) the majority of the participants reported spending upwards of twice that amount of time in dialogue about education with their peers. Ginny, like many of her peers, applauded the continuation of conversations that began in the formal sessions. In response to a question about whether or not conversations from the Long House were continuing into the evenings, she responded:

“Yes. Absolutely. So like, last night, it was eleven o'clock [PM] and it wasn't over. I've seen different groups and I've talked with different groups. And it's not just about life and different things; that's included because that is a part of learning. It's about what we're doing here and our projects. It's like class isn't ending. It's just continuing until bedtime and that's just amazing that I'm still just taking it all in.”

Christine also described these extended and informal discussions as central to the success of the course for her. She said, “[we are]...really kinda feeding off of each other and constant

collaboration, even after hours, sitting on the patio and talking about things and ideas that we have.”

Echoing the calls of Liston and Zeichner (1996) for reflective dialogue among teachers to go beyond immediate practical concerns in the classroom, Christine described the evolution of their conversations going beyond simple understanding of Dewey and the Foxfire Core Practices:

“I feel like the conversations are continuing, you know, at night and at lunch. And I feel like they're evolving into, you know, talking about other things. We went from talking about some of these practices to talking about the Ron Clarke Academy. And talking about our experiences there so even if it's not necessarily about the Core Practices,...like it continues the sharing of our knowledge and experiences. Umm, you know, Cathy and Stacy sat with us at lunch today and we continued the conversation about education and even just like the state of education. So not just Dewey and Core Practices.”

While very few discussions of “the state of education” or educational policy occupied time in the formal sessions, these conversations were often happening during informal times. In addition to discussing national concerns like the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and charter school reform, many of these discussions focused on more state and local issues such as what reforms and programs different school districts in Georgia were implementing.

While many of the most significant conversations that occurred during the course happened at night during informal time spent on the grounds around the Foxfire Center or at nearby restaurants all participants were not able to participate in them on equal terms. While Ginny could not pull herself away from these continuing conversations, she felt under tremendous pressure because of her outside obligations. She was less worried about her teenage and pre-teenage children who were staying at home alone during the day while she was gone and her husband was at work, than her other online coursework. In response to a question about her other courses, she replied:

“I think that's the part that I hate the most. That I have to do other courses while I'm doing this. Because my mind is not 100% here because I'm thinking...I mean, with my kids I can kinda handle it, and that's working out okay, but the other courses are what's blocking my 100% self into this. So with our agenda, I was like, ‘Okay. Oh wow. I get to work in the evenings’ but then class continues for me. I don't want class to stop. So I'm not getting my work done. So now, midway through the week, I'm going, I can't breathe. Oh my goodness, I've got work to do. The system is down; what am I going to do?”

Though she felt tremendous tension between the Foxfire Course for Teachers and her online courses, she was able to strike a balance that resulted in deep engagement with Foxfire and mere completion of her outside online courses.

Ginny was not the only student taking the Foxfire Course for Teachers simultaneously with other courses. Over half of the students were taking at least one additional course. While most of these participants described striking a balance similar to Ginny's, some students chose instead to remove themselves from these informal discussions in order to protect their time for other courses. Maxine, in describing outside conversations with her peers, said,

“You know, I haven't spent a whole lotta time out here [the Guest House] because I have those other two classes that I'm trying not to get so far behind with. So like yesterday I just stayed in there and got my work done so I could submit it. Because when I get back, if I waited...I did ask for extra time, but if I waited to submit next week, I would double up and I didn't want to have to do that. Just coming back from a trip and having to get home and do laundry and all that kinda stuff.

While the students who could afford to invest in the course beyond the formal sessions benefited from their continuing conversations, others were constrained by their outside obligations. This points to a potential problem for some participants to participate fully in the course, particularly if informal discussions are a primary site of engagement with the course texts and central concepts.

The Reflective Exchange of Ideas

“I don't like to be still or sit inside my house. Like at the computer, I absolutely despise that. So I was like, hmmm, I get to go talk to other teachers. Like learn face-to-face or I get to sit on my computer and do a lot of coursework. So, I didn't know anything about Foxfire or what it was. I was just like, hmm, sitting for hours doing papers or going somewhere where I felt like *I would most likely be collaborating and talking, meeting other teachers and that's what I don't do enough of as a new teacher. I have no time to really like talk to other people and hear their ideas, so that was the big thing for me.* I like to see what people do because I know nothing.” – Ella

Many of the participating teachers described wanting to participate in the Foxfire Course for Teachers because they assumed it would be a discussion-based class with teachers reflecting together about their past experiences. Many of the participants described the sharing of ideas with their peers as being one of the more meaningful aspects of the course. Liz, in describing the group dynamic of people trying to listen to their peers and understand their perspectives, pointed to the value in bringing together a large group of teachers:

“My thoughts, I hear my thoughts all the time. I don't think they're more important than anybody else's. So I'm going to listen to what everybody else has to say. I don't want to hear myself talk, I can do that all the time.”

Her statement resonates with the value of reasoned dialogue in deliberative democracy and the benefits of hearing from multiple perspectives.

Ginny went on to describe the process of sharing among the group in greater detail. She said the most memorable aspect of the course for her was the,

“Sharing of ideas; jumping off of each other. That, to me, has been the most impressive thing.... Whatever we're doing, it's not just one person talking or one person sharing their ideas. It leaps from this to this and that's how it is in my head all the time. But it's *my* ideas and that's through *my* personal experience and this has allowed it to be through eighteen other people. Or how many ever we have. Sharing their ideas and their experiences in life and their journeys. And it's shaping the way I think and I hope the way others are thinking.... And I don't know if it's like that in the other courses that are here, but from this experience, it has been amazing. I mean, from sitting in there to each presentation to even at

nighttime. That's what we do, we jump from this to that....it's just like we're collaborating with one another and just building upon ideas and I don't think that happens enough.”

Like Ella quoted at the opening of this section, Ginny longed for this type of sharing of ideas and experiences with other teachers that she had not been finding in her online course work. Whereas Ginny and others described their online course work as “busy work” wherein they read an article and submitted a response to it each week, during the Foxfire Course for Teachers the teachers were sharing teaching methods and constructing an understanding of the FATL together. This type of sharing is evidenced by the continual referencing of other people’s ideas and contributions during the group discussions. During the final presentations, most of the participants referenced specific contributions of their classmates as influencing their action plans.

Reflecting across Differences

“It's kind of neat to hear them talk because you always think, ‘Ah, they have no idea what I go through.’ You know, I have to be with little kids all day, like *all day*, I don't get a break from them. But then you get to hear these different perspectives and you realize, ‘Ah man, they've got it kinda hard too’ but in a totally different way.” - Janet

The reflective sharing among the participants and facilitators was significantly influenced by the varied composition of the participating teachers. Participants were initially concerned that the group’s diverse teaching backgrounds would impede their collaboration, but many of them later came to see value in this diversity. Ross, despite some early skepticism about the make-up of the group, came to see benefits to it:

“It's been useful in that I see how much we really have in common. And you'd never think that...this one girl over here [Ella], she teaches in kindergarten, you know, in a 90% Hispanic population and you're sitting there going ‘what the heck, this has nothing to do with me.’ But, we always go back to these principles.”

This idea of going “back to these principles” to find commonalities in practice was something often echoed by Stacy and Cathy in their facilitation. They emphasized that part of the process of the Foxfire Course for Teachers was translating insights from the course into teaching practices that would work in the teacher’s unique classroom context. In an interview, Janet explained how the difference in teaching context and the need to determine what would work for an individual teacher was part of the process:

“Everybody has different opinions about how things are going to work especially when we teach in such different schools. Like Donna teaches at a school where, you know, almost all of her children are defiant. They come from bad situations and then you have a lot of these people from Forsythe [Georgia]. I mean, basically, that entire area is, I mean, they're wealthier. They have a lot more resources available. It's totally different circumstances everywhere you go. People are going to butt heads and have different, you know, teaching methods and what works in one classroom is not going to work for another. And people have spoken out and said, ‘Well, that's not going to work. That's not practical for me.’ But that's what Stacy and Cathy have kept trying to point out to us. Just because it does work for you doesn't mean it's going to work for somebody else. We're trying to find ways to make things work for everyone.”

This idea of translating the Foxfire Core Practices into something that would work in a participants’ classroom as described by Janet is a description of the goal of the action plan presentations that occurred at the end of the week.

This group of participants also had significant variation in terms of professional title and years of teaching experience. Unlike the differences in school district, grade level, and subjects taught, these differences were much less pronounced. In fact, many people were not aware of these differences until the second half of the course. Christine, despite having seven years of teaching experience, did not see a difference between herself and the others with less experience:

“I wouldn't know if people hadn't told me. I wouldn't have any clue. I mean, Sean I know because I am with him all the time. But umm, like, Jean she has been doing it two years or three years. I don't feel like there is any difference. Like I don't think that I would even know. Or like, you know, Jackie. You would just

assume that she's been teaching forever and she hasn't been in her own classroom. She has only been a paraprofessional."

Jackie, when asked about the variety of people participating in the course and her own status as a paraprofessional, said that the course had dampened some status differentials that existed between her and certified teachers:

"I'm good with the variety of people. I think, you know, here it makes us all kind of on a level playing field. You know, I'm not a paraprofessional; I'm not a subordinate here. I'm just an up and coming teacher, so here the playing field is like leveled. But back home at school, then you know, I would probably feel like Joyce and Ru are over me. And maybe even in some cases Ginny because she is already certified. Umm, so I might have some insecure feelings and you know, I guess, to some degree I probably still do."

Mixed Group Reflection as a Vehicle for Thinking about the "Big Picture"

Ru explained that the value in this type of reflection and sharing of ideas among teachers with different backgrounds came from the creative solutions that emerged when different people looked at the same problems:

"You're never going to get these new ideas unless you just take the time to let people... Oh, I shouldn't say "let", that's a Cathy thing, 'invite' people to just be creative. It's so nice to hear what other people have to offer instead of just thinking about your own ideas. *My* own lesson plans. *My* students. *My* this. Other people have so much to offer if we just have time to share things in a non-threatening environment."

She went on to compare the experience of reflecting with her classmates in the Foxfire Course for Teachers to her experience working with other middle school math teachers in her PLC:

"Part of me wants it to be with more middle school math people because we have a shared experience and shared goals. And just expectations on us and what we do in our classrooms, but I don't think it would be as interesting. And I don't think I would get so many out-of-the-box ideas. And I say that because...in my math group, in my PLC, we're very objective-driven. What lesson are we going to teach today? What resources do we have? You know, there is an agenda for the day and we're going to map out our plans for this week. We're going to make this quiz. I

get so used to that goal-orientedness, that we don't ever have that time to just explore possibilities and discuss or think of the more creative solution. Because you're so worried about just can my students master this standard? Can they learn what they need to learn to be ready for seventh grade? When you get a group of people together that don't have the same goals and the same standards, you can't talk about those specifics so you have to think big picture.”

Ru's comparison between homogenous PLCs and the more varied composition of the Foxfire Course for Teachers offers some insights into the reflective process and how teachers can be supported to move beyond immediate practical concerns about their classrooms. In Ru's experience, the differences between the teachers forced them to move beyond a discussion of specific math standards to have a broader conversation about educational theory, the social context of schooling and the aims of education.

Collectively Engaging with Difficult Concepts

One of the additional benefits of collectively engaging with the course texts, according to many participants, was their greater ability to collectively understand the difficult concepts. Dewey, in particular, was described as a difficult book by all of the participants in the course. Many of the students expressed their apprehension about their ability to understand the concepts while reading alone at night in preparation for the following day's discussions; however, during the discussions themselves important meanings were uncovered through the experiential activities, gentle guidance by Stacy and Cathy and the willingness of participants to share what parts of the text they found confusing. Ru said this of the Dewey text:

“I'm not enjoying the book. I'm not enjoying the book at all. I enjoy our discussions of the big ideas much better. The language is throwing me off so much of that that I can't...I'm so busy trying to understand what I'm reading that I can't just think critically about the big ideas. So, while the book itself I'm not liking, assuming that everything that we're doing in class is kind of living what he's preaching, then I like the ideas that he is behind.”

Ginny too, expressed an understanding of *Experience and Education* that arose not from her individual reading of it, but rather from the activities and dialogue that took place in the whole group.

Even if it's an easy book I probably struggle more than most people probably would. But talking about our ideas and sharing the experiences about the certain topics, I have a clearer understanding than anything I could have ever read in that book. And it doesn't only just give me an understanding, then it brings it into me and points me back out into all these different directions that I can take it to. And I can see it in other aspects of my life. As far as my child. My job. The students that I might teach. I'm able to take it all in and then spray it back out. So, I can't...most people might can do that from reading. I can't. I mean, I can take it in and highlight things and say, 'yes, that's amazing' but I'm not seeing it like how I'm seeing it here.

By bringing together a group of teachers, this difficult text became accessible and meaningful for Ginny. This suggests that reflective collaboration such as is practiced at the Foxfire Course for Teachers may hold promise for raising the level of teacher reflection to a deeper understanding of educational theory that can often be difficult to understand.

Take-Aways from the Foxfire Course for Teachers

"I'm taking in more from this one week or three days than I probably have, as far as what I can take back to my classroom, than I have in the last four years of traditional education." – Ginny

"I have really enjoyed this class. I will say that I have gotten ten times more out of this than I have so far out of any other class." – Christine

Though many participants expressed dissatisfaction with specific activities and concern about fully implementing the FATL, they generally found the course useful. In the first part of this concluding section, I present examples of the types of presentations that were shared on Friday and Saturday morning because the presentations are designed to begin the process of enacting the FATL in the classroom. This is followed by examples of the myriad descriptions

participants shared in response to the interview question, “What do you think you are taking away from the Foxfire retreat at this point?”

Given #3 – Action Plan Presentations

Given number three, the creation and presentation of an action plan for implementing some aspects of the FATL, started on Friday afternoon and ended around lunch time on Saturday. Every person presented for twenty to thirty minutes. Each presentation was followed by the whole group giving feedback to the presenter. Much like the facilitation of the chapters in the Dewey text, most of the presentations were experiential and invited the participation of the entire group. In addition to this, most all of the presentations were highly reflective in terms of sharing personal experiences and particularly the experience of being a part of the classroom community during the previous week. As a result of the format decisions made by most of the presenters, very few of them gave detailed plans for curricular changes that would be made based on the Foxfire Core Practices. Instead, after leading an activity and sharing personal reflections about their experience in the course, most participants pulled out aspects of the Foxfire Core Practices and briefly explained how they were thinking about further developing them in their classroom practice as opposed to presenting a detailed plan of action.

One third of the presentations were essentially personal narratives organized around central metaphors meant to elucidate the experience of participating in the course. Though these presentations would be very out of place in many traditional graduate courses, they seemed to be a continuation of the “vibe” of the course with its focus on language and emotion and the continual referring back to metaphors and poetic descriptions of teaching principles. Holding a sponge tightly meant to represent their students, Jackie asked her peers, “Do we just want them to absorb our choices or do we want to let them make some choices of their own?” Other

presentations used maps and flowers as metaphors that, while explaining an understanding of aspects of the FATL in vague terms, were largely appreciative descriptions of sharing the week together at the Foxfire Course for Teachers.

Joyce, one of the most experienced participants with over twenty-five years of teaching ranging in grade level and subject-area, presented an extended narrative about her career as a teacher and how the Foxfire Course for Teachers fit into her understanding of her own growth. In her presentation, she used a vase with a crack running alongside it to tell a story about being an experienced teaching trying to engage with the course. The idea of using the vase originated with a conversation that happened earlier in the week. While lamenting the increasing number of standards that must be taught, a participant compared teaching to trying to put five gallons of water into a bottle that would not hold it. Joyce explained being struck by that image, “How do you get five gallons into a liter bottle? Someone said that, and it stuck with me. As I was trying to think of my project, water kept coming up.” Later on in the week, she came across a cracked vase that someone had left in the corner of the Long House:

“And the first thing Cathy said was ‘that pot still holds water’And I thought about how as an educator, there was a potter who molded me and made me. And as the years have gone by, I’ve become cracked. I have smile lines and wrinkles and cracks and gray hairs. It struck me that someone thought to not throw out that pot despite its crack...Right now, it’s sitting here empty...They gave us these two books, and I thought how can this fit into my pot? How can I fit anything more into my pot?”

Joyce went onto explain that she had over her many years of experience developed teaching methods that she thought were effective. This led her down a path of telling many stories about her teaching from different classrooms and subjects. After telling many stories about lessons she learned over the years, she returned to address the Foxfire Core Practices. She explained that when she first started looking at the Foxfire Core Practices, she was overwhelmed at the prospect

of overhauling her teaching approach. During the course of the week; however, she starting realizing that she could implement aspects of the Foxfire Core Practices into her existing practice. As she explained this realization, she picked up a piece of paper with a list of the Foxfire Core Practices printed on it and started cutting them up into individual slips. As she cut each one off, she slid it into the narrow mouth of the cracked vase. She explained that participating in the course had made her realize that she could still improve her teaching. She concluded the presentation by passing out slips of paper and inviting each member of the group to write down one idea for something that they could do in their classroom that they learned from the group. After providing a few minutes for them to write, she had each person put their piece of writing into the vase. She closed by saying, “Now I have nineteen ideas that I can take back into my class.” Joyce’s presentation is an example of the kinds of metaphorical narratives that this session of the course presented. While incredibly reflective about teaching, many of these presentations were light on details about how the FATL would be implemented in their classrooms.

Other presentations were more in line with a straight-forward understanding of an action plan. These students went through each of the Foxfire Core Practices and talked about what they had learned about each during the week and how they were thinking about implementing them. Others chose a few specific core practices that they wanted to start focusing on as they revised specific lessons or units in their classrooms. Ella, for example, explained how she had been using learning stations in her classroom during the past year. During the course of the week, she focused on determining ways to integrate more student choice into that process as a way of increasing student engagement in the activity. As part of her presentation, she modeled her previous approach as well as her revised approach to provide some concreteness to her action

plan. Another student, Jean, presented a similar transformation of her planned instruction. Earlier in the summer she developed a unit plan for teaching students about vocational pathways. For her presentation, she showed her original plan and then went one by one through the core practices explaining how she made some changes to the unit based on the FATL.

Self-Reporting the Impact of the Foxfire Course for Teachers

Unlike the action plan presentations which were public and linked to course grades, in individual interviews participants were more free to speak candidly about their experiences during the course and what they felt like they were taking away from the experience. One overarching theme that continually came up across interviews was the feeling of being both affirmed and challenged simultaneously by the FATL. Like many other students, when Christine first started reading over the Foxfire Core Practices she was surprised to discover that much of her existing teaching practice was consistent with the FATL:

“I think one thing that I've taken away is kind of an affirmation of the fact that I already do some of this stuff in my classroom, which is nice. But at the same time, there is a huge room for growth. And I'm definitely excited about, you know, taking the Core Practices back.”

Liz describes the process as starting with a realization that some of her assignments are already consistent with parts of the FATL:

“I mean, there are some things that I do that are, I guess, Foxfire-ish that I don't even, I didn't even know were. Like, I give choices for projects, and I didn't even realize. But maybe if I just worded it a little bit more or...gave just that little bit more freedom, that it would open up more doors, if that makes sense.”

Through her engagement with the FATL, she was able to look at existing classroom activities and evaluate them against the Foxfire Core Practices. Because the approach affirmed some of her existing instructional decisions, such as allowing students to make choices during projects, she was able to evaluate specific activities against the core practices instead of building something

wholly foreign from her current teaching approach. This idea of taking “baby steps” was something continually reiterated by the facilitators during group discussions. Christine described her approach to taking “baby steps” as a process of experimentation:

“It'll be babysteps and trying to learn how to incorporate all the core practices into my class. Maybe not necessarily incorporating all ten of them at one time, in one activity, but like I said today, it's going to take practice. Trying to figure out what works best for me. What works best for my students? What works best for my administration? Because we do have certain limitations of things, you know, I can't just throw my hands up in the air and not worry about the standards and have this perfect democratic classroom where we sit there and just discuss how we're going to do everything

Reflecting with Students

Many of the participants also described their participation in the course as causing them to rethink reflection. Beyond teacher reflection, participants described their greatest insights during the week coming from the idea of reflecting *with* their students. In the FATL, students and teachers are supposed to reflect at key moments throughout their collaborative work together. While teacher reflection was a familiar concept to the participants, many of them were very inspired by the idea of inviting their students into the process with them. When asked which of the core practices she felt would have the greatest impact in her teaching, Christine responded:

“I think reflection. True reflection. I mean, I stop and think what worked and what didn't and what am I going to do to revamp. But reflection with my students; allowing *them* to reflect. Because it does, it takes time especially with sixth graders. They're like, ‘Reflect? That was a great lesson.’ ‘Awesome.’ or ‘It was boring.’ That's what you get...So I think doing more detailed reflection with them. Asking them specific questions and not just ‘What did you think?’”

Liz described a similar urge to open up her reflective process to include her students:

“Obviously, I reflect on my own teaching. I never really do the same things twice. I always tweak something. I've never just stuck with the same thing...but I guess, more of incorporating students in the reflection process and more of asking them, ‘Okay, what did you like about this? What did you not like about it?’ And I did that at the end of the year, but I think it would be more beneficial if I would do it, you know, whether it be daily, weekly, monthly, you know. However that falls

into place. Umm, so that's the [Foxfire Core Practice] that stands out to me the most in terms of tweaking my practice.”

Building in Student Choice

Many participants also talked about being inspired to create more spaces for student choice in their classrooms. Ella gave a typical example of how she could go about giving students more choice in her kindergarten classroom:

“One thing I want to do for my kids, just beginning of the year, ask them, ‘what do you guys want to learn about? Just the first day. Just get a big chart and just ask them, anything in the entire world that they want to learn about. And I really don't care if they say dinosaurs or shoes or my mom. You know, some of them probably will. But just that whole thing of trying to really, really incorporate their own things and what the students want to do. And then try to do that and plan that into my own standards and things that I'm required to teach. And then you know, I can try to build that into reading, into whatever we're doing. You know, just really trying to give students an opinion in things.”

In this passage, Ella describes leading an activity to gather information about her students' interests. This information about her students will then in turn be used for her to better motivate students by planning lessons that include these topics. While this is, in a sense, giving students choice over certain aspects of the curriculum, it is not a radical departure from mainstream approaches to motivating students. For instance, many introductory teacher education textbooks describe a very similar process²⁸.

Like Ella, Jackie also left the Foxfire Course for Teachers with motivation to integrate student choice in her future classrooms. In response to a follow up question about what allowing for more student choice would look like, Jackie responded:

²⁸ For instance, *The Act of Teaching* (Cruikshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf, 2011) and *K-12 Classroom Teaching* (Guillaume, 2015) are two commonly used texts in foundations of education courses that advocate this practice for motivating students.

“I’m going to take the humility component, I think. You know, I guess maybe being a little more tolerant, I think. Because I like structure, I don’t like chaos so I’m going to try my best to invite a little chaos.”

Her language of “inviting a little chaos” is similar to other descriptions that came up in interviews and in group discussions about freedom in the classroom. While many of the participants entered the course concerned about giving up any control in the classroom for fear that it would create classroom management problems or result in students not being able to efficiently master the curriculum, many participants came around to the idea of allowing some forms of student choice. Jackie went on to explain her reasoning behind opening up her classroom more to student choice:

“If you don’t know me, you don’t know how to relate to me. So, it’s kinda like if I’m a black person and I’ve just moved into an all white town and I know nothing about White people. I know nothing about their culture but all I know is mine and I’m trying to teach based on what I know about my own culture. I haven’t taken the time to learn about yours. I think that that would be difficult. You know, coming from the South and this is probably going to sound racist, but it’s really not racist, but it’s almost like the White people think that they know what everybody needs. And it’s going to be done just that way. And they don’t see a need for change, they don’t see the need of bringing in diversity, you know, bringing in different races and different nationalities or whatever. They feel like they’re all knowing. And you can’t be that way. You can’t be all knowing. You have to allow room for everybody’s culture to survive. And that’s the part that I think that I would get from Foxfire, is that you need to learn about me before you can teach me.

Concerns about Constraints on Teaching

Despite finding the course useful and enjoyable, some of the participants struggled to see how the FATL could be applied in their constrained classrooms. Sean was concerned about the short class periods and the requirements laid out by his school administration:

“I’m having some challenges in my head because I’m still looking at that fifty minutes and I know what I’m required to do as a teacher. My boss wants me to have a warm-up, have my standards posted, my essential questions, introduction,

lesson, class activity, and a closing. A five step lesson and I need to do it that way. So how do I work with something really creative that allows a lot of discussion and things going away from the target? That's the hard part. The problem I have is the time I have allotted to do it. That's where I have a little bit of challenge, my personal challenge. So I don't reject anything that [the FATL] is saying, but I do have that, 'But, wait' type of moment."

Like Sean, Ru also questioned her ability to enact the FATL in her middle school math classroom. Whereas Sean was concerned about time and requirements from school administration, Ru was concerned about the developmental levels of sixth grade students coupled with standardized curricula and assessment. She explained,

"In a group of motivated teachers, you can see how it would work. I just have trouble picturing how it could relate to my job. That's where...it seems great as a college-level strategy. But how it would work as a teacher of sixth grade math with the common core standards and standardized testing and all these expectations? Can you really just be a facilitator? Can you really be democratic? I'm struggling with that part of picturing it."

Ginny, like Sean and Ru, was not entirely sure what the FATL would look like in her classroom. Unlike them, her inability to anticipate how the FATL would impact her teaching practice had less to do with external constraints and more to do with her students exercising some autonomy over their education. She explained that without her students' input, she was unable to visualize the results:

"I have all these thoughts, but I don't know how everything is going to work out. Because I'm missing what to me is the most important aspect, which is the students. And without them being a part of it, and them putting their input in, I can't see the end results. But I just have a beginning. That's what all this is giving me. A beginning."

Because the FATL is a democratic teaching approach, students play a major role in shaping the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom. Ginny recognized the role of student choice in the FATL and left the course with an intention to create more spaces for it in her future classrooms.

Chapter 7 – Case Report #3

Introduction:

During the last week of June, a group of fifteen students and two facilitators came together for the final Foxfire Course for Teachers of the year. The majority of the participating students were taking the course for graduate credit. Of the graduate students, four of them were pre-service teachers working full time on their masters' degrees at the Athens and Demorest campuses. For these students, the Foxfire Course for Teachers was an elective that came after previous course work in their masters' programs. The other students were part of a new cohort of teachers pursuing master's degree from the same school district approximately one hundred miles outside of Atlanta.

There were four participants that were not pursuing the course for graduate credit and they had different statuses and purposes for taking the course. Two of the participants were high school teachers who came from Illinois and Virginia for professional development unconnected to a graduate degree. One of the participants was a teacher educator from Georgia who saw similarities between his research agenda and the FATL. Finally, one participant was a teacher educator who came from Japan to participate in the course for a second time having participated five years ago.

The fifteen participants brought with them a great range of experiences. While three of the pre-service teachers had completed practicum experiences and student teaching, one of them had yet to participate in any fieldwork. The other graduate students from the cohort program had

much more experience upon which to draw. Two of the cohort students had been teaching only a few years, but the rest of them had been teaching for more than five. Some of the members of the cohort also held leadership positions in their schools and districts. For instance, one of the participants was the department head for the pre-kindergarten program who was attending with two of her colleagues from that department. Beyond this, two of the participants with over twenty years of teaching experience were charged with vertical curricular planning for their district in the subjects of social studies and English language arts respectively. This week of the Foxfire Course for Teachers also had a broad range of teaching levels and subjects taught. The group of students included teachers from pre-kindergarten, elementary, middle school, high school, and higher education teaching contexts. Collectively, the group included teachers of science, math, social studies, and English language arts.

The course was facilitated by two secondary teachers from Georgia who had not previously worked together. Stacy, a high school English teacher, was the more experienced of the partnership. She had facilitated many previous sessions of the Foxfire Course for Teachers over the past ten years with the most recent one concluding the week before. This summer was the first time she had taught two sessions of the Foxfire Course for Teachers consecutively. James, a middle school teacher of English as a Second Language, was facilitating the Foxfire Course for Teachers for the first time. He had participated in the course a few summers before and was greatly impacted by the experience. In particular, the concept of teaching as facilitation espoused by the FATL had most impacted his approach to working with English language learners. Unlike the previous facilitation partnerships during this summer session, Stacy and James had very limited interaction before they met in the previous week to plan the course.

Course Overview

On Sunday afternoon, the fifteen students arrived in the Long House shortly before three o'clock in the afternoon to find their classroom for the week in disarray. The tables and chairs that had been arranged in an oval during the previous weeks had been stacked in a disorganized pile on the far end of the room. James and Stacy informed the students that their first task for the week would be to arrange the room in a way that would be conducive to learning. After several minutes of deliberation and some questioning about the permanence of their decisions, the group elected to create an oval with chairs with a few tables at the far end for students who wanted a hard surface to write on. After this initial activity, the student took their seats and began working on a brief introduction activity wherein they shared pertinent information about themselves on a piece of construction paper that would be hung on the wall to make a quilt. During their work time, James facilitated a discussion about the experience of participating in that process and shared his experiences of doing a similar activity with middle school students.

The rest of the first afternoon was spent going over logistics and activities created by the facilitators in advance of the course. Stacy walked the group through important logistical information about the Foxfire Center such as where to find food and how to dispose of trash as well as logistical information about the course curriculum. She explained the three givens for the course and previewed the deliberative planning process that the group would be undertaking during the next day. James and Stacy then facilitated a discussion about establishing group norms for the week and began a KWL chart meant to assess the group's previous knowledge about Foxfire as well as their learning goals for the week. Finally, the facilitators gave the students the choice of a start time for the rest of the week. Without much discussion, the group decided they would start each day at 8:30am.

The next morning Stacy and James began the session with the “connections” protocol developed and used by Critical Friends. During this protocol, a facilitator sets aside some amount of time during which students can speak aloud to the group about any topic of their choosing. During this time, the students are not supposed to directly respond to what is said, but rather, just listen to the comments of their peers. James read aloud a brief description of the protocol and kept track of time on his cell phone. During connections, most of the students shared something about their experience in the course thus far. After connections, the facilitators and participants together debriefed on the protocol and agreed to begin the next day in the same way. Ultimately, the group decided to use connections as their starting activity for each day of the course.

After connections, Stacy led an activity about memorable learning experiences designed to frame the deliberative planning that would take place later in the day. Students discussed some of their most memorable learning experiences in pairs and then came back together to share their discussions with the whole group. Stacy then pointed out a large sheet of butcher block paper with the days of the course mapped out hanging on one wall of the Long House. She informed the students that the facilitators planned to have students share action plans on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning, but that with the participants themselves would have control over how the rest of the time was to be used. *Experience and Education* by John Dewey and the Foxfire Course Book.

The deliberative planning of the week was not limited to a single time block during which the students made decisions about the entire week, but rather, was a daily, on-going deliberation about the givens. In many cases, the students were making decisions about activities immediately before undertaking them. During the initial planning time set aside on Monday morning, the group decided that they would be unable to make an informed decision about how

to approach *Experience and Education* without first reading some of it. Therefore, the group decided to postpone their decision about how to structure the week until the afternoon. During the break, the students agreed to read the first two chapters of the book while keeping in mind that they would be deciding on a format for discussing the material later that day.

When the group reconvened, they decided on a provisional plan for discussing the first two chapters. They formed three self-chosen groups based mostly around grade level. Each group would spend seventy minutes discussing the chapters and planning a brief presentation about their “take-aways” as well as their understandings of how the content connected to the FATL. During the debriefing of the activity, there was some criticism about both the length of time spent and the format of the presentation. The group decided to cut the time in half for the next session planned for Tuesday. The group also decided that instead of a presentation the group should plan an interactive activity to animate aspects of the content. When this occurred on Tuesday, one group experienced a significant amount of conflict based on the time constraints and the differing personalities and needs of the group. In the wake of this tension, the large group decided to again revise the plan allowing for more discussion and planning time for the upcoming sessions on Dewey.

By Wednesday afternoon, the facilitators brought the group together to discuss some “ambiguities” that they saw in terms of completing the remainder of *Experience and Education* as well as their reading and engagement with the Foxfire Core Practices, which had not yet begun. They explained that there was only one and a half days left to complete the first two givens before the sharing of action plans would begin on Friday afternoon. With this prompting, the students agreed to discuss the remaining two chapters of *Experience and Education* as a whole group. For engaging with the core practices, the group decided to break into pairs to plan

activities for their peers based on the reading on each core practice. The paired activities began on Wednesday afternoon and were completed by the end of the day on Thursday. The presentations varied greatly both in length and instructional format. Some of the activities lasted only fifteen minutes, while others lasted over an hour. Some of the activities were straight forward large group discussions with several questions prepared to guide the discussion. Others were more interactive activities designed to give students an experiential understanding of the assigned core practice. For instance, one partnership charged with teaching about the role of group work in the FATL had their peers form small groups that were required to create a receptacle that would be able to protect an uncooked egg during a drop from a height outside the Long House.

On Friday afternoon and Saturday morning each student presented their action plan inspired by their engagement with *Experience and Education* and the Foxfire Core Practices. The presentations ranged from fifteen to forty-five minutes in length. While most of them were straight-forward descriptions of what the student was planning to do in concrete terms, a few of the presentations included more experiential aspects that required students to do more than be passive audience members. After the final presentation was completed on Saturday morning, James led the group in a closing activity inspired by Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*. In this activity, the students pretended to be children in a classroom taking a standardized assessment while an administrator was evaluating the teacher's effectiveness. After running through the improvised scene the first time, the group did several other iterations of it where they changed aspects of it to be more like a classroom inspired by the FATL. James explained that this was designed to be a synthesis of the content from the week as well as a lesson in the politics involved in trying to teach this way. Finally, Stacy led the group in a reflective activity in which

she read aloud a teacher's narrative about why they teach and invited each student to share the name of a student that inspires them to work in education. After each person shared their student's name, the course concluded and everyone left the Foxfire Center.

Reflective Co-Facilitation

Planning for Facilitation

While facilitating the previous week's course, Stacy snuck away in the evening to meet with James to begin their planning process of facilitating together for the first time. They met at a coffee shop and discussed the week for about ninety minutes. Stacy described the meeting as being about determining a shared framework for the week:

“We had never interacted with each other in that capacity before. I felt like we needed a framework and a pretty solid plan until we got rolling. And I told [James] that we could sketch out Sunday afternoon and that was really about it until we presented them with the givens and gave them the chart, the task of thinking about that Sunday night, and then meeting back on Monday morning to see what happens.”

Their main task of planning was determining how they would lead the group until they handed over control to the students after Monday's deliberative planning session. Beyond this, Stacy also shared some of her experiences with different outcomes from the many courses she had previously facilitated. Recounting the conversation, Stacy said:

“Sometimes it looks like this, and sometimes it looks like that. And sometimes I don't know what it's going to look like. You know, what if this and what if that. You know, really talking through it because we hadn't worked together. I was almost just making him aware of some of the things that I've seen unfold or not, and then having some sort of plan or idea about his comfort level with these different scenarios. If it's dead silence in a room, what are we going to do? If there is an argument, a clear argument, what are we going to do? If this happens, what are we going to do?”

Stacy and James divided tasks such as explaining the givens and leading the introductions. They also agreed to use James' opening activity of having the students collectively arrange the room

before doing anything else as a group as a way to start the course off with some shared decision making. They did not settle on any other community building activities; however, they did agree to check in with each other regularly to discuss how the group was developing as a community. Finally, they agreed to make silence part of their approach to facilitating. Instead of interjecting during every pause in conversation, they agreed to challenge themselves to be comfortable with giving wait time and embracing the silence that often occurs early on during the Foxfire Course for Teachers.

Soft-Touch Facilitation

During the week, both James and Stacy approached their facilitative work with a soft touch, often leaving the students to solve problems or answer questions on their own. In describing his approach to facilitating, James started by describing how he teaches middle school students:

“Even when I say teacher now, I mean facilitator. Because it really puts me in a position to kind of help kids find stuff, not just giving information to them. To articulate it, it kind of sounds small, but it’s really a big step to view yourself that way.”

He went on to describe how that approach translated to the Foxfire Course for Teachers:

“I was just going to genuinely try to embrace whatever it was. Kind of that whole notion of facilitating where I’m not pushing them. Someone else from the group could receive something or find it in a natural state and then go with it. And I would try to not sway or influence their process or their creativity. So I was kind of nervous about that because it’s a weird line to draw in a group dynamic...My biggest strategy was questions. You know, the whole Socratic thing. And, it’s almost situational. This is especially the case when you are facilitating with people that have significantly more teaching experience than you – that’s rocky territory.”

Instead of trying to appear as the authority on questions about the course content, James would usually give the question back to the group, inviting them to draw upon their emerging understandings of the texts or their own teaching experiences.

Stacy, too, took this approach as a facilitator. In many situations, she would prompt the students to discuss certain issues or to make a decision. Cynthia, a pre-service teacher who was switching careers from nursing after nearly two decades, was one of many students who noticed this about Stacy's approach to facilitating:

“I know Stacy was very careful not to tell us what to do and I think, at first, there was a lot of discomfort and quiet. Stacy would continually propose to the group, ‘well, it’s your time, how do you want to go forth with this?’”

As the week went on, Stacy started using the word “ambiguities” to describe decisions that the group still needed to make or aspects of their plans that were unclear. For instance, on Wednesday afternoon Stacy addressed the group about the ambiguity of their plan in terms of completing their engagement with the final two chapters of *Experience and Education* as well as the Foxfire Core Practices. While Stacy and James had discussed several options for how they could help the students plan these remaining tasks during a private conversation earlier that day, they ultimately decided to simply hand the problem over to the group. Many times throughout the course, Stacy and James made similar instructional moves that guided students toward making a decision, but did not make the decision for them.

Differences between Stacy and James as Facilitators

While Stacy and James were very similar in how they approached certain aspects of facilitation, there were some differences in their understanding of the Foxfire Course for Teachers. The most significant difference was their interpretations of the role of grades in the course. On Sunday afternoon, in describing the required texts for the course, James emphasized

that the students should be making references to passages in the texts and citing arguments. He explained that, because most of the students were taking the course for masters' credit, they would need to do something to show their academic engagement with the material. In an interview with him after the fact, he explained that one of his biggest concerns with the course was students engaging deeply with the content. Citing the Foxfire Core Practices themselves, he explained that "Academic integrity is there – you have choice, you have the givens, but there is an integrity component there....and some standard is needed for showing engagement."

Stacy, on the other hand, was much less concerned about holding students accountable for their academic engagement with the text and instead tried to soften James' message about grades. Describing James' understanding of grades in the course, Stacy said,

"He was really concerned [about grades] and as I probably would be too, if I hadn't done this for years. But Foxfire was never meant to be a graded class and I told him that, but he would, you know, he mentioned a couple of times, they are getting master's credits for this."

She felt that this contributed to some tension that was experienced by students:

"The third week was tense at some moments. And I haven't really wrapped my brain around the reasons why I think it was so tense. I mean, I have some ideas and one of them is that, that notion of a grade. And I find it interesting, I mean no one asked me about a grade the third week. They asked James, about four or five people did. So I guess from their standpoint, if somebody were going to bring the hammer down on them it would have been James."

Stacy described James as being "intimidating" to the students (something that James acknowledged himself in interviews). Because James was viewed this way, Stacy saw her role during the week as being more of a "stroker" for the students who would encourage them and assure them that they would be successful in the course. Beyond this, Stacy also initiated the use of the connections protocol to help contribute to a more open environment. While she was hoping this activity would serve as a forum for students to raise issues that confronted the

community, initially she saw students using it as an avenue to prove their engagement with *Experience and Education*. She explained that she could tell that James' message about grades and engagement with the text "sat heavy on some of them to throw out those quotes and talk about Dewey during connections instead of things that might have come up with community." While this happened a few times during the first session of connections, the activity gradually moved away from this and came to serve Stacy's intended purpose.

Student Control over Community Building

With the exception of implementing the connections protocol, the facilitators left the task of community building up to the students themselves instead of facilitating additional ice breakers or other activities meant to build community among the students beyond the initial introductions. When asked about the differences between facilitating with James and the previous week with Cathy, Stacy pointed to the intentional building of community as the biggest difference. During her facilitation with Cathy, they spent time in the evening discussing the classroom community and developing activities to start each morning session. This, coupled with "floating in Cathy's River for an hour and a half during class" contributed to deeper relationships that Stacy did not see developing early on during her facilitation with James.

While the lack of intentional community building facilitated by James and Stacy may have contributed to some tension early on in the week, the students themselves began to take control of the task. Carly, a veteran English teacher from Chicago, tried to address this lack of community building early on:

"I kept saying, let's go for a hike or something. It doesn't have to be something strenuous. It could be we're going to do a mile hike, like we're going to start by the summit and walk a mile up. Or go to the lake and do a little tramp around the

lake for an hour. Just, that sort of bonding outside of trying to do group decision making. I think it really important and I think it helps the process.”

She raised this and other similar ideas during connections as well as during large group planning sessions; however, it was not taken up because it was seen as an added obligation beyond the three givens for the course and many of the students were busy with other courses and outside obligations. Despite her calls for community building outside of the Long House going unanswered, students did spend a lot of time together in the evening getting to know each other and building community. Carly described an evening conversation between her and three other teachers that created deep bonding between them and influenced the nature of the large group discussions:

“Last night I came out to do my reading and a few of the teachers were interacting. It was just one of these things, like sort of at a crisis moment. I walked in while there were tears flowing and sort of this crisis moment that was both teaching and personal. And it’s one of those things. It’s like true bonding. People become teachers because they feel emotionally connected to it and how difficult that can be because it’s not a detached, logical connection. It cuts you so deeply. And I found that really meaningful. You know, just sharing personal experiences and talking about different things that we’ve gone through. And then it grows into like family histories and all that. And that’s the sort of thing that I like about being in these places. Where things kinda bubble up to the surface when you are no longer distracted by everything in your regular life. Just a truly meaningful and important moment. Where people who are more-or-less strangers kind of break down in front of each other because of that freedom.”

She went on to explain that she felt that this bonding emerged as a result of the isolation of the Foxfire Center and the pressures being put on them as a result of the course structure:

“It’s a product of isolation and it’s a product of the frustration that we went through yesterday. The teacher that was crying was like, ‘You know. I’m here. I miss my kids. I don’t know what we’re doing.’ So that just sorta triggered it. That emotion, it was all these other things were brewing, but just that emotion of ‘what the fuck are we doing right now?’ set it all off. But then it’s like, who else are you going to talk to? I mean, I guess you could go home and call a friend but that’s not the same. I mean, we want that immediate comfort and contact and understanding. And for the most part, I think teachers are very empathetic people.

So there's the immediate thing where you talk about it and support each other. So, yeah, that sort of thing is very much in these spaces."

Many other students shared similar stories about getting to know each other outside the Long House and the impact that had on how the large group functioned during class time. Cynthia described how getting to know each other helped people to feel more comfortable sharing in the large group decision making processes:

"At first, there was a lot of discomfort and quiet. Actually, today's the day, that I'm starting to see, not just a few people engaging, but today was the day that I'm starting to see people turn the corner. And people are starting to realize that they own the process. Whereas, the first few days there was a lot of quiet. Every time Stacy would propose to the group, 'well, it's your time, how do you want to go forth with this?' And, of course, the people that like to tell other people how to think are more apt to be the first to respond. But, I think today, I noticed a big difference where people are more comfortable. I mean, like there are a couple of people who are still being a little bit quiet. I noticed that Kari does not say very much in the big group. She probably talks more in the small groups. And, like today, I noticed that Rachel has a great sense of humor and she's a good thinker. And I didn't see that until today."

These types of stories suggest that even in the absence of planned community building activities on the part of the facilitators; these students were able to come together and bond over their shared ownership of the course.

Student Reactions to the Facilitation:

While most students came to appreciate the facilitation techniques of Stacy and James by the second half of the course, some of them were skeptical at first. Rachel, a pre-primary teacher and department chair at her school, saw the approach as strange and felt that it blurred the roles of students and teachers:

"It's just a different way of thinking. I'm just used to someone coming in and saying I expect you to know blah, blah, blah by the end of this. And I just don't feel like, there's not really a teacher-student role. I know that's the point of it, but I don't work well like that. Umm, they're fabulous people, but it's just weird to me."

Edith, a pre-service teacher hired to work in a kindergarten classroom during the upcoming school year, also wanted more guidance from the facilitators:

“I think I like a little more guidance and when I’m a facilitator in the classroom, I tend to give a little more guidance. Just give a little nudge, like let’s head in this direction, type thing. But then still backing up.”

Students with more experience with this type of instruction, felt more comfortable with the facilitation. For instance, Ann, a pre-service high school math teacher, felt good about the facilitation in part because she had experienced similar instruction in graduate school:

“It’s working for me, but I don’t know for the group. I don’t know if it’s just because I’m kind of used to kind of the sit-back and let everyone else do things approach cause that approach is fairly common in Harry’s classes²⁹ and in other classes there is a sort of a we-decide-what-to-do sort of thing. I don’t know if it’s just because I’m used to that, but I don’t get that uncomfortable with you know, sitting there and waiting for things to happen. But, if I had done this when I first started [graduate school], I would probably be very uncomfortable and probably wouldn’t be enjoying it”

Carly, while admitting that the facilitation approach was frustrating, felt that it was consistent with the FATL and the larger project of democratic education. In response to a question about whether or not the facilitation approach was working for her, she gave the following extended reply:

“There is frustration involved in it and I’m assuming that that’s normal. I’ve been in so many environments where there is no choice and none of this and none of that. And so, you’re just sitting there hoping that lunch or death comes, whichever is first. And, you know, it’s insulting or it’s boring or it’s something you already learned. Or it’s totally irrelevant. And someone is just standing there droning away. So, obviously that is one extreme and I wasn’t looking for that. I think coming right out of school, part of me just wants to not have to think. I want someone to do some of this stuff, a little bit more of the work for me, because it feels kind of like running a classroom except you’re not in charge. But you have to figure out how you can still sort of be charge while still not being in charge of anyone else.”

²⁹ Harry is one of the facilitators from Case Report #1.

Carly went on to explain that experiencing this frustration was an important aspect of learning how to lead a democratic classroom because disagreement and frustration are a part of the democratic process.

Student Choice as Reflective Inquiry

“I like to have a plan. I kind of wish we had been able to, just the first day, sit down and figure out, not specifically, but generally what we wanted to do each day. I would have liked to but I can also see the reason why it might not have been possible.” –Ann

Much like the core practice of “facilitation”, the core practice of “student choice” was foregrounded above the others by the actions of Stacy and James. When the students arrived on Sunday afternoon, they were immediately put into a position to make a collective decision about their learning environment, instead of beginning with introductions or describing the details of the course. By doing this, the facilitators were able to convey to the students that they would be making substantive decisions about their learning. Throughout the week, the students came to know each other and trust the deliberative process, thus resulting in better decision making and insights into how the capacity for deliberation can develop in a democratic classroom.

Having planned activities for Sunday afternoon and Monday morning, James and Stacy intended for the students to engage in an extended deliberation on Monday before lunch that would create a rough outline for the course. Before beginning the discussion about planning, Stacy led the group through a facilitated activity about memorable learning experiences as a method of framing the planning process. Following this, she re-introduced the givens that had first been presented the previous afternoon and reiterated the tasks of planning activities that promote critical engagement with both of the course texts. Shortly after opening up the forum for discussion, several students brought up the difficulty of trying to plan out activities without

having read any of either text. These students felt uncomfortable arguing for an instructional plan, when they could not justify it based on their knowledge of the assigned text. In response to this, the group decided to postpone the planning discussion until the afternoon allowing time for everyone to read the first two chapters of *Experience and Education*.

When the group came back together in the afternoon, they did not use the insights gained from reading the first two chapters to create a plan for the week, but rather created a plan for leading small group discussions about what they had just read. During their deliberation, they decided to create small groups based on grade levels that would be charged with discussing issues raised in the text. After the small groups had discussed for seventy minutes, the large group would come back together to report out insights gained from each of the small group conversations. Stacy was paraphrasing the comments and ideas she was hearing and trying to move the group toward creating a global plan for the week. After going back and forth over minor details, James suggested that the group was free to make a provisional plan for that afternoon and then revise it for the next day.

After the small group discussion, the group came back together and decided on how to engage with the next chapters of *Experience and Education*. The group decided to maintain the small groups they had assigned; however, there was some dissatisfaction with the format and timeline. Instead of allowing seventy minutes for small group discussion, the group decided that for the next chapter they would only be given thirty-five minutes. Several students expressed some concerns about the limited time allowed for discussion. Nonetheless, they agreed to try the new plan for the next chapter. In addition to this revision, some students also advocated for a change to the process of sharing with the large group after the small group discussions. The group agreed that instead of simply reading off a list of topics discussed, they would plan an

activity to animate concepts from the chapter. They did not allot additional time to plan an activity, which meant that the small groups only had thirty-five minutes to discuss the chapter *and* create an activity for their peers. This further eroded the already short amount of time dedicated to a close reading of the text. In one small group in particular, this created a tremendous amount of conflict that will be examined in more detail in a later section of this chapter.

As the week went on, the group continually made changes to their small group discussion formats in the wake of new information. The approach of gathering information and reflecting on it before making a decision characterized the decision-making throughout the week. On most afternoons, the group would conclude the day by debriefing on the activities and setting a schedule and assigned readings for the next day. Stacy described their process like this:

“They didn't want to plan and say, ‘Yes, we're going to stay in the small groups’ until they had done it one day. And then they had the conversation and said, no that was too long and they wanted to cut it in half. And then that was too short and it was ‘let's plan, let's do it and let's debrief’. And then let's plan some more. That was baby steps of planning which drove some people crazy. They wanted the whole framework of the week and what we were going to do when.”

Despite her impression, during interviews none of the students described the process of continually planning and revising as a particularly frustrating activity. From the interviews, it seems that Stacy was the person most frustrated by this approach. She continually raised the issue of needing to plan when the group was finished with an activity, ultimately hoping that the students would create a plan for the remainder of the week instead of spending so much time each day debriefing and planning. Despite her desire for a full plan for the week, she resisted making unilateral decisions about how the group should plan or engage with the texts. On Wednesday when the group was deliberating about how they would approach the Foxfire Core

Practices, the group decided that they could not determine how long the discussions would take until reading the text. When asked about this in an interview, Stacy said:

“That day after lunch that they made the decision to wait until they read those core practices to decide how long they needed, that drove me crazy. But I didn't jump in and say ‘Okay, we have ten to do and we have this much time, here is our free space.’”

Instead of forcing the students to create an entire plan, she let them work out their own process which ultimately resulted in the students exercising a considerable amount of choice over how the givens were met.

Like Stacy, James exercised restraint when the students were creating and revising their plans for engagement with the texts. He was less concerned with their piecemeal approach to making decisions, and more concerned with the decisions themselves. James felt that the continual planning process was difficult for students, but he was ambivalent about whether or not that was a bad thing. He said, “I feel like in our group, we really beat them up mentally. So, I wonder if having that constant revision and thinking about what we’re doing, was that better or worse for them?” His concern was more about the activities themselves not being experiential enough. He was anxious for the students to do something other than simply discuss the texts in small and large groups. James described his struggle with this aspect of facilitating in these terms:

“I really had to control myself because I wanted them to get up and go. Go do something or go make something. You know, but I had to deliberately not encourage them too much. And let them struggle and determine how they were going to do it. And I expected controversy because of everyone having to deal with unknowns and personalities coming out.”

James, recognizing the influence a facilitator can have over a group, decided to remain neutral. He said, “If you put too much out there, they’re going to do just what you told them to do.”

Community Building and Decision Making

James was not the only person that was dissatisfied with the discussion formats. Several students were also dissatisfied and felt their time would be better spent doing something more experiential that took greater advantage of the unique setting of the Foxfire Center and the openness of the course. Despite their concerns, students were reticent early on to bring up many ideas in the large group because they did not know each other and were afraid to offend strangers. Edith described it like this:

“I think the first day I was just sort of sitting there, like scoping it out. And then, as I started getting more frustrated, I was like, okay something is going to have to be said. So then I would bite the bullet and just say something and see where it went. Like a suggestion for how to move forward, like time-wise or schedule wise.”

As students had conversations outside of class time, they became more comfortable raising issues in the large group. Ann felt that an outside conversation with Ken, a middle school math teacher, had contributed to her feeling more comfortable suggesting changes to the small groups. She described it like this:

“I actually talked to Ken yesterday, and he was kind of disappointed and I was a little disappointed. We wanted something different. And I think part of it was, James and Stacy kind of being like, ‘you need a little more.’ So I think it was a combination of some of us wanting something different and them kind of saying maybe you should do something different.”

Even though students were initially hesitant to bring up their opinions in the large group, they were having these conversations in smaller venues.

Carly, who had initially felt resistance when suggesting the group do community building activities in the evenings, had a similar experience. She felt that the outside bonding ultimately led people to express their frustration in the large group:

“I think the more people interact outside of the official large group space and the more they can talk openly and freely about what they’re feeling, the easier it is to voice your issues and concerns and opinions. I mean, people were talking today in the large group who said absolutely nothing yesterday. And I think there were conversations last night about why this is frustrating. What should be different? So then people were voicing frustration.”

She went on explain that the discussions in the evening were a safe place to look for consensus among different people:

“One thing I’ve learned about working with kids is that people need to practice saying things and thinking things in a safe space before they can do it in a whole group. So that’s essentially what we were doing last night. So I think that that being able to confide...I mean, I don’t know any of these people so it’s not really confiding, it’s just people I can talk to and see how they react and if they think that I’m being reasonable than maybe I’ll think about my perspective or what my baggage is. But, you know, as I talk, people were like, ‘yeah, yeah, I think that too.’ So then probably it’s not just the three of us. Probably it’s more people.”

Through the process of getting to know each other and expressing opinions in low stakes environments, the group was able to make better decisions during the large group deliberation.

Working through Disagreement and Tension

“On Wednesday, something happened. Everything gelled.” – Diane

The greatest disagreement and conflict of the week occurred within one small group during their discussions of *Experience and Education*. This group was composed of five secondary school teachers including Carly, Sandy, Cynthia and Diane. During their first small group session on Monday afternoon, the group spent the majority of the seventy minutes allocated closely examining the arguments in the first two chapters of *Experience and Education*. As the session started, and before Sandy had even joined the group, Carly suggested that their primary focus should be on first understanding the text and then, if time allowed, drawing connections to the FATL. She then suggested that

everyone take a few minutes to reflectively write about the chapters they had read in preparation for their group discussion. After approximately three minutes of silent writing, Sandy joined the group and they began sharing their reactions to what they had read. While everyone in the group was making comments and asking questions, Carly was playing the role of a facilitator by bringing the group back to the text and posing guiding questions that she had come up with while reading and during her reflective writing. Cynthia described the first session like this:

“The very first time we were doing the first small group meeting, and right away Carly wanted to run the group. And so we did. We went along with it and we did what she needed to do which is process all of it. Because she’s a literary type. You can tell, she likes to process text.”

Carly, a high school English teacher, explained in an interview after the fact that she made these suggestions because she felt *Experience and Education* is a difficult text and this is how she supports her students when they are engaging with this kind of reading.

Unlike the other small groups that had been done discussing the text after approximately twenty-five minutes, Carly’s group spent the majority of the seventy minutes deep in discussion about the text with the occasional connection to their teaching practice or the FATL. When the three small groups came back together to share their insights and debrief on the format of the small group discussion, the members of Carly’s group became aware that the other groups were doing something different. Because the members of the other groups had not engaged as deeply with *Experience and Education* and thus had additional time to discuss other issues, some of the people from these groups suggested drastically cutting the time spent in small groups. Dan, a pre-service English teacher, suggested that they could cut the time in half based on his group’s experience. This received nods of support from around the room including from members of

Carly's small group. The group decided that the next session would focus on Chapter Three of *Experience and Education* and the groups would only have thirty-five minutes before coming back together as a large group.

After deciding on the change to the time allotted, a student in the group suggested that there also be a change to the format of how the group would share their insights. Instead of narrating their small group discussion back to the large group, this student suggested that they develop an experiential activity to animate some concept from the chapter. Instead of sharing out after the small group discussions, they would take turns facilitating activities for their peers. While everyone in the group seemed excited about this change, no one brought up the issue of time and the need to both discuss the text and plan an activity. As such, the day ended with only thirty-five minutes allotted for the discussion and planning. This time crunch was at the heart of the tension in Carly's group during the next session.

During the next small group session, Sandy took more of an active role in convening the group and suggesting an agenda. The group did not reflectively write about the chapter at the outset. Instead Sandy suggested that they could trust everyone had already read the chapter and therefore could move directly into brainstorming ideas about what activity they could plan for their peers. Despite this suggestion, Carly began flipping through the chapter and bringing up concepts from the text. She became very frustrated when Sandy and Cynthia responded to her comments by trying to move away from understanding the text to planning an activity for the whole group. Cynthia described the second session like this:

“The second time we came around, it was funny because Sandy and I were both like, ‘Listen, we’ve read the book. Let’s get down and do this.’ And [Carly’s] frustration level went through the roof because she was like, ‘Wait a minute, we can’t do that yet, because we haven’t processed the text yet.’ She had to process it

in a group, which is okay. There is nothing wrong with that learning style, but it was interesting.”

Despite the efforts of Sandy and Cynthia to move beyond discussing the text, Carly continued to bring up passages and ask questions about Dewey’s meanings. The other members of the small group remained quiet while Carly, Sandy and Cynthia began to openly argue about what their group should be doing with their limited time. Carly described the experience like this:

“I already came into it thinking, ‘Thirty-five minutes? Why thirty-five minutes?’ Why not forty-five?’ So I was feeling kind of frustrated about that already, knowing that that’s really not a lot of time. There is no way we can have a discussion and come up with something to do. And then there is the intensity of it. I think this is also a clash of working styles. I think by processing verbally. I talk my way through something. I can’t deliver a completed thought and that was part of the frustration. They kept saying, ‘But what are we going to do? But what are we going to do?’ and I was trying to get to what we were going to do by talking my way there. And the more I talked, the more it was, ‘But you’re just talking, instead you should be saying what we’re going to do.’ So that was the source of the frustration.”

Carly also felt conflicted because she had been an early proponent of moving away from just sitting in a circle and discussing all day. She said, “I’ve been pretty vocal about how we need to do something. So, it was sort of that urgency about let’s do something instead of just talk about it.” While she wanted to plan activities to make the course more active, she did not see the sense in planning activities without first having a deep understanding of the text. Because she wanted to have both discussion and planning time, she suggested several times during the small group session that they simply ignore the charge of the large group and discuss the chapter. At that point, they could then explain to the large group that they needed more time to plan a meaningful activity. Sandy argued that this was a violation of what the large group had decided and began referring to the parameters of the small group as themselves “givens” that could not be negotiated. Cynthia described this exchange like this:

“At one point, Carly wanted to change the givens for the small group and [Sandy] said, ‘But wait a minute, we can’t change the givens.’ Carly was talking about maybe changing the givens in the larger group and [Sandy] brought her back and said, ‘We can’t because these are the givens that we were handed. Later we can bring it up to the larger group if we want to change something.’ Which I thought was good because that goes back to that rule thing. You need some rules, boundaries or parameters for every group.

At this point, nearly twenty minutes of their allotted time had passed and Carly ultimately relented to the group. She remained mostly quiet during the remaining fifteen minutes as the group planned an activity with little explicit connection to the text.

After this session, in an individual interview, Carly explained her justification for trying to “change the givens” of the small group. Despite the fact that the group regularly discussed changing their plans throughout the week, Carly still felt that the students were simply reproducing the structures of traditional schooling. For that reason, she had tried to use the small group time to discuss how to change the plans instead of doing what the large group had decided. She explained her thought process like this:

“We keep imposing these things. Teachers love rules and teachers love structure. And we keep imposing the same rules and structure on ourselves. You know, even though this is supposed to be about revision and negotiation, it’s like, ‘No, we have a rule and a structure so we have to follow this rule and structure.’ And, it was this feeling of like, if we keep following this rule and structure, we’re not going to have any moment. There is nowhere in the schedule that says, lets discuss how we’re going to change the rules and structure for today. So I was sort of like, ‘Wait a minute, before we go any farther, let’s maybe get a feel for this and see if we’re on the same ground, so when we come back to the group, we can discuss some of these things.’ Because otherwise the momentum is going to keep going and we’re going to keep rushing to meet these deadlines. We’re going to keep doing the same thing. You know, there’s not a rule. There isn’t a red button that is going to be pushed if we say, ‘You know what, we’re still working.’”

Unable to convince her peers in the small group to abandon the plan, Carly brought her concerns to the large group later on. During the debriefing session that followed the activities planned by the small groups, Carly suggested that the groups needed more time to adequately discuss the

text and plan an activity. James and Stacy echoed this sentiment and the group agreed that they would keep the format of small group discussing and planning prior to large group discussion, but that they would allot forty-five minutes for small group work.

During the third and final small group session, an equilibrium was reached and Carly's group established a working relationship that promoted engagement with the text and the planning of an experiential activity. At the beginning of the third session, Sandy suggested that the group, in order to avoid the problems from the previous day, should set an agenda with spaces for both discussion and planning. Everyone in the small group agreed to this idea and they decided that the first fifteen minutes would be set aside for discussing the chapter without regard for their activity. Following that, they would shift gears toward planning an activity with insights gained from the discussion. Diane, a teacher of over twenty years and a member of the group who had remained quiet during most of the contentious second meeting, felt that the group had worked through their early conflicts to establish a working arrangement that honored everyone's needs. She described the progression of the group like this:

“Every day it has gotten a lot better. Like [Tuesday], I mean, we had a little bit of conflict. We just felt so rushed and stressed. I think it was Tuesday when we were doing our second group. That second day was when we were just like, ‘AHH! We’re so rushed.’ And we have some strong folks. You know, Carly has a strong personality and Sandy too. And I felt like we were having a little bit of conflict, but it wasn’t that bad. But [Wednesday] we got it straight. Now, it’s all good. But again, that’s part of it. As long as we don’t get personal and ugly, which I haven’t seen any of that. And I’m glad for that.”

She went on to explain that the conflict arose from a combination of the personalities and working styles in their group and the “time crunch” during the second session:

“Part of it was the time crunch. That was the huge part of it. And I think a lot of us are deep thinkers too. And that was part of it. We wanted to have time to do it right. Not just throw out something. And plus, the second time we said, fifteen

minutes for [discussion] and thirty minutes for [planning]. I think that helped. It was a totally different experience that third time.”

Here Diane is echoing Carly’s concern that they would not be able to plan a meaningful activity connected to the text without first clarifying the meaning of the text. Despite her feeling the same way, she did not raise these concerns during the second small group discussion.

During the small group sessions, the facilitators did not actively participate in small groups, but rather spent most of the time together on the porch of the Long House reflecting on how the week was progressing. It was only during the end of the second session that James began observing Carly’s group from a distance because he could see they were struggling to reach consensus. James described their conflict as “hot and heavy” during the second session but resisted the urge to step into the group because he wanted them to work through it on their own. He explained that he sees tension as a structural aspect of the course:

“You want to make sure they don’t actually start fighting. But at the same time, that struggle is a large part of how the class is structured. You don’t want them to just fight, but if there is tension, you want that to get channeled in the right direction.”

Reflecting on it after the fact, he explained that he was happy that he did not intervene because they were able to work through their conflict as a group and were better off for having gone through the process. He said, “Whatever they did, they figured it out. I don’t recall what they ended up doing, but they figured it out.” He went on to explain that the experience of the struggle was something they could take back with them to their classrooms as they begin to implement the FATL. He said, “Whatever it is they figured out in that process, they need to take that back to their classrooms. And I was kind of hoping they learned something about group work.”

Insights Gained by Practicing Democracy

“I had a lightbulb go off in here yesterday. I was sitting next to Stacy and she said part of the content of this course is the struggle...I didn't realize that. It's exactly like what our students go through. You know, with everybody's frustrations that we've heard, that is exactly what students experience everyday” - Ken

Through the process of making choices about the course, the students gained valuable insights into democratic education and what it is like to facilitate learning in a student-led classroom. Many of the students interviewed made insightful remarks about how the facilitation approach and the design of the course led them to have simulative experiences of the FATL. Diane, a high school history teacher with over twenty-years of teaching experience, explained her gradual realization that the course was designed to offer the participants insights into what it is like to be a student in a classroom inspired by the FATL:

“I started to get it. Like, okay, this is to help us understand what self-directed learning is like and we're experiencing that frustration and that uncomfortable feeling. There's a reason for that and I started reading more of the Dewey book and started realizing that's why we're doing this. And they're trying to facilitate and let us have choice. We're living it, basically. How our students are supposed to feel is how we are supposed to feel. So, I made peace with that.

For Diane, these insights were especially useful because she came into the course hoping to improve her abilities as a facilitator and to develop more innovative ways to facilitate group work among her students. The experience of struggling with a group to make decisions helped her realize that a group of students can still have meaningful and productive collaboration even if they are struggling initially.

Cynthia expressed a similar realization about her experience working in the group to make decisions democratically. She explained,

“I think that whole process that we went through with the group was what Dewey says is going to happen in the real classroom. That rigorous, bumpy; it's not going to be smooth. *It's going to be more work when you do it this way.* If it takes

people who are supposed educators that much effort to democratically proceed.....But, on the other hand, one thing I can say, is if that is a model of what we're going to do in the classroom in terms of consensus building and democracy and the meeting of the minds. In the process, what happens is, *it gets better*. And I think that's what happens in the normal classroom. It's going to get better. You're going to start off and you're going to realize, this person needs this and they're not going to be comfortable doing that. And if I rush ahead, this person over here is going to be upset. And this person is going to say, 'Fine with me; I'm fine.' So, I think what we did in the group is pretty much what we're going to do in the classroom."

In the above quotation, Cynthia makes two important points about democratic education. First of all, she points out that to be successful, this approach takes more work than a more traditional teaching approach. This echoes one of Dewey's central arguments Dewey *Experience and Education*. Countering the incorrect notion that "progressive education" is a laissez-faire approach that requires little work on the part of the teacher, Dewey argued that it in fact requires more preparation. Secondly, Cynthia also points out that students will get better at making decisions and working together if given the opportunity to practice democratic skills. These are important insights for teachers attempting to teach democratically because they prepare them for what to expect from students. Like Diane, Cynthia left the course with a better sense of how a group progresses and gets better at building consensus the longer they work together.

Carly also gained valuable insights into democratic education by participating in the sometimes frustrating deliberation during the Foxfire Course for Teachers. Being from outside of Georgia and being one of the few students not in a master's program, Carly described herself as feeling isolated from the group at times. This feeling was exacerbated by the fact that she tried to initiate some changes to the course early on but was unable to convince her peers of the utility. At times she felt like making a statement by leaving the Long House for the picnic tables outside. In her hypothetical move, she would have encouraged anyone else who was interested in a more experiential approach to engaging with the material to come with her. She ultimately decided

against doing this because she came to feel it would be a violation of the idea of democratic education. She explained,

“There is a sanctity of the group. You don’t want to violate the group. There’s like a tacit contract amongst all of us that we’re here to work together as a group. I don’t want to be some splintered off faction and refuse to work with the group, but maybe that’s part of my participation. Again, that would also be kind of shitty to be like, we’re out here and we’re the outsiders and you’re the insiders.”

She went on to further explain that part of democracy is working through the discomfort of collectively making decisions with people you have disagreements with:

“There is a reason why we have an understood social contract. The idea is, like, we recognize that we all have to work together even if it’s uncomfortable. And that’s democracy. You’re part of this group. You’re stuck together. Even if you don’t like what anyone else is saying....Part of democracy is that it’s frustrating and you don’t agree and you have to figure out how to make something happen from that.”

As Carly’s quote points out, disagreement is part of the democratic process. Anyone trying to teach democratically needs to understand this and have a commitment to helping students work through their disagreements through deliberation.

Chapter 8 – Multicase Analysis

Introduction

Democratic education can be practiced in many different ways. Any model of democratic teacher education for in-service teachers must be designed to encourage reflective teaching and provide the participants with opportunities to deliberate about their own educational experiences; however, how these elements are realized can vary. The Foxfire Course for Teachers is designed to provide the participants with an ample amount of space to make decisions about their engagement with the Foxfire Approach and how it will be enacted in their classrooms. Because of the open structure of the course and the varied backgrounds of the participants each week, it is no great surprise that each iteration of the course looks different from the others. Any truly democratic education is going to look different when practiced by different groups of people. This analysis of three iterations of the Foxfire Course for Teachers is too limited to reach a level of saturation; case reports on additional iterations of the course would certainly contribute to a greater understanding of how the Foxfire Course for Teachers can be practiced. The goal here is to understand how the Foxfire Course for Teachers interfaces with reflective teaching and deliberative democracy.

In this chapter, I return to the central research questions of the study to provide a structure for the multicase analysis. The central research questions are as follows:

1. How is democratic teacher education practiced during the Foxfire Courses for Teachers?
2. How is democratic teacher education supported by course design and facilitation?
3. How does participating in the Foxfire Course for Teachers impact participants' understanding of their teaching and professional lives?

Each section of this chapter is organized around one of the research questions. In the first section, I answer the first question by providing a brief summary of each of the three previous case reports, highlighting their most salient features with regards to reflective teaching and deliberative democracy. This first section is not directly comparative between the three cases. In the second and third sections of this chapter, the three cases are directly compared with regards to how they varied in terms of course structure and facilitation as well as the experiences of the participants.

How is democratic teacher education practiced during the Foxfire Course for Teachers?

Week 1

The first case of the Foxfire Course for Teachers most striking feature was the degree to which the facilitators played a mostly passive role during the deliberation and discussion sessions. After Monday morning, their actions as facilitators became muted. An outsider entering the Long House after Monday morning would probably struggle to identify the facilitators among the participants except for the fact that both Harry and LeAnn are much older than even the oldest participant and their contributions in discussions about teaching reflected a greater knowledge of how the Foxfire Approach had been enacted in different classrooms. In this way, they truly did practice the Foxfire Core Practice of providing learner choice. They effectively distributed much of their power into the hands of the participants.

While LeAnn and Harry made regular contributions during the discussions of the texts and the Foxfire Core Practices, for the most part, they did not intervene in the functioning of the group in active ways. One exception was the activity designed to familiarize the participants with different discussion formats prompted by LeAnn after the second small group facilitated their activities for engaging with *Experience and Education*. LeAnn praised the group for using a

creative approach to facilitating a discussion and wanted to share other similar formats. She simply shared some other approaches but did not explicitly encourage the group to use them during the remainder of the week. The other place the facilitators intervened was with regard to Louise who at times dominated the conversation. Having taught her before, Harry pulled Louise aside early in the week and warned her of her tendency to prevent others from sharing by talking too much. During the last discussion of the Foxfire Core Practices, LeAnn tried to stop Louise from facilitating the discussion to make room for another less vocal participant. This was the only time that LeAnn intervened with regards to the norms of the group. With the exception of this one comment, she did not feel the need to intervene as the group had the ability to exercise control over Louise if they felt it necessary.

The deliberation about the course structure and how the participants would spend their time together that occurred during this iteration of the Foxfire Course for Teachers was contained primarily to a single event on Monday morning. The participants, aided by the slow provision of information of the facilitators, planned out their entire week during a single session. The only sessions that remained ambiguous after Monday were the three timeslots set aside for small groups to facilitate activities and discussions about *Experience and Education*. The responsibility for these sessions was delegated to small groups that made their instructional decisions later on. In many ways, the deliberative session that occurred on Monday morning felt like a group of people collectively creating a syllabus. Once set, everyone agreed to execute the schedule that had been agreed upon. For the participants with outside obligations such as other graduate courses, they now had a schedule that they could plan around.

The small groups charged with planning activities and discussions about segments of *Experience and Education* became a space, albeit small, where deliberation about instructional

design continued throughout the week. As the group proceeded through their plan to approach each Foxfire Core Practice in a large group discussion with light facilitation by an impromptu facilitator, participants grew wary of their decisions. As a way to counteract this, the small groups leading the activities on *Experience and Education* saw their sessions as opportunities to address these concerns without violating their agreed upon schedule.

Conversations about the course and how the group was functioning were happening but away from the formal large group sessions. During meal times and late at night, people criticized their earlier decisions about how to engage with the Foxfire Core Practices. Because there was no deliberate time set aside for the whole group to process their decisions in light of new information or revisit their plans, these grievances were funneled into the small groups that planned the sessions on *Experience and Education*. As a result, these activities and discussions looked very different from the majority of the week.

The reflective deliberation that occurred *about* the Foxfire Approach, in contrast to the deliberative scheduling and planning, was much more consistent with a robust conception of democratic teacher education. More so than the other weeks of the Foxfire Course for Teachers, this session put a high premium on storytelling as a vehicle for collectively reflecting on teaching and what constitutes the Foxfire Approach in different contexts. Oftentimes during the discussions of the Foxfire Approach, the entry point for understanding a Foxfire Core Practice was the sharing of a story about something that happened in a classroom of a participant. The other participants then added to the story with their experiences and compared it against the assigned reading and the conversations that had happened earlier in the week. In this way, the group was collectively deliberating about what the Foxfire Approach means in different schools and classrooms. The participants and facilitators were talking about their practice and comparing

it to the practice of other teachers as well as educational theory. Someone would bring up a teaching practice and collectively the group would deliberate about if it was consistent with the Foxfire Approach and how it could be brought into greater alignment with it. In this sense, the reflective work of these teachers was very much in line with the work of the Foxfire Teacher Networks.

During these reflective discussions about the Foxfire Approach, the facilitators contributed stories about their teaching and the work of other teachers inspired by Foxfire. Their contributions to the discussions were similar to the participants' except that they had more experience and expertise to draw upon and share. At times, their contributions highlighted aspects of the Foxfire Approach that were being overlooked or provided examples of teaching that overcame the perceived constraints that would keep a teacher from deepening democracy in the classroom. In this way, LeAnn and Harry had their greatest impact on the participants during this week because, through their sharing of teaching stories, they were able to offer the participants a window into the past work inspired by Foxfire and the Foxfire Teacher Networks.

Week 2

The second week of the Foxfire Course for Teachers was entirely different from the previous week. The most significant difference came from the actions of Cathy and Stacy, the facilitators of the second session. They were incredibly active in their roles as facilitators. In addition to actively planning sessions throughout the week and even unilaterally making decisions that, by design, belong to the participants, Cathy and Stacy interjected their thoughts and stories throughout all of the discussions of the Foxfire Core Practices and *Experience and Education*. Cathy was especially talkative during the discussions, often interjecting with her

thoughts and opinions every few minutes. At any point throughout the week, an outsider could visit the course and readily identify their status as instructors.

Stacy and Cathy, as facilitators, played different roles during the week. Stacy, being a local high school teacher and experienced facilitator of the Foxfire Course for Teachers, often contributed stories about how different teachers in local public schools had enacted aspects of the Foxfire Approach in their classrooms. Her contributions were easily understood and framed in terms familiar to the participants. Cathy, on the other hand, contributed in ways that felt entirely foreign to many of the participants. For instance, she talked about the language that was being used and pulled out the hidden meanings implicit in how people talk about teaching. In a sense, she was modeling a way of reflecting on teaching that was unfamiliar to the participants. In interviews, many of the participants described being inspired by Cathy and wanting to be more like her in their classrooms.

Many of the activities that were planned and facilitated by Cathy and Stacy focused on community building and creating emotional bonds between the participants. The introduction activities and the River of Life both took significant amounts of time and contributed to the feeling of deep connection among the participants and a sense of obligation to each other. During the course of the week, small groups continually challenged themselves to come up with ways of facilitating activities on each of the chapters of *Experience and Education* that exposed their classmates to novel and active ways of teaching and learning. These small group planning sessions took significant amounts of time in the evening on top of the time spent together in formal sessions and the time needed to read the course texts. While most participants acknowledged that the course structure would allow them to complete it successfully with

minimal effort, many of them described a sense of obligation to the group that prevented them from shirking this responsibility.

Like the first session of the Foxfire Course for Teachers, the deliberative planning during this session primarily occurred during a single event early in the week. The facilitators guided the students through a discussion of possible formats for the week that resulted in a schedule and assigned groups. Unlike the first session, the decision about how to engage with the Foxfire Core Practices was postponed by the facilitators. Later on in the week, Cathy and Stacy unilaterally decided upon a discussion format that would allow the students to complete the “given” in their limited remaining time. Instead of presenting the students with the problem of how to approach the text within the constraints of the remaining days of the course, Cathy and Stacy solved this problem on the participants’ behalf. As a result of this approach to deliberation during the week, most of the participants did not see this aspect of the course as particularly meaningful. Many of them described it as mundane and similar to their other graduate courses in education.

While most participants did not find the deliberative aspects of the course particularly meaningful, every participant described the course as being a highly reflective and significant experience in their professional development. Most participants emphasized the sense of community and their ability to become vulnerable in front of each other as having the greatest impact. As a result, the participants shared many stories about their teaching and became deeply invested in helping each other talk through their experiences. Many of the participants explained that the course made them want to approach their teaching in ways that would create a similar “vibe” to the one created by Cathy and Stacy.

Week 3

The democratic teacher education practiced during the third and final week of the Foxfire Course for Teachers, like the two before it, is best understood in relation to the actions of the two facilitators, Stacy and James. They foregrounded the role of reflection and deliberation. While they actively contributed their thoughts and opinions during discussions of the required texts, the activities they planned were very much designed in the service of promoting reflection on the process of participating in the course and bringing decisions to a head. Both of the facilitators described their discomfort with the participants' decisions at different points during the week, but they both exercised restraint. Instead of telling the participants what to do or suggesting a change to their plans, they let the participants work it out themselves with the help of their facilitation.

One activity that Stacy and James planned was the "connections" protocol from the Critical Friends Network. This was designed to provide the participants with a space to share their thoughts at the beginning of each day. While this was often used as a place where people shared insights from the text or stories from their personal lives, it also became a venue where participants raised concerns about their functioning as a group and their reactions to the decisions about the format of the course. Beyond this, Stacy and James also stopped the group between sessions at a few points during the week to point out the "ambiguities" they saw in their plans. At one point late in the week, James and Stacy were concerned about the groups' ability to complete a task in the remaining time. Instead of making a unilateral decision, they instead made the group aware of the problem and asked them to deliberate about it and come up with a solution.

Unlike the other weeks of the Foxfire Course for Teachers, deliberation was an on-going element of the course instead of a single event that occurred at the beginning of the week. During

the first deliberative planning session on Monday morning, a few participants argued that it would be unreasonable to make decisions about the entire week before reading either of the texts and getting a sense of how long it would take to read them and the types of discussions that would be most suitable. They were able to convince their peers that an incremental approach to making decisions would be better for the group. In an interview, Stacy expressed her concerns about this and preference for them to make more decisions at the outset, however, she did not interrupt the group's plan. By electing to return to deliberative discussions about how to engage with the course materials regularly throughout the week, the participants were able to revise plans and practice democracy in ways that the participants in the other two weeks did not.

Along with deliberation, the participants in this session of the Foxfire Course for Teachers experienced conflict and open disagreement. As the days went on, participants who had remained quiet during the initial deliberative planning session become more comfortable sharing their opinions and disagreeing with their peers. Because of the decision to approach deliberative planning incrementally, there were still many decisions left to be made when these participants became comfortable with contributing. As a result, their concerns and opinions were funneled into the deliberation and resulted in decisions that reflected greater inclusivity. As described in the case report, one small group experienced open conflict over how they should be using their time to discuss *Experience and Education*. Instead of festering and becoming resentment among the participants, their conflict was raised in the whole group debriefing session and the small group activities were revised as a compromise. These instances of conflict and resolution were described by some participants as providing the greatest insights into democratic education.

How is democratic teacher education supported by course design and facilitation?

Course Design

The design of the Foxfire Course for Teachers supports democratic teacher education by creating a venue for teachers from diverse teaching backgrounds to come together and providing them with resources about which to make decisions. Many professional development opportunities for teachers are focused narrowly on grade level or subject area. As a result, conversations in those spaces often reflect a targeted focus on grade level-dependent and content-specific practices. By not drawing from a single group of teachers in terms of grade level, subjects taught, or school district, the conversations that occur at the Foxfire Course for Teachers emphasize the broad applicability of the Foxfire Approach. While the Foxfire Magazine was an innovation that emerged from a high school English class, the Foxfire Approach is a stance toward teaching and learning that can be applied in any context. The diversity of the group requires participants from different teaching backgrounds to work together to determine what an application of the Foxfire Approach could look like in their varied teaching contexts. This, coupled with the third given, requires the participants to collectively engage with the Foxfire Approach in more contexts than simply their own.

The second feature of the design of the Foxfire Course for Teachers that supports democratic teacher education is the open structure of the course. Democratic education requires that there be some resource to deliberate over and make decisions about. In the Foxfire Course for Teachers that resource is time. The participants have committed to spending a week of their summer vacation to spend engaged with the Foxfire Approach and the educational theory of John Dewey. The week is their collective resource to make decisions about. While the course runs from Sunday until Saturday, some of that time is set aside for activities that the facilitators have

set beforehand. On the front end, the facilitators lead activities such as community building, setting norms, discussing memorable learning experiences, and facilitating an initial deliberative discussion about how to spend the week. The last day and a half is consumed by individual action plan presentations. This leaves the participants with four days to deliberate about and decide how to spend.

The open structure of the Foxfire Course for Teachers is conducive to democratic teacher education because not all of the decisions have been made yet. It requires the input of the participants to exercise control over their own professional development and decide how they want to spend their time together. While the structure of the course is supportive of deliberative democracy, there is very little in place to ensure that the decision making is deliberative in the sense that it complies with the normative commitments of deliberative democracy. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the facilitators to ensure that the participants are exercising their power in ways consistent with deliberative democracy.

Facilitation

Facilitators have an important role to play in supporting the deliberative decision making of the participants in the Foxfire Course for Teachers. One of the most important things they can do is to be protective of the space that is designed to be used by the participants. The facilitators make choices at the beginning of the week in terms of framing and setting up the deliberation. Any decision about how the group should spend its time beyond that comes at the cost of the space for participants to make decisions about their own education. In a sense, it comes at the cost of practicing the Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning. During the second week of the course, Cathy decided to lead *The River of Life*. While many of the participants described this activity as incredibly meaningful, it came at the cost of participant decision making.

Another important example of how the facilitators shape deliberation comes from examining how conflicts over the schedule are handled in the different weeks of the course. In both the second and third week of the course, the facilitators became worried about the participants' ability to complete the second given and have meaningful engagement with the Foxfire Core Practices. During the second week, Cathy and Stacy identified this problem on their own and addressed it without the input of the participants. During their debriefing one night, Stacy and Cathy decided that the participants should use a carousel activity to engage with each of the Foxfire Core Practices over the course of the remaining class sessions. In effect, they took this decision away from the participants and unilaterally solved the problem. In addition to contracting the already limited space for the participants to exercise control, this action also ran the risk of sending a problematic message about the Foxfire Approach. If the facilitators are using time constraints as a justification for making decisions without the input of students *during* the Foxfire Course for Teachers, a relatively luxurious setting in terms of required content and instructional time, it becomes difficult to imagine how students can be empowered to make decisions about their own education in the more constrained spaces in k12 public education.

The actions of the facilitators in the third week provide a telling counter example of how problems that arise due to lack of time can be handled during the Foxfire Course for Teachers. During this week, James and Stacy felt similarly apprehensive about the group's decision making and their ability to complete the second given. Instead of making a decision for them; however, they simply brought the problem to the attention of the participants and let them make a decision about how to proceed. This action models learner choice and the Foxfire Approach in a much more meaningful way by showing the participants that problems will arise in the democratic classroom and that students can be involved in solving them. The facilitators have more

knowledge of the content and the threat of time constraints, but that does not mean that they should be making all the decisions.

Comparing these three separate iterations of the course also makes it clear that the participants need support during their initial deliberation. The participants, like the students in a k12 classroom, have little experience with democratic decision making. When asked to deliberate about how to engage with different texts, the participants, like the students in Eliot Wigginton's first Foxfire classroom, mostly respond with blank stares and confusion. Deliberative decision making by participants is better when the facilitators carefully explain the givens and provide activities for them to brainstorm multiple ideas about how to structure the week like the use of the think-pair-share protocol during the second week. The deliberative planning session during the first week suffered in part because the participants were confused about what they had the power to decide and also because the facilitators did not provide them with any supports for brainstorming possible instructional formats. As a result, few people contributed to the deliberation and the instructional format they selected did not satisfy the group.

The facilitators are also able to better support democratic teacher education in the Foxfire Courses for Teachers by extending the deliberation beyond the initial deliberative planning session that occurs on Monday morning. In addition to needing support while practicing deliberation, the participants benefit from multiple trials of deliberation. Just as deliberative democracy is meant to be a method of provisional decision making that is responsive to changes in preferences and new information, the participants in the Foxfire Course for Teachers should understand their deliberative planning as provisional. In the absence of this, the participants may feel dissatisfied with their initial plan and fail to revise it, like in the first week, or not find the

deliberative planning activity significant, like in the second week. During the third week, deliberation was woven throughout each day. It was supported by the “connections” protocol which created a space for participants to raise issues that could later be addressed in deliberative debriefing that occurred after each discussion session. This, coupled with the facilitators’ approach to raising questions about the “ambiguities” of the group’s plans, created an ethos during the week that democratic education is about ongoing experimentation and revision. Importantly, the facilitators during the third week practiced restraint during the deliberative decision making. They did not suggest solutions to problems, but rather prompted the participants to deliberate about them and make provisional decisions. By raising the problem and then getting out of the way of the participants, James and Stacy were able to model a robust conception of learner choice, the first Foxfire Core Practice.

Beyond framing the deliberative elements of the course and supporting ongoing deliberation, the facilitators’ other role in the Foxfire Course for Teachers is bringing to the group a wealth of knowledge about Foxfire and Foxfire-inspired teaching practice. While all of the facilitators during the Foxfire Course for Teachers, were able to advance discussions and expand the participants’ thinking about the Foxfire Core Practices by sharing a well-placed story about teaching, Harry was by far the most effective and knowledgeable in this regard. Having decades of experience with Foxfire and the Foxfire Teacher Networks, Harry was able to tap into the catalog of teaching experience that created and revised the Foxfire Approach. During the first week, participants would share teaching examples and evaluate them against the Foxfire Approach. Oftentimes, Harry would interject with a relevant example of what another teacher, perhaps a past participants in the course or a member of the Foxfire Teacher Networks, had tried

in their classroom and what effect it had. These examples often had the effect of affirming the participants' discussion but also challenging them to broaden their thinking.

How does this experience of participating in the Foxfire Course for Teachers impact participants' understanding of their teaching and professional lives?

Participants across all three sessions of the Foxfire Course for Teachers described the experience as being novel, unlike anything they had experienced in their professional education up to that point. Many described it as very meaningful because it provided them a space away from their schools and classrooms where they could have extended conversations with other teachers about important issues in education. While the participants certainly work alongside other teachers in their classrooms and schools, many of them described a benefit of the course being that it provided them a refuge from their day to day considerations of teaching. The diversity of the participants also contributed to the unique experience because they were forced to find the common ground and understand the Foxfire Approach in relation to education in general as opposed to only thinking about it in relation to the technical details and nuanced issues of their subject areas, grade levels, and school districts. As evidenced by the case reports, participants in all three sessions of the course spent significant amounts of time reflecting together about teaching and the Foxfire Approach beyond what would be required to simply complete the three givens of the course. It was as much these informal, self-organized discussions that contributed to the community building and meaningful engagement with the Foxfire Approach as the formal sessions planned and executed in the Long House.

The impact the Foxfire Course for Teachers had on the participants' understanding of democratic education and the role of learner choice in the classroom varies significantly based on

how deliberation and decision making was handled during their week. For the participants in the first and second weeks of the course, deliberation was more of a background element. It was an event that happened early in the week and set the schedule. The participants in the third week, on the other hand, left the course understanding learner choice and the role of deliberative democracy as being at the heart of the Foxfire Approach. Participants came to understand the course as a simulation of democratic education designed to provide them with a visceral understanding of the tensions and possibilities of democratic decision making with students. They gained insights into how disagreement can be processed through deliberation and how people become better at democracy by deliberating together. While participants in the other sessions of the course had meaningful experiences and came to understand the Foxfire Approach, it is clear that they did not have the same insights into democratic education as the participants that spent more time reflecting on their decisions and revising them through deliberation.

A theme that continually emerged in interviews and informal discussions with small groups of participants was the idea that the content of the course had the simultaneous effect of both affirming much of their current teaching practice and challenging them to improve aspects of their teaching addressed in the Foxfire Core Practices. When asked about the Foxfire Core Practices themselves, all of the participants in interviews said that they recognized elements of their current teaching practice in the descriptions. For instance, a participant would explain that they offer some learner choice in their classroom, but they had not thought much about how to expand those spaces and what might be the consequences of that action. Similarly, many participants talked about the role of reflection in their teaching and how it related to the Foxfire Core Practices. Many participants said that they had procedures for reflecting after a lesson, but they had never thought about inviting their students to participate in the reflective work of

improving their teaching as suggested by the Foxfire Core Practices. In these ways, the familiarity of the Foxfire Core Practices offered participants many pathways into thinking about how the Foxfire Approach could transform their teaching.

Participants came at the work of thinking about how to revise their teaching from different places depending on their experience, grade level and subject area. All of the facilitators emphasized that the Foxfire Core Practices collectively represented as “approach” to teaching and learning as opposed to a checklist against which all teaching had to comply. Because the facilitators were not dogmatic or prescriptive, participants felt comfortable selecting a few Foxfire Core Practices that would serve as their entry into the Foxfire Approach. A kindergarten teacher that was suspicious of her students’ ability to exercise choice in the classroom might focus on creating greater community connection and improving group work. On the other hand, a high school English teacher inspired by the original magazine program might focus on rethinking the audience of their students’ writing and inviting them to deliberate about who should be the target of their work. The action plans that focused on making concrete changes in the classroom varied significantly in scale and focus, but only a few of them tried to emphasize all of the Foxfire Core Practices. This is because the facilitators emphasized taking “baby steps” because the process of enacting the Foxfire Approach in the classroom was not a quick-fix but rather a journey that would unfold over many years.

The participants’ ideas about how to change their practice were, like all aspects of the course, significantly impacted by the actions of the facilitators and how they chose to frame the action plan presentations. In the first and third sessions of the course, the action plan presentations focused on concrete actions that would be enacted when classes began again in the fall. While they varied significantly in terms of scale and focus, the presentations during these

sessions, with the exception of a few, were very much focused on action. During the second week, on the other hand, many of the presentations did not describe action plans. Instead these presentations focused more on publicly reflecting on the experience of participating in the course and working closely with the other participants. While these participants had clear ideas about how they might change their teaching practice based on the Foxfire Approach that came across in interviews, these actions were not the focus of many of their presentations.

Understanding how participating in the Foxfire Course for Teachers impacts teaching practice is a question that's answer lies beyond the scope of this study. Though every participant in interviews, discussions, or action plan presentations described changes that they planned to enact in their teaching, this study is limited beyond gauging those intentions. While nearly all participants described the experience as a positive one that they would recommend to other teachers, a small handful of them came to feel passionately about the Foxfire Approach. Participants like Ginny in the second week and Carly in the third week, described participating in the course and learning about the Foxfire Approach as transformational experiences that provided them with new tools for thinking about their teaching. They both expressed a desire to continue working on this type of teaching innovation; however, they were concerned about their ability to maintain momentum when returning to their classrooms without the support of the other participants that they grew close to over the course of the week. Without the Foxfire Teacher Networks, these teachers are left to experiment alone in their classrooms or attempt to build their own community of teachers or maintain ties with the other participants.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

Introduction

There is a certain irony in spending two years in mostly solitary meditation on the Foxfire Course for Teachers, a program that emphasizes democratic deliberation and bringing teachers together to reflect on their practice. While the writing of this dissertation has been an individual enterprise, the intention behind it is much more social. My goal in researching and writing about the Foxfire Courses for Teachers is to increase discussions about this unique and important approach to supporting in-service teachers in their professional development along democratic lines. I see my role as that of a sympathetic critic. I have sought to understand the course from the perspective of democratic teacher education, a perspective familiar to the practitioners who facilitate the Foxfire Course for Teachers. As such, I have used the lenses of democratic deliberation and reflective teaching, both central elements of the Foxfire Approach, to try to understand the program on its own terms.

The Tasks of the Critical Scholar/Activist

In part, this research has been inspired by Michael Apple's writing on the "Tasks of the Critical Scholar/Activist" (Apple, 2010; 2013). Apple calls on researchers to be "critical secretaries" for groups of people and social movements that are challenging existing structures of unequal power. The critical secretary is charged with both documenting the rich complexity of the work that is being done and providing the actors with supportive criticism geared toward improving their actions. This also has the purpose of "keeping the multiple traditions of radical and progressive social work alive" (Apple, 2013, pg. 42). Critical secretarial work does not require dogmatism or any purity test, but rather "should be guided by an openness to expanding

the critical understandings we need to more fully cope with the range of dynamics that are so destructive to our societies” (ibid, pg. 43).

This approach to conducting research as a critical secretary is modeled wonderfully in the volume *Democratic Schools: Lessons in Powerful Education* co-edited by Michael Apple and James Beane. In this book, the authors provide “thick descriptions” of *different* teachers and students experimenting with *different* approaches to democratizing their classrooms with *different* results. While the accounts of these efforts in schools are sympathetic, the introduction and conclusion of the book, written by Apple and Beane, provide a framework for understanding democracy in schools and challenging practitioners to push their work further. Importantly, the cases do not reflect a uniformity of understanding what constitutes democracy in schools. Rather, the different cases represent different interpretations of democratic education and document different attempts at practicing democracy. This approach broadens the meaning of “critical traditions” in education and offers more pathways into making schools more democratic.

I have approached my research on the Foxfire Course for Teachers as a critical secretary with similar concerns to the editors and contributors of *Democratic Schools*. As a past participant and a teacher educator who strives to teach in ways consistent with the Foxfire Approach, I am certainly sympathetic to the cause. At the same time, I believe criticism benefits both teacher educators that are interested in opening up spaces for in-service teachers to deliberate and reflect together on their practice and the facilitators and other practitioners that work directly on the Foxfire Course for Teachers. For outsiders, these case studies provide a window into a radically different approach to supporting in-service teachers as they work to improve their teaching. By showing the strengths and weaknesses of this approach captured in the three case studies, teacher educators from beyond this small program can evaluate the transferability of these findings and

determine how Foxfire might apply to their teaching contexts and the teachers they support. For the facilitators and practitioners working directly on the Foxfire Course for Teachers, I hope these case studies and the multicase analysis can serve as an object of deliberation and reflection. The genesis of the Foxfire Approach and the iterative cycles of revision it has gone through are the product of teachers coming together to talk about teaching. If this research can contribute to any improvement of the Foxfire Course for Teachers by prompting discussion and debate, then this project has been a success in my eyes.

What can Critical Educators learn from the Foxfire Course for Teachers?

Though the program does not trace its lineage to explicitly political conceptions of education, the Foxfire Course for Teachers offers many insights for critical educational studies and critical teacher educators alike. As I have argued in the theory chapter of this dissertation, any robust version of democratic teacher education must be built upon both deliberative democracy and reflective teaching. Consequently, any critical democratic teacher education must also have these elements at their foundation. The Foxfire Course for Teachers provides a programmatic example of a form of teacher education that allows teachers to make decisions about their own professional development. In the critical tradition of educational research, there is a wealth of theory about what education should (and should not) look like, but there are far fewer examples of how to realize these ideals. While not perfect, the Foxfire Course for Teachers takes democracy and reflection seriously. By using these features of the course as a starting point, critical teacher educators can create educational spaces for teachers that have the advantages of the Foxfire Course for Teachers as well as critical and political analyses.

The task of developing a critical teacher education program inspired by the Foxfire Course for Teachers is much too large for this study. Furthermore, just as the Foxfire Approach

is the product of social reflection, deliberation, and experimentation among many educators, a critical version of the program would certainly be a collaborative effort. With that said, this project would undoubtedly include greater attention to diagnosis and criticism of schools as well as a more developed understanding of how social transformation occurs. A critical version of the Foxfire Course for Teachers would require participants to evaluate their teaching contexts and inventory what spaces exist for deepening democracy. It would require participants to discuss the political consequences of their actions and strategize about how to frame democratic experimentation with students. Finally, it would require participants to discuss how spaces for democratic action expand and contract and what mechanisms exist for transforming classrooms and schools.

The other lesson that critical educators can learn from the Foxfire Approach and the Foxfire Course for Teachers is that reforming practice at the level of the individual is often a slow process. Becoming a critical educator is not about complying with a checklist of practices and political commitments. It is a process of taking incremental steps in a whole host of areas and experimenting with different practices. This is the value of the Foxfire Approach. The Foxfire Course for Teachers does not require participants to instantly transform their teaching to include all of the Foxfire Core Practices. Rather, it offers many entry points into the teaching approach and invites participants to begin the process of democratizing their teaching on their own terms. Just as *Democratic Schools* provides many examples of what change in classrooms and schools can look like, the Foxfire Course for Teachers encourages teachers to begin down the path of enacting the Foxfire Approach in ways they see fit. In the same way, critical educators should emphasize growth and the willingness to experiment with different approaches

to improving their teaching, recognizing that the work will look different for every teacher. In the introduction to *Democratic Schools*, Apple and Beane capture this attitude wonderfully,

“Choosing to move in the direction of democratic classrooms and schools does not require replicating any of the accounts here. Democracy offers values and principles to guide our work. The work itself may take as many different forms as there are classrooms and schools. Moreover, “democratic classroom” or “democratic school” is not a title bestowed after achieving a checklist of certain practices and programs. Democracy is not something out there waiting to be reached. Rather it is in the work itself as we create ways to promote human dignity, equity, justice, and critical action” (Apple & Beane, 2007, pg. 25).

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