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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

EQUITY AND CHARTER SCHOOLS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Department of Leadership, Policy and Development:
Higher Education and P-12 Education
Educational Leadership

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This Dissertation by: James Bradford Every

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has been approved as meeting the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education from the program in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences.

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ABSTRACT

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There is a void in current research and literature critically analyzing how charter schools and their leaders provide equal access to all students. The language used in both federal and state legislation (in the 40 states that have passed charter school legislation) providing a legal basis for the establishment of charter schools explicitly identifies historically disadvantaged students as being a focus for charter school development as an alternative choice to other traditional public non-charter schools. The charter school movement began as an effort whose purpose was to provide more choices to parents and their students especially those who were concurrently enrolled in underperforming public schools. This qualitative study focused on the measures taken by leaders of charter schools that promote equity within their respective schools. Using a grounded theory approach to study the central phenomenon in question, 7 themes emerged which must be considered by policy writers, legislators, and leaders of all public schools. The first six themes apply specifically to the policies and operation of individual schools: 1) parent choice and influence, 2) enrollment process and outreach/marketing, 3) mission and curriculum, 4) academic accountability and interventions, 5) discipline and behavioral expectations, and 6) transportation and physical access. The seventh theme that emerged identified the responsibility of charter schools within the context of all

public schools. The 4 implications of this research are: 1) charter schools provide equal access to all students when described holistically, 2) leaders of public schools have discretionary control over factors that limit student access identified in the 7 themes, 3) beliefs of educational leaders might impact how they choose to make discretionary decisions, and 4) charter schools should be considered a part of the public system of education by education professionals and the communities that are served by these schools.

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In pragmatic fashion, I would like to thank my wife and two children with a short verse. Thank you Amber, Gilbert, and Niko!

We give
We share
We support
We comfort
We love

...and more often than not, I forget to thank you

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Chapter I: Introduction | 1 |
| Historical Perspective of American Public Education | 2 |
| Reform, Innovation, and Current Climate | 4 |
| Voucher Programs and Charter Schools as Schools of Choice | 6 |
| National Student Demographics | 7 |
| Colorado Student Demographics | 8 |
| Rationale for the Study | 9 |
| Purpose of Study | 10 |
| Research Questions | 10 |
| Definition of Terms | 10 |
| Assumptions | 11 |
| Conclusions | 12 |
| Chapter II: Literature Review | 13 |
| Context of Reform | 13 |
| Schools of Choice Reform | 14 |
| Voucher Systems | 15 |
| Charter Schools | 16 |
| Legislation and School Choice | 17 |
| Desegregation | 18 |
| Charter Schools Became a Legal Alternative | 20 |
| History of Charter Concept | 23 |
| Charter Policy and Procedures | 23 |
| Colorado Waivers Given to Charter Schools | 24 |
| Accountability | 25 |
| Enrollment | 25 |
| Governance | 26 |
| Models of Charters | 27 |
| Core Knowledge | 27 |
| Montessori | 28 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Expeditionary Learning | 29 |
| Paideia. | 30 |
| Success For All Program. | 31 |
| Knowledge Is Power Program..... | 32 |
| Choice and Diversity. | 33 |
| Diversity, Reform, and Achievement Gaps..... | 37 |
| Conclusion..... | 38 |
| The Problem | 38 |
| Chapter III: Methodology | 40 |
| Qualitative Research..... | 42 |
| Epistemology..... | 44 |
| Theoretical Perspective | 45 |
| Interviewing..... | 46 |
| Grounded Theory | 47 |
| Participant Selection..... | 48 |
| Participants and Setting | 51 |
| Data Collection..... | 51 |
| Individual Interviews..... | 52 |
| Memo Writing | 52 |
| Data Analysis | 53 |
| Constant Comparative Analysis | 53 |
| Open Coding..... | 54 |
| Axial Coding | 54 |
| Selective Coding..... | 55 |
| Limitations..... | 55 |
| Credibility..... | 56 |
| Transferability | 56 |
| Confirmability | 58 |
| Triangulation of Data. | 58 |
| Peer Review..... | 58 |
| Negative Case Analysis..... | 58 |
| Member Checks..... | 58 |
| Dependability | 59 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Summary | 59 |
| Chapter IV: Results..... | 60 |
| Purpose of the Study..... | 60 |
| Data Collection and Analysis | 61 |
| Interviews | 62 |
| Mt. Vista Academy..... | 65 |
| Thomas. | 66 |
| Fanny. | 69 |
| Benito. | 72 |
| Plains Charter School | 74 |
| Mustapha. | 75 |
| Linda..... | 78 |
| John. | 81 |
| Canyon Preparatory | 82 |
| Helmholtz. | 84 |
| Bernard. | 86 |
| Lenina..... | 88 |
| Common Themes | 89 |
| Theme 1: Parent Choice and Influence | 90 |
| Theme 2: Enrollment Process and Outreach/Marketing | 94 |
| Theme 3: Mission and Curriculum..... | 97 |
| Theme 4: Academic Accountability and Interventions | 99 |
| Theme 5: Discipline and Behavioral Expectations | 100 |
| Theme 6: Transportation and Physical Access..... | 102 |
| Theme 7: Charter and Public Non-Charter Schools | 103 |
| Summary | 104 |
| Chapter V: Discussion | 105 |
| Research Questions | 107 |
| Question 1..... | 108 |
| Question 2..... | 112 |
| Theme 1: Parent choice and influence. | 113 |
| Theme 2: Enrollment process and strategies. | 115 |
| Theme 3: Mission and curriculum..... | 118 |
| Theme 4: Academic accountability and interventions. | 119 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Theme 5: Discipline and behavioral expectations..... | 122 |
| Theme 6: Transportation and physical access. | 124 |
| Theme 7: Public non-charter and charter schools. | 125 |
| Summary of grounded theory..... | 127 |
| Question 3..... | 129 |
| Implications | 131 |
| Limitations of this Study | 133 |
| Suggestions for Future Research | 134 |
| Conclusion..... | 135 |
| References..... | 136 |
| Appendix A: Charter School Enactment and Enrollment by State..... | 153 |
| Appendix B: Complete List of Waivers Granted to Colorado Charter Schools | 156 |
| Appendix C: Essential Policies For All Charter Schools | 158 |
| Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Questions | 160 |
| Appendix E: IRB Approval | 163 |
| Appendix F: Consent Form | 165 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 1: Format of Literature Review..... | 14 |
| Figure 2: Four Elements | 41 |
| Figure 3: Six Thematic Interactions | 90 |
| Figure 4: Three Dimensional Perspective Diagram | 105 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 1: Selected Charter Schools' Demographic Composition | 50 |
| Table 2: Participants Organized by School and Job Description | 64 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

American public education has been a dynamic system of innovation, change, and reform. One general theme has continued throughout the history of public education since the passing of the first educational laws: students should have access to free public schools (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). After the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling in 1954, one other theme began to emerge: all students regardless of race, socioeconomic background, and ability should have access to equal education (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). After the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, in 1983, critical social analysis and accountability became the defining context of public education. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 2001, which later came to be known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), brought the idea of achievement gaps between historically disadvantaged and academically successful students to the public's social awareness (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001). Innovation and educational reform have allowed the evolution of charter schools to develop as a seemingly viable alternative to their public non-charter counterparts. Currently, there exists some confusion and discord across the literature available on educational research with regard to the viability of charter schools meeting the needs of all learners.

While it is important to understand national historical trends and policies, the focus of this synthesis and study will be on Colorado charter schools. Under the Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, states are implicitly given the authority

and responsibility to create and maintain their own public systems of education. Due to this sovereignty, each state has its own unique education clause and charter school laws. These nuances must be taken into consideration when discussing state level educational reform.

Historical Perspective of American Public Education

The first major law for public education in the developing American colonies was the ye old deluder Satan Act of 1647 enacted in Massachusetts (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). Arguably, this laid the foundation for free and universal public education in America (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). Benjamin Rush (1798) elucidated a planned system for public education in a series of essays first published in 1798. His plan called for a commonality across curriculum in the state of Pennsylvania. Although Rush (1798) did not provide prescriptive measures, he certainly alluded to present day school systems. He wrote:

The manner in which these schools should be supported and governed – the modes of determining the characters and qualifications of schoolmasters, and the arrangement of families in each district, so that children of the same religious sect and nation, may be educated as much as possible together, will form a proper part of a law for the establishment of schools, and therefore does not come within the limits of this plan. (Rush, 1798, p. 6)

This passage implicates many of the features found in contemporary schooling systems in America: (a) qualifications for educators, (b) district and school boundaries, and (c) racially desegregated systems of education.

The period from 1812-1865 is often referred to as the Age of Common School Revival and was greatly influenced by Horace Mann (Groen, 2008; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). During this period, states began to take away some of the local control that was once under the purview of school districts. This was motivated by an attempt to

create more uniformity across states and school systems (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). Common schools were established as free schools that would be supported by local taxes. Orville Taylor, editor of *The Common School Assistant*, described common schools as a school “where the rich and the poor meet together on equal terms, where high and low are taught in the same house, the same class, and out of the same book, and by the same teacher” (Taylor, 1837, p. 1). This description of schools continues to be applicable to contemporary schools in many respects.

Prior to 1861, little attempt had been made to educate minority students (Katz, 2001). The few examples of educating minority students before this time included missionaries attempting to educate Native Americans, some slave owners occasionally educating their slaves, and Quaker schools sometimes allowing African-Americans to be educated in their school houses (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was adopted in 1868 and opened the door for equality in public education (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). This amendment protected individual rights and provided equal protection to all people. This meant that states providing free education to whites must then also provide these services to African-Americans as well (Tyack, 1974). In 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson* legalized racial segregation in schools under the doctrine separate but equal (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). The claim made by states was that they could offer equal support for African-American students but would do so in separate learning facilities (Tyack, 1974). Several states allowed public education to remain segregated until 1954 and the decision associated with the *Brown* ruling (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). Due to the inequities

associated with racially isolated schools, the decision in *Brown* found that the separate but equal doctrine was unconstitutional. Chief Justice Warren penned:

We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does....To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone. (*Brown v. Board*, 1954, pp. 493-494)

Following the *Brown* decision, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the publication of *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966), commonly referred to as The Coleman Report, began landmark desegregation reforms in public education (Gutek, 2000). For example, Title IX amendments to the Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination by gender in public education and successive Supreme Court decisions furthered the desegregation process across America (Alexander & Alexander, 2009; Horn, 2002).

Reform, Innovation, and Current Climate

Several initiatives in American public education have surfaced as potential areas for contemporary innovative reform including revising learning standards, providing choices to parents and students, and funding experimental models of schools (NCLB, 2001). The goals of this reform effort were to increase student achievement while closing achievement gaps between all students (Hayes, 2008; NCLB, 2001). However, it must be understood that educational reform and innovation are distinctly different constructs (Geri & Kuehn, 1999). The confusion between these disparate ideas is rarely discussed in educational research but the differences between them become important to understand when discussing educational policy implications (Farkas, 1999; Geri & Kuehn, 1999; Horn, 2002; Reiser & Skalski, 2010). Innovation has been defined as

“something newly introduced; new method, custom, device, ... change in the way of doing something” (innovation, 2011). Senge (1990) described innovation as a form of grass-roots experimentation typically not afforded to the public sector. Innovations in public education could include any variety of new differentiation strategies, hands-on interdisciplinary projects, prescriptive remedial work, or career based education programs (Huberman & Miles, 1984).

Education reform typically refers to a top-down change effort with the intention of making a system operate in a different and better way (Horn, 2002). These changes are often accompanied by legislative action (Horn, 2002). In order to find a clear and contemporary example of educational reform, one could look to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 2002 (Reiser & Skalski, 2010). NCLB (2001) mandates increased accountability for schools with regard to closing the achievement gap between all students, especially those who have been at a historical disadvantage.

The disparity and confusion between the constructs of innovation and reform can best be illuminated with an example that has been prescribed to either by different authors: schools of choice. A model for schools of choice has been described as both an innovation and reform (Horn, 2002; Lubienski, 2003). Given the previous definition of reform, schools of choice will be considered a reform effort as opposed to an experimental innovation. Schools of choice include charter schools and voucher schools (Horn, 2002; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). The purpose of defining schools of choice as a reform lies in the implication of federal and state statute. Statute drives the development of policy reform but only fosters and supports innovation (NCLB, 2001;

Warren, 1978). It is the broad sweeping effect of statute and educational policy that have granted, and in some cases prohibited, individuals' equal access to educational opportunity (Alexander & Alexander, 2009; Horn, 2002; Tyack, 1974).

The current climate of public education is one of accountability and innovative school reform. Accountability in American public education has never been at a higher level of public awareness (William, 2010). For example, on March 29, 2010, the United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, announced the two top state winners for the federal grant Race to the Top (Hamilton, 2010). The winning states for these grant monies were lauded as having the most comprehensive educational reform plans which focused on school accountability, educational leaders making data driven decisions, and student achievement based on high level state learning standards. These grant monies came during a time of global recession when states were cutting considerable percentages of their budgets with educational funding absorbing a large proportion of those cuts. At a press conference, Duncan articulated "We are trying to become the department that leads innovation. We are trying to stop being a compliance driven bureaucracy. We are trying to change the business we are in" (Duncan, 2010, "Innovation Education," para. 3).

Voucher Programs and Charter Schools as Schools of Choice

First suggested by Friedman (1955) as a possible choice for parents who were sending their children to failing schools, voucher schools were proffered to bring the principles of economic competition to public education. Historically, this was the first time that the idea of school choice emerged in American public education (Larson, 2002). While voucher programs have yet to gain national traction, charter schools had a

level of public appeal that granted them national attention and acceptance as a possible alternative to tradition public schools (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). Charter schools have been described as innovative schools with the freedom to experiment with educational practices and school governance models (Lubienski & Weitzel; 2010).

National Student Demographics

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), charter schools served 1.4 million of the nation's total 49 million students during the 2008-2009 school year (2011, Table 100). This 2.9% of total students serviced by charter schools shows a considerable growth up from the 2000-2001 school year when less than 1% of the nation's total student population was enrolled in charter schools (NCES, 2011, Table 100). The Center for Education Reform distributed 4,624 surveys to charter schools operating in January 2009 and 980 surveys were returned and analyzed (Center for Education Reform, 2010). Based on the results of their survey; 54% of all charter school students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, 52% were minority students, and 50% were at-risk students (Center for Education Reform, 2010). Even though charter schools seem to be serving diverse populations at the national level, a growing consensus across educational researchers suggests that charter school enrollment has been found to lead to racial isolationism and *de facto* segregation (Carnoy, Jacobsen, Mishel, & Rothstein , 2005; Finnigan et al., 2004; Frankenberg, Siegel- Hawley, & Wang, 2011; Garcia, 2007). Miron, Urschel, Mathis, and Tornquist (2010) found that minority diversity within charter schools is only similar to state and national averages because researchers typically pool data.

Colorado Student Demographics

The Colorado League of Charter Schools (2011) reported that 72,000 students were being served in more than 170 Colorado charter schools during the 2010-2011 school year. It also reported 42.8% of those students were minorities while the state's public non-charter schools served 44.5% minorities for the same school year (2011). These percentages seem to reflect similar minority demographics between charter and public non-charter schools in Colorado. Miron et al. (2010) showed that these types of averages even out due to researcher pooling data but their research focused on charter schools managed by educational management organizations (EMO). EMOs have been described as private organizations that receive public funds in order to manage public schools (Miron et al., 2010). This unique subset of public schools is a limitation of Miron et al. (2010) findings but examples of non-EMO charter schools are available. Colorado Department of Education (CDE) reported disaggregated student subpopulation counts served in Colorado charter schools as follows: 599 (0.6%) American Indian; 2,416 (3.0%) Asian; 4,877 (6.0%) Black or African American; 28,915 (35.8%) Hispanic or Latino; 42,154 (52.2%) White; 130 (0.1%) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; and 1,898 (2.3%) two or more races (2010). At-risk students are clearly underserved in Colorado's charter schools (Weiler et al., 2011). Weiler et al. (2011) found that out of 42 districts sponsoring 139 charter schools in Colorado, school district total student population was made up of 33.7% at-risk students while charter schools within those districts were comprised of 25.0% at-risk students. In Colorado, the pooling effect reported by Miron et al. (2010) did not mask the disparity of at-risk students served by charter schools as reported by Weiler et al. (2011).

One example of a traditional school district in Colorado without EMO run charter schools that supports Miron et al. (2010) findings is Flat Mountain School District (pseudonym), located in the north-central area of Colorado. The district reported having 56% minority students during the 2009-2010 school year (Flat Mountain School District, 2010). CDE (2010) released demographic information based on charter school, student count, and minority count. Three charter schools were in operation in Flat Mountain School District during the 2009-2010 school year: Canyon Preparatory, Green Mesa Charter School, and Charter Town School (Colorado Department of Education, 2010). All school names reported will be given pseudonyms in order to protect their identities. These schools served a combined student population of 2,867 with 750 of those students being reported as minority students (2010). The disaggregated student subpopulation counts were reported as follows: 17 American Indian, 47 Asian, 48 Black or African American, 601 Hispanic or Latino, 2117 White, 10 Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 27 two or more races (2010). Combined, the minority populations within these three schools represent 26.1% of their total student populations (2010). During the same school year, 22 charter schools were reported as serving greater than 90% minority students (Colorado Department of Education, 2010). These pockets of racial isolation clearly support Miron et al. (2010) findings.

Rationale for the Study

Charter schools have been lauded as being successful at closing achievement gaps while raising achievement for all students (Macey, Decker, & Eckes, 2009; McDonald, Ross, Bol, & McSparrin-Gallagher, 2007). At the same time, charter schools have been criticized as being selective and sometimes exclusive, resulting in racial isolation (Carnoy et al., 2005; Finnigan et al., 2004; Frankenberg et al., 2011;

Garcia, 2007). This exclusivity has been described for charter schools as being schools of "white flight" (Carnoy et al, 2005; Garcia, 2007). With national consideration being given to charter schools as bastions for positive school reform concurrent with claims of exclusivity and racial isolationism, little attention has been given to resolving these seemingly disparate descriptions of charter schools (Tirozzi, 2010).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze both written and unwritten policies and practices of Colorado charter schools with regards to student enrollment, diversity issues, and attrition in order to answer the research questions used to focus this study. Qualitative methodology will be used to investigate student enrollment trends, diversity issues, and student attrition along with the beliefs of school administrators, teachers, and counselors with regards to issues surrounding student diversity. The intent of this research will be to inform state, district, and school level policy writers and practitioners so that they may ensure equitable access to all public schools of choice and specifically charter schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

- Q1 What evidentiary support suggests that charter schools provide equal access to all students especially those identified as historically disadvantaged?
- Q2 How can leaders of charter schools influence student diversity and enrollment trends within their school?
- Q3 What are the beliefs of leaders of charter schools with regard to student diversity within their school?

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap - the disparity in academic achievement between historically successful versus disadvantaged students (NCLB, 2002).

At-risk student - NCLB legislation often refers to historically disadvantaged students as at-risk (NCLB, 2002; Rapp & Eckes, 2007). This definition is extended to include what Colorado statute has defined as any student who “because of physical, emotional, socioeconomic, or cultural factors, is less likely to succeed in a conventional educational environment” (Colorado Department of Education, 1993, p.31).

Charter school - a public school of choice that is free from some state and government regulations (Martin, 2005).

Diversity - includes all disaggregated subpopulations identified by Colorado’s Student Assessment Program (CSAP) and the Colorado Growth Model including: gender, ethnicity, language characteristics, “at-risk,” and special education needs.

Social desirability bias - the tendency of an individual to either over or under-report their beliefs, attitudes, or actions in a more socially favorable way (Leite & Cooper, 2010; Phillips, 2009).

Assumptions

Assumptions recognized in this study will include:

1. Administrators, counselors, and teachers may not accurately describe their own beliefs about diversity issues due to social desirability bias.
2. Administrators, counselors, and teachers representing their respective schools may not have all the necessary information about their district and state demographics.

3. Administrators, counselors, and teachers representing their respective schools may not have all the necessary information about legally acceptable desegregation initiatives.

Conclusions

Charter schools were first conceived in order to provide a place for experimentation in public schools while offering parents and students more choices in public education (Martin, 2005). These schools have moved beyond being isolated Petri dishes for trying new governance, pedagogical, and philosophical models of public schools and have emerged as a federal and state supported public education reform alternative to traditional public schools in 40 states. In order to provide equal access and an equitable education to all students, analysis of charter school enrollment trends, policies that foster these trends, and educational professionals' beliefs that sustain these trends all become critical areas of study. Chief Justice Warren's fear of the deleterious effects of racial segregation may become actualized if enrollment trends continue in Colorado charter schools as they have since 1993. With the information gleaned from the current study, educational leaders and policy writers can make decisions that create greater access to all public schools including charter schools while decreasing racial isolation within all public schools.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Context of Reform

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001) has set forth a series of mandates articulating that schools must close the achievement gaps between advantaged and historically disadvantaged students. Legislation allowing local education agencies to offer schools of choice including charter schools has been described as one potential solution for public education to close the achievement gaps between all students (Martin, 2005). Charter schools have been lauded as being successful at closing achievement gaps while raising achievement for all students (Macey et al., 2009; McDonald, Ross, Bol, & McSparrin-Gallagher, 2007). At the same time, charter schools have been criticized as being selective and sometimes exclusive. This exclusivity has been described for charter schools as being schools of "white flight" (Carnoy, Jacobsen, Mishel, & Rothstein, 2005; Garcia, 2007). With national consideration being given to charter schools as bastions of positive school reform concurrent with claims of exclusivity, little attention has been given to resolving these seemingly disparate descriptions of charter schools (Tirozzi, 2010).

This literature review will include a context for understanding the central question this study will address: What evidentiary support suggests that charter schools provide equal access to all students especially those identified as historically disadvantaged? Issues surrounding educational reform, models and practices of charter

schools, and pertinent topics surrounding student diversity will be discussed in this literature review. In order to provide clarity to the sequence of this literature: national context will first be addressed and then followed by a local, Colorado, context. Both of these will be discussed within a perspective of providing equal educational access to all students. The format of this literature review is modeled in figure 1.

Figure 1: Format of Literature Review

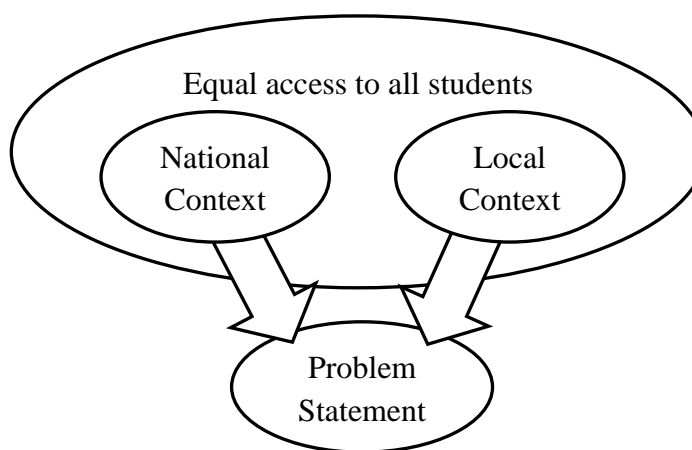


Figure 1. Graphic model identifying the context for the problem statement guiding this literature review.

Schools of Choice Reform

Milton Friedman, often given credit as being the founder of the movement for school choice, first proposed his idea of a voucher system in 1955 that would allow parents freedom to choose the school where their children would attend (Friedman, 1955; Weissberg, 2009). The system Friedman proposed would allow private, parochial, and public schools to receive vouchers as long as they met a minimum curricular standard (Friedman, 1955). Coons and Sugarman (1971) are credited for bringing the conversation of vouchers into the context of social justice and equitable application. Not considering traditional public schools, two distinct models for schools of choice reform

have emerged in the literature: (a) voucher schools and (b) charter schools (Alexander & Alexander; 2009; Hanushek & Lindseth; 2009).

Voucher systems. Economists such as Friedman (1955), Coons and Sugarman (1971), and Hanushek and Lindseth (2009) have encouraged the development of voucher systems based on two primary arguments; (a) educational product functions and (b) increased competition driving school improvements. In *The Economics of Schooling: Production and Efficiency in Public Schools*, Hanushek (1986) described product functions as a cost versus quality examination. In discussing the history of such analyses, Hanushek (1986) noted that concepts associated with production functions are easily applied to industries like petrochemical production but can still be used within the complexity of public education. Hanushek (1986) warned that production functions generated from econometric-educational research has a greater degree of uncertainty than those generated within other fields.

Voucher programs have been implemented in several states including Florida, Maine, Ohio, Vermont, and Wisconsin (Larson, 2002). Hanushek (2009) outlined three generalities of voucher schools:

- (1) the expenditures in the voucher schools are almost always noticeably less than those in the competing public schools, (2) parents tend to be happier with the private schools they have chosen through the voucher programs than with the competing public schools, and (3) the achievement of students receiving vouchers appears to be as high as or higher than that of students in comparable public schools. (p. 77)

A review of available literature revealed mixed findings about voucher schools especially to the claim that voucher schools raise student achievement. For example, Peterson, Myers, and Howell (1998) found significant gains in math achievement scores for students who were enrolled in voucher schools in New York. Krueger and Pei (2004)

re-evaluated the same data that had been available to Peterson et al. (1998) and found no significant effect of voucher schools on student achievement. Krueger and Pei (2004) stated that the difficulty in researching voucher schools stems from availability of data.

Charter schools. Charter schools have emerged as a pervasive school of choice model. Charter schools are defined as “innovative public schools providing choices for families and greater accountability for results” (US Charter Schools, 2011). All but 10 states have passed charter school legislation allowing charter schools to open as publicly funded alternatives to traditional public schools (US Charter Schools, 2011). Appendix A lists all states that have passed charter school legislation, the year legislation was passed, the number of charter schools in the 2010-2011 school year, and the number of students serviced in those schools. At the time these data were published, 5,453 charter schools were nationally serving 1.7 million students (Center for Education Reform, 2011). The first state to pass charter school legislation was Minnesota in 1991 with California following in 1992 (Center for Education Reform, 2011). Several states then passed charter legislation in 1993 including: Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, and Wisconsin. Mississippi is included in Appendix A because charter legislation passed in 1997, but during the 2010-2011 school year no charter schools were in operation (Center for Education Reform, 2011).

Being experimental schools for innovation, parents and legislators had hoped that charter schools would bring new and creative ways of educating students along with inventive school governance practices (Lake, 2008; Lubienski, 2003; Lubienski & Weitzel; 2010). Using the definition of innovation previously discussed, charter schools have done little as far as creating new pedagogical practices or curriculum (Lubienski &

Weitzel; 2010). The primary innovation brought about through charter schools is in the area of school governance (Lake, 2008; Lubienski, 2003). Charter school boards can either be categorized as locally controlled or institutionally controlled (Colwell, 2010). One example of institutional control can be found in Colorado: Colorado Charter School Institute currently operates 18 charter schools across the state and its school board was appointed by the governor and commissioner of Education for Colorado (Colorado Charter School Institute, 2011). All other charter schools in Colorado are locally controlled and sponsored by their local school district (Weiler et al., 2011).

Legislation and School Choice

The federal government has maintained an indirect influence on public education through both structural and rights provisions (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). Structural provisions include the impact of the three branches of the federal government on public education while rights provisions have been written directly, or sometimes implicitly, into the United States Constitution. NCLB legislation and federal grants belong in the category of structural provisions while the implications of the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution fall under the rights provisions. The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, ratified by states in 1791, implicitly gave states control of public education because the authority to control public education had not been explicitly delegated to the federal government (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). The federal government maintains authority in all areas explicitly outlined in the United States Constitution. States have unique educational clauses written into their state constitutions which suggest each state's role in public education (Komer & Neily, 2007).

State sovereignty has influenced differential rates of educational reform across all states. For example, prior to the United States Supreme Court decision of *Brown v.*

Board of Education of Topeka (1954), in which the Supreme Court outlawed segregation, some states had already begun desegregating their public schools (Horn, 2002). Serving as one example: Ohio Supreme Court declared *de jure* segregation unlawful in 1888 (Douglas, 2003). *De jure* segregation is defined as “purposeful segregation” (Alexander & Alexander, 2009, p. 1034).

Desegregation. Published in 1966, Equality of Educational Opportunity, also known as the Coleman Report, (Coleman et al., 1966) was produced in response to Section 402 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which stated:

The Commissioner shall conduct a survey and make a report to the President and the Congress, within two years of the enactment of this title, concerning the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions at all levels in the United States, its territories and possessions, and the District of Columbia. (p.iii)

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided injunctive relief against discrimination with specific regards to voting and the use of public establishments and accommodations.

The historical context of what has become known as the Coleman Report also includes the United States Supreme Court decision of *Brown* (1954) in which Chief Justice Warren wrote:

It is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms. (p. 493)

This context underscores the political climate and nascence of educational-sociometric research in light of equal opportunity across race and economic status. Credit is often given to Coleman (1966) for conducting one of the first and largest social science studies on educational equality (Kahlenberg, 2001; Wong & Nicotera, 2004).

Coleman (1966) measured variance in student achievement across several factors including: school facilities, teacher salaries, grade level, and teacher/principal attitudes towards schooling. A primary goal of the Coleman (1966) study was to identify factors that contributed to student achievement. While several demographic groups were represented within the analyses, the focus was on the contextual and academic differences between Caucasian and African-American students. The primary finding of the Coleman Report (1966) was that differences between schools have little impact on student achievement. The original assumption made in the Coleman Report (1966) was that school funding, and ultimately schools, would be found to be the most significant factor in explaining the achievement disparity between “blacks and whites” (Kahlenberg, 2001, p. 55). What Coleman et al. (1966) found was that family socio-economic status and school peers were the greatest predictors of academic success.

The Coleman Report has been criticized for its methodologies because the statistical analyses were based on assessments designed to measure student aptitude rather than achievement (Carver, 1975; Leyden, 2005). Analysis was inherently biased against finding significant differences between student achievement across various schools. Other researchers have recommended using criterion referenced achievement tests in order to decrease this bias, especially since the Coleman Report (1966) was designed to identify differences in student achievement as a potential function of school dynamics (Carver, 1975). Despite its criticisms, the seminal quality of the Coleman Report is recognized by researchers regardless of the flaws found within the report’s methodology or findings (Hanushek, 1986). Hanushek pointedly stated, “its importance is more in terms of intellectual history than insights into schools and the educational

process” (p. 1150). The Coleman Report sparked policy discussion while causing researchers to take a closer look at their methodologies used when studying complex social issues such as public education (Carver, 1975; Hanushek, 1986; Kahlenberg, 2001; Wong & Nicotera, 2004).

The *Brown* (1954) decision made *de jure* segregation unlawful but had little sustained effect on *de facto* segregation. *De jure* segregation occurs as a result of specific law while *de facto* segregation can be a result of choice or actual condition such as place of residence (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). Some school districts then adopted a “freedom of choice” stance on public education that allowed students to choose their own public school (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). In *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968), plaintiffs alleged that the New Kent County school board in Eastern Virginia had maintained a racially segregated school system under the “freedom of choice” plan. The court found that the school board’s plan did not meet an adequate level of desegregation compliance (*Green v. County School Board of New Kent Count*, 1968). *De facto* segregation continued to be pervasive in school districts until the Supreme Court ruling in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) which allowed busing to be a judicially acceptable alternative to overcome *de facto* segregation (Alexander & Alexander, 2009).

Charter Schools Became a Legal Alternative. Passing the first state charter school statute in 1991, Minnesota paved the way for charter school legislation in American public education. Each state may define “charter school” differently due to state sovereignty (United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2011). Charter schools may receive exemptions which are outlined on a state-by-state basis also due to

state sovereignty of public education but federal laws that have educational implications still apply (Alexander & Alexander, 2009; Komer & Neily, 2007; United States Department of Education[USDOE], 2000). While this list is not exhaustive, some of the federal laws that are applied to all public education include: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, or national origin; Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments prohibiting discrimination based on gender; and Title II of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act which both prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities (USDOE, 2000). The Individuals with Disabilities Education and Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004, also federally mandated, guarantees a free and appropriate education to students with special needs (IDEIA, 2004).

Charter School Program. Original authorization at the federal level for the Charter School Program (CSP) occurred in October, 1994, under Title X Amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1965 (USDOE, 2011). The Charter School Expansion Act of 1988 amended the CSP and provided more stimulus funds to charter schools in states with significant chartering activity (Allen, 1998). President Bill Clinton signed into law the Charter School Expansion Act and cited three criteria which gives priority to states that: (a) review the performance of each charter school at least once every five years to ensure accountability, (b) increase the number of high-quality charter schools, and (c) only allow funds associated with the CSP program to go to charter schools that are measured by the same assessments used for other public schools in the same state (Clinton, 1998).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. NCLB was signed into effective action on January 8, 2002, by President George Bush (Bush, 2002). In front of a crowd at Hamilton High School in Ohio, Bush said:

No longer is it acceptable to hide poor performance. No longer is it acceptable to keep results away from parents. One of the interesting things about this bill, it says that we're never going to give up on a school that's performing poorly; that when we find poor performance, a school will be given time and incentives and resources to correct their problems. A school will be given time to try other methodologies, perhaps other leadership, to make sure that people can succeed. If, however, schools don't perform, if, however, given the new resources, focused resources, they are unable to solve the problem of not educating their children, there must be real consequences. There must be a moment in which parents can say, I've had enough of this school. Parents must be given real options in the face of failure in order to make sure reform is meaningful. And so, therefore, this bill's second principle is, is that we trust parents to make the right decisions for their children. Any school that doesn't perform, any school that cannot catch up and do its job, a parent will have these options -- a better public school, a tutor, or a charter school. We do not want children trapped in schools that will not change and will not teach. (para. 20)

With this statement, President Bush articulated the emerging level of increased accountability in public education and federal support of school choice.

The goals of NCLB (2001) legislation were to require states to design state learning standards and assess student learning achievement based on those standards, while holding schools and districts accountable for student performance (Hayes, 2008). One salient feature of NCLB (2001) was that it caused states to begin measuring growth and performance of students disaggregated by several demographic features such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status (Dunn & Allen, 2009). This feature allowed states to measure achievement gaps while monitoring the progress of all schools. Some states began designing methods for measuring student growth within and between sub-group populations (Dunn & Allen, 2009). Colorado has designed one such growth model

that is used in determining adequate yearly progress for schools and districts (Colorado Department of Education, 2011).

History of Charter Concept

Ray Budde, a retired teacher and administrator, first began exercising the idea of “Education by Charter” in the 1970s as he attempted to outline a book on this new concept (Budde, 1996, p. 71). Tentatively titled *Education by Charter*, Budde circulated his manuscript through friends and colleagues but did not receive much interest in the topic at that time (Budde, 1996). Budde’s charter concept was shelved until it re-emerged in a 1988 National Press Club speech given by Albert Shanker (then president of the American Federation of Teachers) (Shanker, 1988a). Based on Budde’s model, Shanker (1988b) outlined all of the main features of contemporary charter schools with one major exception: the original idea was to allow teachers to apply for and design the parameters of the charter school that would ultimately operate within existing public schools. As Shanker spoke at the National Press Club, he explained the charter model this way: “The school district and the teacher union would develop a procedure that would encourage any group of six or more teachers to submit a proposal to create a new school” (Shanker, 1988a, p. 12). The charter school reform effort has taken an entirely different direction than Budde’s original conception which was endorsed by Shanker (Kahlenberg, 2007).

Charter Policy and Procedures

Charter schools must apply for a charter application through a sponsoring local education agency (LEA) which is typically represented by the local school district. LEA is a term used to identify school districts within federal and state statutes (Alexander & Alexander, 2009; Rapp & Eckes, 2007). In some states, charter schools can apply to

become their own LEA which then allows them to operate as their own school district (Rhim, Ahearn, & Lange, 2006). Wisconsin charter law, for instance, has allowed charter schools to operate as their own LEA (Drame, 2011). Charter schools that operate as their own LEA must meet the following criteria: (a) provide free access in a least restrictive environment to children with disabilities, (b) provide methods for identifying previously undiagnosed students with disabilities, and (c) meet all federal guidelines with regards to special education mandates (Rhim, Lange, Ahearn, & McLaughlin, 2007).

Colorado waivers given to charter schools. Charter schools that are assigned as their own LEA must individually meet all federal mandates such as IDEIA. Charter schools that do not operate as their own LEA are not held to the same degree of accountability. In either case, charter schools are granted a variety of waivers by their sponsoring state. In the case of charter schools not acting as their own LEA, sponsoring school districts must show that the district is meeting the needs of all students covered by IDEIA not necessarily that the charter schools are meeting these specialized needs (Rhim et al., 2006; Rhim et al., 2007).

A comprehensive list of the 13 waivers granted to Colorado charter schools can be found in Appendix B. While the idea of waivers is not particularly important, gravity begins to form around the idea when considering charter school enrollment statistics and legally warranted practices. Waivers can either be in reference to district policies and procedures or state educational laws. In Colorado, charter schools do not automatically receive waivers but must include a request for each waiver in their charter school application (Carpenter & Kafer, 2009). In the Colorado League of Charter Schools

statement of principles, waivers are described as essential for charter schools to provide proven or innovative educational programs (Colorado League of Charter Schools, 2011).

Accountability. The charter school movement was founded on a principle of various constituencies holding charter schools to a higher degree of accountability (Stillings, 2005). According to Stillings, there are three levels of accountability that charter schools must recognize: 1) authorizer, 2) market, and 3) NCLB. Authorization of charter schools refers to the charter's sponsoring agency which technically has the authority to deny reauthorization of a charter if the school does not meet its performance-based objectives (NCLB, 2001). Market accountability refers to the supply and demand factor of school choice. The argument is that if parents and students want charter schools to be an alternative to tradition public schools then they will create or enroll in charter schools (Stillings, 2005).

NCLB (2001) mandates that all public schools will be measured by a state's standardized accountability system. While this seems to include charter schools, NCLB (2001) provides clear direction for charter school accountability: "the accountability provisions under this Act shall be overseen for charter schools in accordance with State charter school law" (p. 1449). The Accountability Act of 1971 provided a legal context for accountability in Colorado public schools (Dam, 2004). The Colorado Charter Schools Act of 1993 clearly states that charter schools must participate in state standardized assessments, CSAP, which Colorado adopted in 1997 (Dam, 2004).

Enrollment. Charter schools are open to all students and those receiving CSP funds must enroll students based on a random-lottery system when applicants exceed enrollment capacity (USDOE, 2011). Students may be exempted from lottery selection

based on the following reasons: (a) students who are either enrolled in a public school or eligible to attend that school at the time it is converted to a charter school, (b) siblings of enrolled or admitted students of the charter school, and (c) children of the charter school's staff or founding members (USDOE, 2011). NCLB (2001) states that charter schools must have a plan to inform the community about the charter school and provide a description of how "students in the community will be given equal opportunity to attend the charter school" (p. 1791).

Charter schools are often designed to meet the particular needs of a specific group of students such as: at-risk, minority language needs, or science-math focused (Garcia & Garcia, 1996). According to *Charter Schools Program* non-regulatory guidance published by USDOE (2011), one of the identifying characteristics of a charter school is that it "operates in pursuit of a specific set of educational objectives determined by the school's developer" (p.6). Meeting the needs of students with special education requirements is one of the greatest difficulties for charter schools that operate as their own LEA (Drame, 2011). In instances where charter schools cannot meet the needs of a particular student, these schools have been found to counsel these students out of the charter school (Bulkey & Fisler, 2002; Ramanathan & Zollers, 1999).

Governance. Charter school governance can take a variety of forms due to the intention of charter school autonomy in charter school law (Colorado Department of Education, 1993; NCLB, 2001). Appendix C is a comprehensive list of essential policies for all charter schools as outlined by CDE (2010). These policies are not specifically prescriptive; instead, they are guidelines of federal and state laws from which charter schools have no wavier. CDE (2010) provides two broad models for charter school

governance: (a) the board develops policy while the administrators develop procedures adhering to policy; and (b) policy governance by which the board develops policy outlining the limitations of administrators.

Models of Charters

Several models for charter schools have received national recognition (Carpenter & Kafer, 2009). Carpenter and Kafer (2009) reported the number of Colorado charter schools using nationally recognized models to be: 57 Core Knowledge, 7 Montessori, 6 Expeditionary Learning, 3 Paideia, 1 Success For All, and 1 Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). Each of these models can be described either as an approach to teaching and student interaction or a curricular guide. In either case, these choices are not exclusive to charter schools. These models have been used in private and public non-charter schools alike for over two decades. Colorado charter schools not using nationally recognized models have developed their own models which have not received national recognition (Carpenter & Kafer, 2009)

Core Knowledge. The Core Knowledge curriculum was designed based on E.D. Hirsch's book *Cultural Literacy* (Ellington & Rutledge, 2001). In his book, Hirsch identified 5,000 essential concepts, dates, phrases, and names that "literate Americans know" (Hirsch, 1987, p. 146). Hirsch argued that the preliminary list of items should serve as a basis for American common culture (Hirsch, 1987). He described this as a national vocabulary that if used properly would mitigate the cultural fragmentation of curriculum that is currently occurring in American schools (Leistyna, 1998). This list was used in the development of the scope and sequence of the Core Knowledge K-8 curriculum (Ellington & Rutledge, 2001). The curriculum is laid out in a sequence that presents broad topics early in the program and continually revisits such topics

throughout a student's elementary and middle school experience (Ellington & Rutledge, 2001). In the late 1980s, just after the publication of the first Core Knowledge sequence, proponents of Core Knowledge criticized curricular alignment to common core standards and learning objectives because the focus seemed to be on student's academic skills rather than on specific content (Gewertz, 2010). There has been a shift in this philosophy due to NCLB mandates and state articulation and alignment of standards and learning objectives. Now, The Core Knowledge Foundation arranges its materials to be more clearly aligned to state standards for most states (Gewertz, 2010).

Criticisms of Hirsch's curriculum seem to have a common theme: the essential content used to build the national vocabulary was designed from a mono-cultural perspective (Johnson, Janisch, & Morgan-Fleming, 2001). Peterson (1995) argued that the culture espoused and promoted by Hirsch's curriculum may not be relevant to diverse learners. The dominant cultural perspective of the Core Knowledge sequence is primarily white American middle-class with an agenda at preserving the power of this dominant culture (Arvizu & Saravia-Shore, 1990). Paulo Freire (1970), author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, argued that oppressed learners must infuse their culture into any meaningful learning experience, less they become oppressors themselves.

Montessori. In 1907, Maria Montessori developed the first Montessori school which served children with mental retardation and economic disadvantages (Pickering, 1992). Historically, Montessori schools primarily serviced young students through the age of six (Brehony, 2000). During the 1990s, acceptance of the Montessori model had grown and expanded to include middle and secondary school programs (Seldin, 2002). Lopata, Wallace, and Finn (2005) reported that more than 4,000 Montessori programs

were operating in the United States. The Montessori method has been described as an age-appropriate student driven exploratory that is based on individual student interests (Lopata et al., 2005).

A notable difference between Montessori schools and traditional public schools is the physical arrangement of the classroom. Montessori classrooms are designed so that stations of student desks create heterogeneous age groups spanning three years (Chattin-McNichols, 1992). Students also receive considerably less direct whole-group instruction in Montessori classrooms often accruing to less than one hour per day (Baines & Snortum, 1973). These methods have received mixed findings with regards to their effects on student achievement in reading and math (Lopata et al., 2005). In general, Montessori schools do not typically use standardized tests as the focused measurement of students' abilities and learning outcomes (Damore, 2004). These schools put a significant emphasis on developing and attending to student's emotional needs in order to build intrinsically motivated learners (Edwards, 2003). Supporting this claim, Rathunde and Mihaly (2005) found that middle school students from Montessori schools reported having higher intrinsic motivation for school work than their counterparts in traditional middle schools.

Expeditionary Learning. Established in 1987, the Harvard Outward Bound Project was the progenitor of the Expeditionary Learning (EL) model (Expeditionary Learning, 2011). Hallmarks of the EL model include: project-based learning, interdisciplinary investigations, and data-driven planning (Rugen & Hartl, 1994). A driving focus of the EL model, much like the Montessori model, is based on building student motivation. (Riordan & Klein, 2010). EL programs have been described as long-

term student driven investigations, focused on a specific topic, aligned to state standards, and resulting in a performance, product, or project (Clark, 2000).

There is a strong focus on continued professional development and transformational support within the EL model (Klein & Riordan, 2009). Klein and Riordan (2009) developed a six stage continuum of professional development implementation based on their research of EL schools. This continuum includes:

1. no implementation or rejection of the EL model,
2. token implementation: by teachers used EL jargon accompanied by unaligned actions,
3. mistaken implementation: teachers attempted implementation with fidelity but failed at some crucial aspect,
4. direct implementation: teachers transferred their professional development experience directly to their classes without any changes,
5. tinkering: teachers adapted some aspects of their professional development but still remained true to their original professional development experience,
6. crafting and jiggering: teachers adapted their current understanding of professional development and created new methods that they had not yet experienced in their professional development training (Klein & Riordan, 2009).

With such a concentrated focus on developing teachers' professional abilities to meet students' academic needs, EL schools continue to foster increased students success and academic achievement (Rugen & Hartl, 1994).

Paideia. The Paideia Program is a transformational, systemic whole-school approach to educational reform (Roberts & Trainor, 2004). The foundational principles

of this program are focused on the belief that: (a) all children can learn, (b) equity in public education is at least as important as equality, (c) motivation for lifelong learning must be built and fostered in all learners, and (d) teachers are facilitators in the learning process rather than conveyors of knowledge (Paideia Active Learning, 2011). This model is very similar to the EL model in the practice of having students engage in intensive project-based assignments.

Based on teacher responses and observations of those teachers, Hatt-Echeverria and Jo (2005) concluded that the Paideia Program is more effective for high achieving students because teachers implementing the program blamed poor academic performance on individual students. The critique of the Paideia Program is similar the criticism presented on the Core-Knowledge curriculum in that the program promoted an “ideological hegemony of Whiteness” while failing to acknowledge the cultural nuances that accompany students of diversity (Hatt-Echeverria & Jo, 2005, p. 64). Hatt-Echeverria and Jo (2005) acknowledged the first principle of the Paidiea Program in their publication but add the exception, “All children can learn ... if they are willing to conform to White, middle class ideals and standards” (p. 64).

Success For All Program. Success for All (SFA) was designed as a comprehensive reform approach for students that were identified as at-risk (Klingner, Cramer, & Harry, 2006; Slavin & Madden, 2006). Five beliefs provide the SFA foundation: (a) all children can learn, (b) schools make the difference, (c) involvement of the community and family is the key to student success, (d) leaders and practitioners must make research based decisions, and (e) all professionals must relentlessly pursue effective methods based on students needs (Success for All, 2011). While there are

similarities between SFA and Paideia Program foundational beliefs, SFA seems to take the extra step towards meeting the needs of all learners regardless of their background. Several researchers have reported significant gains in academic performance for historically disadvantaged students enrolled in SFA schools (Chambers et al., 2007; Hurley, Chamberlain, & Slavin, 2001; Slavin & Madden, 2006). These findings are not without their research based criticisms.

Jonathan Kozol (2006) raised ethical issues with Slavin's research. Kozol (2006) stated that Slavin's findings of SFA schools closing achievement gaps is not directly in question, but the methods producing those findings was purposefully biased in favor of SFA schools. For example, Slavin never controlled for the effects of other school initiatives that might have led to significant gains in student achievement. Pogrow (2002) described SFA as being built upon "a history of scientifically invalid research creating the appearance of success in a way that masks actual failure" (2002, p. 463). Based on his research, SFA schools are no better equipped at meeting the needs of at-risk learners than their tradition public school counterparts (Pogrow, 2002). The fact that Robert Slavin not only founded SFA but has been a chief researcher in the publications about SFA introduces a unique degree of researcher bias (USDOE, 2007).

Knowledge Is Power Program. The Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) model was launched in 1994 by Mark Feinberg and Dave Levin (Macey et al., 2009). They had originally designed the program for 5th grade students, but with success extended the program to include all grades. The KIPP model rests on five philosophical pillars: (a) high expectations, (b) choice and commitment, (c) more time on task, (d) fostering the power to lead, and (e) a focus on results. KIPP schools are chosen by

parents because of their proclaimed success in raising students' academic achievement scores. There is evidence to support the claim that KIPP schools out-perform other area schools but most of that supporting data has been collected and published by proponents of KIPP (Macey et al., 2009).

One inherent weakness in the Macey et al.(2009) evaluation of the KIPP program is the lack of critical focus on the ancillaries of public education such as student retention and attrition rates. Carnoy et al. (2005) have criticized KIPP schools based on their findings that KIPP programs are often exclusive with their enrollment and retention practices. Using nearly identical search terms for all charter models previously discussed, the Montessori and Expeditionary Learning models were the only two models that did not explicitly yield reported exclusionary factors based on student diversity. Notably, the preponderance of Montessori schools are private institutions (North American Montessori Teachers' Association, 2003).

Choice and diversity. Prior to 1991, some attempts were made by public schools to make the curricular offerings associated with charter schools such as magnet schools with a focus on specialized curricula (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). While charter schools are free from some state regulatory statutes, all federal statutes still apply. With the recent inception of charter schools, very little case law exists concerning charter school policy or practice. Of the 144 civil rights cases filed against charter schools during the years of 1998-2002, more than 78% of all alleged complaints have involved section 504 violations (Martin, 2005). Section 504 stated:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States... shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or

activity receiving Federal financial assistance. (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, § 794)

Charter schools have been described as exclusive and guilty of “creaming” or “skimming” the best students off the top (Carnoy et al., 2005; Garcia, 2007; Miron et al., 2010). One example that helps explain both of these attributes is the practice of counseling students out of charter schools. “Counseling out” is a term given to the practice of charter schools in which the charter school suggests to a child’s parent or guardian that the school’s facilities cannot meet the child’s required needs (Casanova, 2008). The meaning of that term will be broadened to include any suggestion made by a charter school that could result in a student’s placement back into public non-charter schools. The purpose of broadening the definition of counseling out is for the ad hoc use of including those students whose behaviors, needs, or academic achievement have not been identified as requiring special education assistance. Examples of such behaviors or needs could include poor grades, gang related activities, or inability to purchase school lunch (Casanova, 2008; Weiler & Every, 2009).

Charter schools, by state statute, are given some freedoms from state regulations placed on public education. It is with these freedoms that they attempt to offer parents alternatives to standard curriculum and practices of their public non-charter counterparts. It has been suggested that charter schools can be a place of experimentation by which purely public schools can follow upon their success (Casanova, 2008; Martin, 2005).

One study showed that New Jersey charter school population does, in fact, reflect local populations with regards to ethnic diversity but suggested that there is an under representation of students receiving special education services and students identified as having limited English proficiency (Martin, 2005). One explanation given for New

Jersey's charter school population and ethnic diversity being in line with surrounding school districts is that New Jersey has enacted the Charter School Program Act requiring all charter schools to statistically represent the ethnic diversity found in their local communities (Martin, 2005). When looking at students receiving special education services in Washington D.C., there is a lower proportion of students receiving services compared to their surrounding school districts (Gleason, 2007).

While charter school law can be written free from some state statute, federal laws cannot be circumvented. Such laws typically cited include Individuals with Disabilities Act and 504 provisions (Casanova, 2008; Martin, 2005). This is where one instance of counseling students out of charter schools can come into play. Charter schools can counsel a student out by suggesting the school is not equipped to meet his or her particular needs. In an interview, Dr. Vogelcheck reported cases when the leadership in his school participated in counseling students out of their charter school for academic reasons relating to the student's special needs (Every, 2011). Frankenberg et al. (2011) also reported a trend in charter schools to be selective in their admissions process with respect to students needs. While there seems to be an initiative in public non-charter schools to find ways to meet the needs of all students, this motivation does not seem to be mandated on the charter schools. While no specific instances of counseling students out of charter schools based on special education services or other diversity needs can be found, Martin (2005) suggested that incipient nature of charter schools and the lack of case law could.

Charter schools nationally educate a smaller per populous percentage of students receiving special education services concurrent with serving at-risk and diverse

populations (Gleason, 2007). This trend also existed in Colorado during 2009-2010 (Weiler et al., 2011). Gleason (2007) suggested that one possible explanation for the reported disparity of charter schools serving students with special needs is that charter schools meet the educational needs of students before they are identified as having special needs. This premise will be abandoned due to lack of published data and excused as speculation. In its place will be offered the suggestion that charter schools either limit the enrollment of students identified as having special needs or the school will in fact counsel students out of the school with the impression that it is in the student's best interest (Gleason, 2007). Herein lies the legal foreplay that portends the current climate of charter school and public education law. Charter schools not only have the tacit option of counseling students out of their schools but also do not have a legal obligation to transport students to and from school (NCLB, 2001).

When parents have the easy option of choosing to enroll their child into a neighboring public non-charter school with free transportation without any hesitation from that school, parents would rarely choose the route towards litigation. Also, even in the few disputes that have made it to the upper level courts, the courts have overwhelmingly sided with charter schools, as discriminatory practice has historically been difficult to prove (Casanova, 2008). The connection between charter schools' discriminatory practices towards other diverse learners must be recognized. Weiler and Every (2009) reported an instance where two students who qualified for free lunch were counseled out of a charter school because the school did not have a kitchen and therefore reported not having the means to provide free lunch to qualifying students. Another

example of discriminatory practices of charter schools is a general tendency to counsel out students with poor academic standings (West, Ingram, & Hind, 2006).

Diversity, reform, and achievement gaps. NCLB (2001) set forth a series of mandates articulating that school districts provide more choices to parents while closing the achievement gaps between all advantaged and historically disadvantaged students. NCLB (2001) states that “the development and design of innovative educational methods and practices that promote diversity and increase choices in public elementary schools and public secondary schools and public educational programs” (p. 1087) should be the focus of school reform. Focusing on at-risk students and school choice, NCLB (2001) has this to say: “In providing students the option to transfer to another public school, the local educational agency shall give priority to the lowest achieving children from low-income families” (p. 1478). The Colorado Charter Schools Act of 1993 echoed similar ideas with regards to diversity stating “this article is enacted for the following purpose: ... to increase learning opportunities for all pupils, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for pupils who are identified as academically low-achieving” (Colorado Department of Education, 1993, p. 30).

The language used in federal and Colorado state statute is clear with regards to meeting the needs of diverse learners. As districts review and consider charter school applications, the Colorado Charter Schools Act of 1993 states that “priority consideration be given to charter school applications designed to increase the educational opportunities of at-risk pupils” (Colorado Department of Education, 1993, p. 36). In establishing schools of choice, NCLB (2001) requires districts to provide “a description of the manner in which historically underserved students (such as students

from low-income families, limited English proficient students, students with disabilities, or students who have low literacy skills) and their families, will participate” (p. 1832).

Conclusion

Charter schools have been granted waivers which arguably give them an advantage in meeting the needs of all students. Currently, no consensus has been reached on charter schools’ ability to meet the needs of all learners. Given the turbulent history of American public education and issues surrounding segregation, a concentrated effort must be given to developing a theory of charter schools and how they fit into the legislative architecture of public education. Charter schools have been shown to increase segregation within school districts. With the rise in charter school enrollment accompanied by increasing support for schools of choice; federal, state, and local policy must be realigned to ensure student equity, access, and adequacy across all publicly funded schools. In 1968, the United States Supreme Court found that the “freedom of choice” plan adopted by New Kent County School Board was an unacceptable plan for desegregating the schools in that district (*Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*, 1968). More than 40 years later, schools of choice reform -federally supported through grants and NCLB mandates- has been found to lead to greater racial isolation and *de facto* segregation much like the “freedom of choice” from 40 years earlier.

The Problem

Charter schools are given waivers in order to experiment with innovative strategies and now a federally funded educational reform. Nowhere have charter schools been given waivers from desegregation. With that stated, the problem statement central

to this study is: Evidentiary support suggests that charter school reform might be leading to greater levels of racial isolation.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the guiding research questions of this research project I have used a combination of: interviews, analysis of educational research literature, and extant document analysis concurrent with peer analysis and constant comparative techniques. These questions will be supported through an analysis of the semi-structured interview questions used to focus this study.

- Q1 What evidentiary support suggests that charter schools provide equal access to all students especially those identified as historically disadvantaged?
- Q2 How can leaders of charter schools influence student diversity and enrollment trends within their school?
- Q3 What are the beliefs of leaders of charter schools with regard to student diversity within their school?

I used a constructivist approach toward creating a grounded theory that can adequately describe practices within charter schools that influence student enrollment, recruitment, and attrition. The epistemological approach of constructivism is consistent with other studies that have utilized grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006). This qualitative methodology has been purposefully chosen because its characteristics and constructs fit the nature of the current research:

You use grounded theory when you need a broad theory or explanation of a process. Grounded theory generates a theory when existing theories do not address your problem or the participants that you plan to study. Because a theory is “grounded” in the data, it provides a better explanation than a theory borrowed “off the shelf,” because it fits the situation, actually works in practice,

is sensitive to individuals in a setting, and may represent all of the complexities actually found in the process. (Creswell, 2008, p. 432)

Creswell (2007) suggested that “the methodology evolves during the course of the study, so writing it early poses difficulties. However, the researcher begins somewhere, and she or he describes preliminary ideas about the sample, the setting, and the data collection procedures” (p. 190). One implication of this approach is the possibility of needing to revisit the literature with regard to any major themes that emerge and have not yet been considered in the literature review that will be used to guide these methods. With this in mind, I have chosen to use the four elements identified by Crotty (1998) to guide the reciprocal process of developing meaning within the context of constructivist interaction (see figure 2). While this model provides a general framework for guiding the thought process, it will not be used as a formulaic outline. Crotty stated “we have four elements that inform one another” (1988, p. 4).

Figure 2: Four Elements

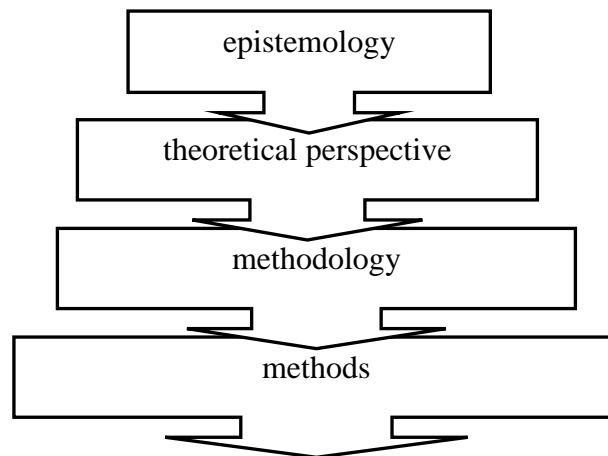


Figure 2. Guiding elements of qualitative research identified by Crotty are identified in this flow chart (1998).

Qualitative Research

Why choose a qualitative approach to answer the central question of this research when quantitative or mixed method research strategies could be used to tease out variance across participants' responses to previously determined questions? Two primary reasons will be discussed: 1) complexity of the social phenomenon central to the problem and 2) lack of current theory and research. Creswell (2008) referred to quantitative approaches when he wrote "traditional investigations created a contrived situation in which the research participant was 'taken out' of context and placed within an experimental situation far removed from his or her personal experiences" (p. 50). One goal of this research is to place myself as the researcher at the nexus of the investigation to provide rich context and meaning to the problem being researched. With this in mind, the intention is to avoid creating a contrived situation guided by rhetorically unbiased statistical analysis. In keeping with the qualitative tradition of recognizing the researcher as the primary instrument, I have made a conscience effort to write this methodology chapter from the first-person perspective for the purpose of creating closeness between myself, the research, and the readers of this research (Merriam, 2009).

I worked as an educator and instructional coach in a Midwestern-Colorado charter school for four years. While working in those roles I also performed some administrative duties including: teacher observation and evaluation; curriculum development and alignment to state learning standards; and student disciplinary issues. Those experiences influenced the research I focused on throughout my doctoral program, namely, topics including counseling students out of charter schools, financial equity and distribution of funds targeted for at-risk students, and education professionals' beliefs about student diversity within one charter school setting.

Merriam (2009) identified the importance of a qualitative researcher identifying their connections, subjectivities, and biases towards their own research. It is this reflexivity, or self-awareness, that informs the reader of the axiological assumptions of the inquirer (Creswell, 2007). Creswell stated:

In a qualitative study, the inquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field. We say that they ‘position themselves’ in a study. (p. 18)

In the literature review preceding this chapter, I implicitly identify my values as they apply to public education: American public education was founded on principles of providing free and equal access to all students. This has been continually espoused throughout the legal and practical history of public education (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). My bias is that I have yet to find clear evidence that charter schools provide free and equal access to all students.

The complexity of charter school internal policy, guiding statutes, and social context that have given rise to charter school reform has created a categorical imperative for further research in this area of public education (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010). Crotty (1998) articulately distinguished between research designed to discover “a theory that merely reflects the current situation and a theory that seeks to change the situation” (p. 130). Before discussing the theoretical perspective of critical theory implied by Crotty’s statement, I must first develop the argument of choosing qualitative methodologies.

“Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). According to Creswell (2008), qualitative research should be used when addressing problems requiring:

- an exploration in which little is known about the problem
- a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon. (p. 51)

The central phenomenon to be studied is charter school exclusivity. In their comprehensive analysis of charter schools, Lubienski and Weitzel (2010) correctly identified that early charter school research focused on theorized impacts and outcomes of charter schools. Current charter school research has primarily focused on student achievement and demographic composition by pooling large samples of data (Miron et al., 2010). No available research currently exists that theorizes the central phenomenon in question. Janesick (1994) highlighted several other pertinent characteristics of qualitative research that have been taken into consideration and will be applied to this current research:

Qualitative design ...

- is holistic. It looks at the larger picture, the whole picture, and begins with a search for understanding of the whole.
- looks at relationships within a system or culture.
- is focused on understanding a given social setting, not necessarily on making predictions about that setting.
- incorporates room for description of the role of the researcher as well as description of the researcher's own biases and ideological preference.
- requires ongoing analyses of the data. (p. 212)

In summary, a qualitative methodology was chosen because it frees the research from the predetermined parameters and characteristic of quantitative methods while allowing the methodology to take on a protean freedom intended to deeply probe the problem in question (Creswell, 2007).

Epistemology

Epistemology has been defined as “the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity” (epistemology,

2011). The need to identify, justify, and explain the epistemological stance adopted by a researcher can be found in Maynard's (1994) description: "epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate" (p. 10). Issues surrounding limitations, validity, adequacy, and legitimacy guide the usefulness and ultimate utility of any qualitative research (Creswell, 2008). This is not to suggest that quantitative research is not guided by similar constructs; in fact it is (Creswell, 2008). It is the statistical methods and analysis used in quantitative research that guide similar constructs in that field of research.

I identified a constructivist epistemology used to guide this research considering the reciprocal nature of an unstructured interview format used to develop an emergent theory. Aspects of the overarching constructionist view of creating meaning were also considered. Crotty (1998) best summarized and offered suggestion to these immediate contrasting perspectives:

It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term constructivism for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind and to use constructionist where the focus includes the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning. (p. 58)

I believe that it would be an over-statement to suggest that one individual could accurately reflect a singular authoritative reality to any given cultural phenomenon.

Theoretical perspective

Theoretical perspective has been described as "a way of looking at the world and making sense of it" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). The basis for this research project can be found in the theoretical perspective of critical theory. Crotty contrasted traditional theory with critical theory having respectively articulated the differences as "a theory that merely

reflects the current situation and a theory that seeks to change the situation” (1998, p. 130). While this description of critical theory has great appeal to authors and researchers that advocate for its application to educational research, it seems to imply an *a priori* position of identifying something that needs to be changed (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010).

A logical next step would be to suggest that research grounded in critical theory is inherently biased prior to the investigation. In an attempt to avoid such bias, the following description of critical theory will be used to guide all interactions and fundamental reasoning for the current research:

We conceive of critical theory as a participatory approach that engages constituents or stakeholders in a reflective and critical reassessment of the relationship between overarching social, economic, or political systems, such as capitalism or accountabilism, and every day practices. Central to a critical theory argument is that systems like capitalism produce knowledge in such a way as to obscure their oppressive consequences. Unjust practices and arrangements, therefore, do not manifest themselves in straight forward ways but become distorted and hidden over time within contextually and culturally embedded practices. (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010, p. 8)

This description highlights several compelling reasons to frame this research project in the logic structure of critical theory:

- reflective relationship between researcher and participants
- critical reassessment of social settings
- research methodology purposefully chosen to detect potentially oppressive or unjust practices.

Interviewing

Interviewing has been described as “one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 361). This method will be used in the solicitation of data. Fontana and Frey (1994)

warned researchers that the written and spoken word will always have some residual ambiguity regardless of how carefully the researcher words a question or codes the data. With this in mind, I have chosen to use a semi-structured format for interviews in order to create a dialogue with my participants (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2008) described these types of interviews as a means that allows for the participants' own words to guide the study. Characteristics of semi-structured interviews that were utilized in this study include:

- All questions are used flexibly
- Specific data are required from all respondents
- Largest part of interview is guided by list of questions or issues to be explored
- No predetermined working or order. (Merriam, 2009, p. 89)

Using a semi-structured format allowed me to ask participants questions aimed at the purpose of clarifying their own intentions and meaning. These interviewing characteristics are ideal considering the grounded theory methodology used to guide the development of an emergent theory grounded in participants' responses and their own intentionality with respect to developing meaning of the topic in question.

Grounded Theory

Charmaz (2006) described grounded theory methodology as “systemic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (p. 2). These guidelines are comprised of heuristic devices and general principles rather than formulaic strategies (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2003). Denscombe (2003) espoused using a grounded theory approach when a researcher aims to explore new territory in the context of human interactions. This

perspective is supported by Goulding (1999), who advocated for the use of grounded theory when the area of interest does not yet have a long history of empirically based literature supporting any developed theories. Several important characteristics of grounded theory have been acknowledged by Merriam (2009) and were used as guiding practices in this research:

- the investigator is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis
- utilization of constant comparative data analysis techniques
- inductive reasoning used to develop a substantive theory

Grounded theory design has its beginnings in symbolic interactionism. Blumer (1969) identified 3 basic assumptions of symbolic interactionism which will be considered a mediator between researcher and participant interactions in the context of discovering an emergent theory:

- human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them;
- the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows;
- these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (p. 2)

Interactions will be used to guide the development of a grounded theory that attempts to explain how charter schools provide access to historically disadvantaged students.

Participant Selection

Participant selection was guided by both theoretical and maximum variation sampling methods. "Theoretic sampling is strategic, specific, and systematic" (Charmaz,

2006, p. 103). Creswell (2008) defined theoretical sampling as purposeful by which “the researcher chooses forms of data collection that will yield text and images useful in generating a theory” (p. 442). This intentionality was used to locate and identify the schools from which participants were solicited. Maximum variation sampling has been described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as being especially suited for grounded theory designs because it allows for dense conceptualization of a phenomenon across widely varying manifestations.

I began with a list of potential charter schools from which to select participants. Using purposeful selection, three schools were chosen that reflect the spectrum of demographic variation in Colorado charter schools. One school was chosen from each of the following categories: a school whose historically disadvantaged student demographic composition under-represents the demographics of its sponsoring district by more than 15%, a school whose historically disadvantaged student demographic composition over-represents the demographics of its sponsoring district by more than 15%, and a school whose historically disadvantaged student demographic composition is similar (within 5%) to its sponsoring district. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of each charter school chosen for this study as compared with their sponsoring school district's demographic composition.

Table 1

Selected Charter Schools' Demographic Composition

| Schools | School Demographics (minorities) (free and reduced) | District Demographics (minorities) (free and reduced) | School's percentage of District's student population |
|-----------------------|---|---|--|
| Canyon | 19% 17% | 63% 60% | 7% |
| Plains Charter School | 40% 25% | 35% 33% | 3% |
| Mt. Vista Academy | 58% 58% | 29% 29% | Less than 1% |

After identifying three schools that fit the necessary criterion, I contacted the administrator of each school first by letter and then followed by a phone call in order to explain the nature of this research. I explained how the school was chosen and asked if they were interested in participating in this research. After obtaining administrator permission, I then began contacting other potential participants within the school by phone and e-mail. Potential participants were informed that they could expect to receive further details about the study via e-mail. Details included: full description of the study, informed consent document, demographic questionnaire, and a preference list of potential individual interview dates and times on which they will be able to choose their top three choices that best fit their schedule. I informed potential participants that their identities would never be disclosed and ensured confidentiality. It was explained that participation is voluntary and at no time should participants feel obligated or coerced into continuing participation.

Three participants were chosen from each of the selected schools: one administrator, one teacher, and one counselor. In the case of one of these individuals did

not wish to participate in this study, I planned to select another professional staff member from that school that meets the participant criteria. I made every effort to select a participant whose job description matches the job description of the previously selected participant. The following criteria was used to select participants: (a) the participant must have worked a minimum of two years within the selected charter school; (b) the participant is either a teacher, administrator, or counselor within the charter school; (c) the participant is an educational professional with knowledge of the school's enrollment, attrition, and potential marketing strategies within the school's community; and (d) the participant has some knowledge of the student demographic composition of their school.

Participants and Setting

Interview setting will depend on individual participants. I interviewed participants in a setting of their choice dependent upon convenience to each individual. I assumed participants will choose to be interviewed in their respective schools or some other public place such as a library.

Data Collection

Interviews were used as the primary source of data collection. Creswell (2007) stated "interviews play a central role in the data collection in a grounded theory study" (p. 131). This sentiment is echoed and extended by Merriam (2009) who said "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 88). A secondary source of data were texts including: policy and procedures manuals, published information on school websites, and any other texts that participants are comfortable sharing. These documents were coded after interviews had been coded using the codes that emerge from the interviews.

Extant texts in which the “researcher does not affect their construction” (Merriam, p.37, 2009) were used as supplementary sources for understanding general context. One specific use of these texts will be as a point of reference during individual interviews. Memoing allowed me to track my thoughts throughout the entire research process.

Interviews were designed to last between 60 and 90 minutes depending on participant’s responses. Several questions used during the interviews were piloted in a previous study and have been refined based on piloted participant’s recommendations. In keeping with the semi-structured interview format identified by Merriam (2009), interview questions were used as a general framework for each interview and were not read or asked to individual participants as word-for-word questions. This allowed themes to organically emerge from the interview process instead of going in with *a priori* themes identified. All interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and then transcribed. I reserved the right to conduct follow-up interviews with willing participants for purposes of clarification and emergent theme development.

Individual Interviews

The central research question used to guide this study was: What evidentiary support suggests that charter schools provide equal access to all students especially those identified as historically disadvantaged. In order to answer this question, the questions shown in Appendix D will be used to guide each individual semi-structured interview.

Memo Writing

Memo writing (also referred to as memoing) has been described by Charmaz (2006) as “the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing” (p. 73). Memoing was used throughout the data collection and analysis process in order to track my thoughts and use as a source of reflective introspection. These key aspects of the

emergent theory process have been identified by several researchers as necessary in order to increase abstraction of ideas that will be applied to the development of the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Memoing can include any variety of field notes, ideas that arise during interviews, or minutes from meetings. These notes will be used as one source of data triangulation. Creswell (2008) describes triangulation as “the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection” (p. 266).

Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to the recursive process of preparing, organizing, and then reducing the data into themes (Creswell, 2007). Data must be managed through a process of coding which has been described as “nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 173). My task then becomes to find meaning in the data with regard to the phenomenon being researched. Creswell (2008) outlined the process of data analysis, for grounded theory research as (a) open coding, (b) axial coding, and (c) selective coding. This process was applied to the current research during which constant comparative analysis was also be utilized. Member checks were used as one method to support constant comparative analysis.

Constant Comparative Analysis

Charmaz (2006) identified constant comparative analysis as essential to grounded theory design due to the complexity of the emergent process. Through the process of constant comparative analysis, patterns in data emerge as well as dimensional variations across different conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1996). Conceptualization of themes stems from this microscopic examination of data. Consistent with grounded

theory design, theoretical saturation will ultimately result from the reciprocal interaction between the researcher and data through constant comparative techniques (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2008).

Open Coding

Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined open coding as “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101). This first step of the coding process has been given the name open “because you are open to anything possible at this point” (Merriam, 2009, p. 179). Initial conceptualization of the phenomenon being studied begins to emerge during this phase of coding (Charmaz, 2006). Consistent with other grounded theory studies, *incident to incident* coding (a variant of open coding) was used in this study in order to determine initial categories (Charmaz, 2006). This strategy of coding allowed me to fragment data and identify incidents of the phenomena while constantly comparing them to previously identified incidents. The purpose of fracturing the data in this fashion was to sort, synthesize, and ultimately reassemble them. *In vivo* codes (codes created by using participant’s language) were used to name initial categories (Charmaz, 2006). The use of *in vivo* codes allowed me to preserve the language and intent of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Axial Coding

Axial coding is the step in the coding process when I took one of the major categories identified during the open coding phase and placed this category as a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). During this phase of data analysis, I revisited the data and literature in order to provide greater insight into attempting to explain “causal conditions that influence the central phenomena” (Creswell, 2007, p.161). My goal was

to reassemble the data from its previously fragmented state in order to identify: 1) conditions (circumstances of the phenomena); 2) actions/interactions (participants' routine engagements surrounding the phenomena); and 3) consequences (results of participants' routine engagements with central phenomena) (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A coding paradigm (a diagram portraying interrelationships) was designed as a result of axial coding (Creswell, 2008). Strauss and Corbin (1998) referred to this product as a conditional/consequential matrix and suggest this as a technique to beginning researchers who can "often become lost while attempting to sort out all of these complex relationships" (p. 182).

Selective Coding

The final step of the coding process is called selective or theoretical coding (Creswell, 2007; Charmaz, 2006). During this step of the analytic process, I generated hypotheses that attempt to explain axial codes and the coding matrix previously developed. These hypotheses were then synthesized into a theory that acts as an abstract explanation of the central phenomena.

Limitations

Several limitations might impact this study and the credibility of its findings. These limitations include: (a) the subjective nature of social interactions and my interpretations of these actions; (b) my bias as a researcher in terms of understanding public school law and its applications; (c) replication of this study by other researchers using the same methodology; (d) the ability to apply the findings of this study to other schools, districts, and states, and (e) social desirability bias. I have made specific considerations in choosing a research design and methodology that should mitigate the effects of each limitation previously listed.

As a qualitative researcher, I struggle with the notion of subjective forms of meaning when dealing with complex social phenomena. I find solace in Merriam's (2009) words:

Qualitative research, however, is not conducted so that the laws of human behavior can be isolated. Rather, researchers seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experienced it. Since there are many interpretations of what is happening, there is no benchmark by which to take repeated measure and establish reliability in the traditional sense. (p. 220)

With this, Merriam (2009) casted implications across several areas concerning the usefulness and utility of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. Each of these will be addressed individually.

Credibility

Merriam (2009) described credibility of qualitative research as the counterpart of internal validity in quantitative research: "How congruent are the findings with reality? Do the findings capture what is really there" (Merriam, 2009, p.213)? An assumption of qualitative research is that reality is holistic and continually changing (Crotty, 1998). With this in mind, credibility in qualitative research can be approached when: 1) the researcher has achieved intimate familiarity with the setting and topic; 2) the data sufficiently merit the researcher's claims; 3) conclusions have been reached through systematic comparisons between observations and data (Charmaz, 2006). Credibility of this research is grounded in each of these characteristics identified by Charmaz (2006) and was furthered through the critique process associated with my doctoral committee and the Institutional Review Board at the University of Northern Colorado.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research has been compared to the concept of external validity found in quantitative methods in that both are concerned with the

degree of generalizability of the research in question (Merriam, 2009). Generalizations (the ability of research findings to be applied from a statistical sample to a population) made in quantitative research is literally the product of the statistical methods applied to the data and the assumptions made by the researcher (Creswell, 2008). In this sense of the term *generalizability*, qualitative research cannot be generalized to populations but findings can be transferred to other settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) articulately contrasted the difference between these similar terms by stating that within the process of transferability: “the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do” (p. 298).

Dressman’s (2008) critique of qualitative research specifically addressed this problem of generalizability when he said:

I will argue that advocates in the last two groups of qualitative and ethnographic approaches are not being completely accurate, either with themselves or with others, when they state that their methods are not intended to produce generalizable findings. If this were the case, then every published case study and naturalistic report would have to be written-and read-as completely fresh and new, and understood without reference to the reader or writer’s prior knowledge or experience of people or situations. (p. 61)

Dressman was referring to grounded theory designs when he stated “in the last two groups” (Dressman, 2008, p.61). Dressman (2008) could have used the term transferable in place of generalizable as this is exactly what he was implying. With this in mind, the burden of proof for transferability lies with those individuals that attempt to apply the findings of this current research to other situations not specifically identified by this research.

Confirmability

Creswell (2007) described confirmability in qualitative research as the level of objectivity within the research. In order to decrease subjective researcher bias and ultimately increase objectivity, the following methods used throughout this research project: triangulation of data, peer review, negative case analysis, and member checks.

Triangulation of data. Creswell (2008) defined triangulation as “the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of collection” (p.266). Triangulation was achieved by utilizing constant comparative analysis techniques concurrent with the other four confirmability methods to be discussed.

Peer review. Merriam (2009) identified this process as implicit to any graduate research project or thesis through the interactions, reviews, and critiques of the committee towards the developing research of the student.

Negative case analysis. In negative case analysis, the researcher continually refines and redefines all hypotheses “in light of negative or disconfirming evidence” (Creswell, p. 208, 2007). Negative case analysis was achieved by using constant comparative analysis until the point where all axial coding categories became theoretically saturated. This aspect of confirmability, negative case analysis, was used in determining the sampling strategy of maximum variation sampling in order to have participant representation across all dimensions of the phenomena in consideration.

Member checks. In member checks, participants are asked to perform analysis and reflection over data and findings. This is then used as a basis for comparison between their interpretations of the data versus those of the primary researcher’s. In

order to strengthen the findings of this study, I asked participants if they would be willing to perform member checks throughout various phases of the research.

Dependability

In qualitative research, dependability refers to the degree to which the study represents the data. Several sources of data have been chosen in order to create a broad representation of the central phenomena. Coding and analytic strategies were purposefully chosen in order to create a high level of dependability within this current research.

Summary

Chapter III outlines the qualitative (grounded theory) design I selected in order to answer the central question and discover an emergent theory surrounding the central phenomenon. A grounded theory approach was chosen in order to develop the lacking body of available literature with specific regards to theories aimed at conceptualizing the relationship between charter schools and historically disadvantaged students. The purpose of Chapter IV will be to provide rich thick description of the participants' responses to interview questions. This can be used to inform readers of transferability of the current research.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In keeping with the tradition of qualitative methodology espoused by Merriam (2009), I have written in first person in order to reveal the closeness between myself (the researcher and instrument of analysis) and the collected data. The format for this chapter will include: 1) a brief overview of the purpose that frames and provokes this study, 2) a cursory discussion of data collection and analysis procedures, 3) interviews aggregated by the schools from which participants were selected, 4) identified themes based on interviews, and 5) a general summary of findings. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified, it is the responsibility of the reader and practitioner to determine the specific degree of transferability of the current research. The descriptions of participants' schools and methodologies should be referenced when determining that transferability.

Purpose of the Study

Charter schools have been criticized as being selective and exclusive (Carnoy, Jacobsen, Mishel, & Rothstein, 2005; Finnigan et al., 2004; Frankenberg et al., 2011; Garcia, 2007). As a result of these possible filtering processes, charter schools have been identified as one possible influence that has led to increased racial isolationism and *de facto* segregation (Carnoy et al., 2005; Finnigan et al., 2004; Frankenberg et al., 2011; Garcia, 2007). Empirical data and statistical analysis can be used to both support and reject these claims (Miron, Urschel, Mathis, and Tornquist, 2010). The purpose of this grounded theory study was to analyze written and unwritten policies and practices of

Colorado charter schools with regard to student enrollment, diversity issues, and attrition. What systems are in place that might influence student enrollment? Can charter school leaders influence those systems and if so then how? Using interviews, document analysis, and data mining techniques, I hoped to cast a light into the recessed corners of school-choice and a temporal reality of Colorado charter school enrollment. I anticipate findings will be used to inform state, district, and school level policy-writers and practitioners so that they may ensure equitable access to all public schools of choice.

Data Collection and Analysis

Nine interviews were conducted with professionals who worked in Colorado charter schools during the 2011-2012 school year. Theoretical and maximum variation sampling methods were used to select the three schools and each of the three participants from each school (Charmaz, 2006). These methods were chosen in order to provide a wide variety of perspectives and insights. Interviews ranged from 45 to 77 minutes. Interview transcripts were used to develop initial and final coding structures. Other sources of data included observations of school setting and environment, mission and vision statements, school website postings, policy handbooks, and charter authorization documents. I chose to use a semi-structured interview format in order to create a dialogue around each question (see appendix D). All interviews were recorded on a handheld digital audio-recording device and were transcribed.

Printed transcriptions and documents were used during the coding process of deconstructing the data. White board personal reflection and results of memo writing were used to reconstruct the data. As an adult learner, I have found it advantageous for me to have the walls of my home-office covered in white Mylar-board in order for me to quickly jot ideas, diagrams, or themes using dry-erase markers. Using white board

personal reflection liberated me to track my ideas in a way that did not imply permanence. I have found by using this strategy I am more likely to continually revise my own cognitive structures. Theme and theoretical saturation was achieved through each of the processes previously identified. Saturation of themes warranted no further data collection. All documents, transcripts, and field notes were rigorously examined using open, axial, and selective coding techniques in order to identify major themes. Document analysis served the purpose of reassuring initial coding structures and to inform and confirm the emergent theory model that will be discussed at the end of this chapter. Two and three dimensional visualizations were developed in an attempt to explain the emergent theory (see figures 3 and 4).

Interviews

All names and locations were given pseudonyms in order to protect the confidentiality of all participants and the charter schools in which they work. In the same respect; all demographics, compositional make-ups, and student counts will be reported within a range of either plus or minus 2% of their actual compositions. Three schools were chosen on the basis of representing the maximum variation of demographic differences, namely the percent of minority students that make up the student population, when compared to their districts: Mt. Vista Academy is a charter school that represented having a greater percentage of minority students served, Plains Charter School represented serving approximately the same percentage of minority students, and Canyon Preparatory represented a school whose minority demographic is substantially lower. Table 1 (see p. 48) summarizes the charter schools selected for this research project and compares their demographic composition to their sponsoring school districts.

Participant selection was then solicited based on job description, with ideal conditions being: principal administrator on the highest level of expected leadership responsibilities, classroom teacher at the opposite end of the expected continuum of school leadership responsibilities, and another professional whose job description fits somewhere in between the previously mentioned job descriptions. I chose to have participant representation across this professional spectrum in order to identify any underlying nuances within each of the schools chosen for this study. Professional positions are loosely identified based on the operational job titles given to educational professionals who work in charter schools. My specific intentions were to suggest that charter schools, by definition, operate within a structural paradigm that generally does not fit the hierarchal structures of traditional public non-charter schools. By this I intended that job descriptions and titles of educational professionals are considerably more blurred when compared to their homologous counterparts that exist within other public non-charter schools. The criteria used to select participants were primarily based on the demographic composition of their schools and secondarily on their job descriptions. I will report initial responses and findings in the same format as criterion selection. Schools will be described based on selection criterion, participants' responses, and general observations. Following each school's description, participant characteristics and responses will be addressed.

In this section, I have chosen to focus on participants' responses that helped to identify the culture and niche characteristics of each school. I have also chosen to highlight any unique perspective that participants might bring to this study based on their experiences. My hope is to create an interaction between the reader and the

educational professional being interviewed. With this intention, responses have been edited only to clarify syntax so that the data is presented in a manner of conversation which could allow readers to draw their own conclusions. With this same theme as a guiding framework, I have chosen not to "cherry-pick" any specific response from context. Instead, I have attempted to create a flowing dialogue with participant responses at the nexus of interaction. Table 2 summarizes the participants chosen from each school and provides a brief description of those participants.

Table 2

Participants Organized by School and Job Description

| School | Participants | Description |
|------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Canyon Preparatory | Helmholtz | Assistant Principal |
| | Bernard | Athletic Director |
| | Lenina | Special Education Teacher |
| Plains Charter Academy | Mustapha | Principal |
| | Linda | Assistant Principal |
| | John | Social Studies Teacher |
| Mt. Vista Academy | Thomas | Headmaster |
| | Fanny | Special Education Teacher |
| | Benito | Art Teacher |

Mt. Vista Academy

Mt. Vista Academy is a high school located in the central metropolitan area of Colorado near the foothills. During the 2011-2012 school year, this charter school reported a minority student composition of 58% while its sponsoring district was comprised of 29% minority students (Colorado Department of Education, 2012). Mt. Vista Academy's total student enrollment represented less than 1% of its total district's student count. This school was chosen because it had a considerably higher minority composition than its sponsoring district. A mantra repeated by each participant from Mt. Vista Academy was "free-no-fee." This specific resonance prompted me to look further into demographic composition. I then looked into each school's free and reduced lunch percentage composition and compared that to each of the schools' sponsoring districts. Mt. Vista Academy's free and reduced lunch students represented 58% of its total student population while its sponsoring district was comprised of 29% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch status (Colorado Department of Education, 2012). In Colorado, students qualify for free and reduced status based on their financial conditions and an application process.

One interesting point arises within the context of free and reduced status based on a suggestion made within available research: Gleason (2007) suggested that students receiving special education services within charter school systems might often reflect a smaller percentage when compared to sponsoring districts because these charter schools are designed to meet the special conditions of these respective students. Gleason (2007) was specifically referring to students with special needs. Based on the findings of this research, Gleason's premise will be expanded to include students eligible for free and reduced lunch status. Mt. Vista Academy is a school that prides itself on literally not

costing students anything associated with fees or school based extracurricular opportunities.

Mt. Vista Academy operates strictly as a high school with no specific feeder schools. Charter schools are often developed to fill a specific niche that includes curricular components, instructional models, or students' needs. From the perspective of academics and learning objectives, no specific curriculum defined Mt. Vista Academy. Based on the original charter authorization document, the focus of Mt. Vista Academy is "primarily on high risk students, many of whom are on probation, deferred adjudications or diversions, ... or who are dropouts" (Mt. Vista, 2012a). Mt. Vista Academy received a waiver from its sponsoring district that allows it to enroll students that have been expelled or suspended from the sponsoring or surrounding districts. 100% of students take the option of not participating in the Colorado Student Assessment Program. One of the school's graduation requirements is a portfolio that must include at least one college acceptance letter. With this requirement in mind, the professionals at Mt. Vista Academy touted a 100% college acceptance rate. In criticizing lowered graduation requirements as a response to increasing graduation rates, Thomas (the headmaster at Mt. Vista Academy) had this to say:

So whenever we lower the bars we have a lower dropout rate instead of no we need to extend the school day, we need to increase the number of days, and we need to raise the bar on what high school graduation means. I thought when the school started, when I was involved in the founding and we said hundred percent college placement rate, I thought I might have lasted three years at the max.

Thomas. Thomas works as the headmaster of Mt. Vista Academy. The distinction between headmaster and principal is very small, but one defining characteristic of the headmaster title is that headmasters often teach classes. Thomas

reported teaching civics classes along with leading affective and character education meetings. It became apparent that he is the primary principal administrator during the interview however. For example, on several occasions our interview was interrupted by teachers and telephone calls causing Thomas to address student behavior issues and grant writing concerns from other staff members. The layout of the school has Thomas's office situated as a peripheral observation booth from which the common areas of the school can be observed. Before the interview officially began, Thomas explained that he chose this specific school site with that type of layout in mind based on his previous work within the judicial system.

Thomas chose to hold our interview session in his office. This experience offered me a unique opportunity to make some observations that were previously unanticipated. On Thomas's desk there was a shrine (for lack of a better term) in commemoration of a student who recently died in a car accident. The shrine was certainly a centerpiece of the office. There were pictures, quotes, and other memorabilia that students had amalgamated for the shrine. The shrine personified any definition of diversity I could possibly imagine including representations of various religions, hobbies, any variety of cultural nuances, and pictures of several students seemingly from different cultural backgrounds.

This same embrace for cultural diversity was immediately apparent in Thomas's words and actions. Before our interview session began, Thomas and I had a chance to introduce ourselves and briefly converse about our educational interests. Originally, our interview session was scheduled for 9a.m. but something arose and Thomas had to postpone our session for later that afternoon. This gave us an opportunity to talk off-

record. He asked about the aim of my study and I attempted to give a cursory response in order to not introduce any unnecessary bias. As soon as I mentioned that the focus was on Colorado charter schools and student equity issues, Thomas excitedly jumped over to a bookshelf and pulled of a copy of Jonathan Kozol's book, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, in order to reference inequities in public education. Thomas requested Fanny, Mt. Vista Academy's special education teacher, come into his office shortly after this exchange so that I could proceed with the interview that I had previously set up with her. While I waited on Fanny to arrive, I looked at the bookshelf that Thomas had pulled from. A few of the words from the visible book spines caught my attention: Buddhism, *Plain Truth* by Jodi Picoult, Native American, and several titles that had the word diversity in them.

Thomas explained that he was involved with writing the charter for Mt. Vista Academy based on a desire to offer opportunities to students that lacked access to public education for a variety of reasons but primarily due to behavioral issues associated with at-risk students. When questioned about this type of student diversity within Mt. Vista Academy's sponsoring district, Thomas had this to say: "I think traditional mainstream suburban approach where they react to the esthetic desires of the parents rather than the actual needs of students so you get these white flight schools or specific need schools or something on those lines." In summary, Thomas was indicting all schools of choice within his community as being guilty of selective and exclusionary practices. With regards to these types of practices, Thomas confessed, "We get the kids that have been skimmed inappropriately... we get a lot of the students that were counseled out." He continued by explaining:

They don't think their failure could be somebody else's success. I think that's a public school dynamic because what I know from the private and boarding school models is when they had a suspension or expulsion, they didn't have any statutes to run so you know it's just a business decision.

In this statement, Thomas was referring to public schools and districts in the first sentence. Thomas's belief that all students can succeed given the right opportunity was very present throughout the entire interview. Along this same line, Thomas made a very interesting point:

I think the best we can hold ourselves out to be is a model for teachers, for teachers to have hope for the kid that they have sent off. I mean that has been another part that's been distributing, which is I have worked in the criminal defense field. I have found and this is a startling, it's been startling for me. I have found teachers more attached to the label of failure that they place on a student than I have found police officers attached to the label of delinquent that they may have placed on the same kid or another one.

Thomas provided an example in order to clarify this statement. A student was expelled from the district for hacking into a teacher's computer in order to change students' grades. A couple of years later, this student graduated from Mt. Vista Academy and was accepted into one of Colorado's top tier universities for engineering contingent upon the district dropping the expulsion from the student's record. The district refused to drop the expulsion. Thomas went on to explain that he has had probation officers assist in dropping probations and helping kids clean up their records if it meant college acceptance.

Fanny. Fanny is the special education teacher at Mt. Vista Academy. When asked how she would define the demographic of historically disadvantaged students within her school, she responded, "I think that's primarily what we are. Our population is primarily those who have been disadvantaged from the public schools for whatever reason." As the school's only special education teacher, Fanny provides special

education services to all students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Students with IEPs have been identified by the school district as students with special needs. I asked Fanny what her IEP case load looked like as far as student counts and range of needs and she said:

I have maybe 17 right now technically on my case load but I deal primarily and mostly with kids who don't have IEPs because at this point the kids have kind of gone through the system, they kind of have their own thing already done, they are moving along so it's the other ones that I go out and try to identify so I can give them the support they need: how to study, how to learn. It's interesting because it's a whole entire school that's on my case load.

Her response roused my curiosity provoking a follow-up question: "Do you think that a lot of your students would have been identified as having learning disabilities given the right context?" She continued:

I think that a lot of our students do not get identified because they miss a lot of school for whatever their reasons are and there is a lot of variety of reasons. But once they miss a lot of school so it becomes a truancy issues, a behavioral issue and not necessarily a disability that might get overlooked. Not that they all have a disability but they all have some different way of learning.

In consideration of Fanny's responses and the niche characteristics that typically define individual charter schools, I asked her how she would define her school's niche. Fanny described one particular student that helped to glean more insight into the mission of Mt. Vista Academy:

I have a gal who started with us I think late second block so you can't count that because it was maybe a couple weeks before our winter break. And then block 3 if she was here, then she was never in class but that was her thing. She was here because the court said she had to be here but then she wasn't going to go to class and now I think I see her going to class more. We are only in our second week but I think she is starting to realize that she is going to have to do it in order to get off her court case or she is realizing that we are here to help her or maybe it's a little bit of both.

Once the interview was over and the digital recorder was turned off, Fanny proclaimed that some of the questions I asked "started to get my blood boiling." I found this to be an interesting reflection on her part because I felt some tension during the interview surrounding the topic of free and appropriate education while providing equity and access to all students. When asked about her beliefs about the role of free and appropriate education in our society, she quickly responded with "its not free." She explained:

That's a loaded question for me, wow because I have two kids that are in a public school and I pay boat loads of money out for student fees and field trips and it's not free. It's not free. I struggle sometimes during the months when my kid needs money for field trips and I don't want to say honey you can't go, they have to go it's not a question. And I'm definitely not in as bad a place as a lot of some of the other families that are out there in my district so that tuff. Wow... I don't think it's free.

In order to explore the idea a bit further I asked how she might respond to the question if the word free were removed. She stated: "The role is to educate our children, to give them enough background so that they can go on and be productive members of society."

In response to applying those ideas to Mt. Vista Academy, Fanny's response was very telling:

We are free and don't have fees. We give them gas money to get them here. We have free meals. We do lots of grant writing and activities after school, lots of fund-raising, lots of teachers pay out money from their own pockets to purchase their stuff for their classes. And free and appropriate education up until they are 21 we will not graduate a student at 18 just because they are 18.

Fanny went on to further explain that students will often stay at Mt. Vista Academy in order to graduate even though they could transfer back into another district school and graduate sooner rather than later. She believes that the students begin to see the value in what Mt. Vista Academy has to offer. Early in the interview I asked Fanny what attracts

students to Mt. Vista Academy in the first place. Her sentiment was that Mt. Vista Academy is a last chance for many students.

Benito. Benito works at Mt. Vista Academy as its art and art history instructor. While his interview was the shortest out of all the interviews, Benito had some very interesting insights into his school. Throughout the interview, he continually reminded me that his only ties to public education are the schools he went to as a student and the one and only school that he has worked at, Mt. Vista Academy. Prior to coming to Mt. Vista Academy, Benito expressed his belief of thinking that charter schools were somehow like private schools. Once arriving at Mt. Vista Academy, he began to understand how charter schools operated along with the idea that public school students all have different sets of needs. Benito explained one of his greatest surprises during the first year working at Mt. Vista Academy:

I didn't even realize that there were historically disadvantaged kids in this school district. I mean it was a big learning experience for me. It's been an eye opener for me in that there's – I mean, we definitely deal with students that come from very low income.

It should be noted that the sponsoring district of Mt. Vista Academy is one of the more affluent districts in Colorado. To put this into perspective, Thomas stated his student per-pupil operating revenue: "I think its \$7100 total, that's a lot considering our neighboring district I think is at fifty one hundred and they are in the same county."

Benito confessed how the affluence of the sponsoring district allowed him to make some poor assumptions before getting to know his students: "I learned that I'm stereotyping kids the same way by assuming that their life is okay because their parents have money or they're Caucasian, you know what I mean?"

Benito described the culture of his school as one of acceptance. From his comments it seemed like differences between personalities and backgrounds were celebrated, not just tolerated. He said, "our credo at our school is unity through diversity." One vignette he identified was:

There's somebody there that's seen that or been through it or fits in that category. But they all interact together really well and it's like you can now... somebody that might be a stereotypical nerd in a lot of schools that maybe would have got picked on real bad, for example in the high school I graduated from right? And he put on an interpretative dance act at lunch for kids whose older brothers may very well be gang bangers or you know what I mean.

While discussing the nuances that makes Mt. Vista Academy different than other schools, Benito expressed:

I think that might be part of the reason that charter schools are becoming so popular is because it's a different system. I think that education at a high school level should always be completely free. For example, our students don't have to buy their own art supplies. Their parents don't have to buy their art supplies. We have free lunch for everybody. You don't have to prove how much money you make or don't make.

This sentiment seems to give more credence to the idea that Mt. Vista Academy's free and reduced percentage of 37% might actually be an under-representation given the fact that all students at the school receive the same treatment with regard to "free-no-fee," as Thomas put it. As Benito addressed one of the final questions about the role of free and appropriate education in our society, he wrapped it all back around to diversity saying that:

I think diversity is important because I think high school is also about learning lessons about how to be an adult. It's about learning how to interact with people from different backgrounds. And I think that's an important part of it. I don't think that the kid who grows up in a town, in a small town that might all be Caucasian and doesn't go to school with anybody but Caucasians is racist because they weren't around them. I don't think that's a racist community. That's just a symptom of the way this country has been built and it's changing.

Plains Charter School

Plains Charter School is a K-10 charter school that hopes to expand its program to offer 11th and 12th grade by 2013. This school is located within 8 miles of Mt. Vista Academy but sponsored by a different school district. During the 2011-2012 school year, Plains Charter School's district reported having 35% minority students while 33% of their student population was eligible for free and reduced lunch status (Colorado Department of Education, 2012). At that time, Plains Charter School reported having a 40% minority student population with 25% of their total student population being eligible for free and reduced lunch status (Colorado Department of Education, 2012). Plains Charter School represented more than 3% of their sponsoring district's total student count at the time this data were retrieved.

The curricular focus of the K-8th grades is Core Knowledge, a curriculum developed by E.D. Hirsh. The Plains Charter High School targeted population draws from the areas local Core Knowledge middle schools "due to internal encouragement for Core Knowledge students to continue in an educational process tailored to extend their Middle School education" (Plains Charter School, 2012a). The mission of Plains Charter School is to provide "students with the foundations of character while building cultural literacy through as rigorous, content-rich curriculum... We believe that a whole education includes strong academics along with abundant opportunities for expression in the arts, music, and sports"(Plains Charter School, 2012b). Policy characteristics that describe the focus and intent of Plains Charter School include: a strict grading scale and required homework, a strong discipline code" which both protects the classroom learning environment and sanctions students for inappropriate behavior," and a belief that parental involvement is in integral part of a child's education.

Mustapha. Mustapha is the principal administrator at Plains Charter School and has been a pivotal player in expanding the charter authorization to include its newly developed high school. Mustapha requested that I interview him at his school office as he suggested that he would "never be available after school or off of school campus." His office had a very traditional feel with no unique defining characteristics. Mustapha requested that we should not be disturbed as we entered his office, but throughout the entire interview he continually checked his phone and computer. I repeatedly got the sense that I was not particularly welcome and that Mustapha felt as though I had some hidden agenda. For example, I ended the interview by asking "is there anything you think I am missing or is there another question you wished I had asked." Mustapha responded, "No, it's the politically correct surveys, it's at the university level and it's funny because I don't know what the focus of it all is but that's ok." Before the interview began I explained the nature of my research and asked if there were any questions before starting the interview.

After we completed the interview I turned off the digital recorder and proceeded to thank Mustapha for his time. As I was walking out, he retorted "you university people make up these terms that are politically correct, racial isolationism, and no one even knows what they mean. You can find anybody guilty of anything when you use progressive terms like that." The recorder was not on when he spoke his last statement so I quickly hurried to my car, repeating his words over and over in my head as not to forget them, and I wrote down what he said. In a similar context, as I began asking Mustapha how he would define the role of free and appropriate public education in our society, he saw the term racial isolationism on the paper that I was reading questions

from and said: "Racial isolationism? It's funny because you get these progressive terms that try to define and try to bring about an assumption of understanding." Once I asked question 20, the only question that explicitly mentions racial isolationism, Mustapha responded: "Yea sure, because it's always everybody else's fault. Its everybody else's fault except our own, except our own personal accountability and our right to self-govern ourselves right so we want to legislate it. Make sense?" He did agree with the statement about charter schools likely contributing to the phenomenon but felt that other public non-charter schools were guilty of contributing to this same conclusion.

Mustapha continued: "Do you see school districts opening the newest and nicest school in the worst part of town? I didn't hear you answer that question." I reminded him that I came to discover his beliefs about these ideas and that I was acting as a non-biased researcher to the best of my ability to which he said, "I'm just trying to bait you in."

In response to being asked about the role of education in American society, Mustapha brought up an interesting point about personal accountability and values. He said:

I think the role of our education system is, we want the common man to know that there is common truths, there is a real strong concerted effort to know that the highest form of free and appropriate education is self-government to be able to govern yourself, to discipline yourself.

Just prior to this question, Mustapha pointed at the wall and asked, "What do you see there? Read that up there." He was pointing to the mission statement of his school posted on the wall behind me. I turned and read, "the mission of Plains Charter School provides students with a foundation of virtue and character, building cultural literacy through a rigorous content rich curriculum and encouraging environment." Mustapha went on to say:

Our legacy is academic excellence which it says below it. So, is there something different about that? I think it's anything for any student. Its high reaching and it's a lofty goal and provides a lofty opportunity for any student regardless of their demographics.

As a follow-up to the question I asked Mustapha to define student diversity, he responded and repeated: "Sometimes there's more effort given to define diversity and have a dialogue around it than there is in pursuit of virtue and character building cultural literacy through a rigorous content rich curriculum in an encouraging environment."

During the interview I explained that the focus of this study was to identify how charter schools are providing equal access to all students. When asked what limitations existed for students that wanted to attend Plains Charter School, Mustapha clandestinely replied:

What limitations attend for students? umm... It's funny because you never hear about the people that don't want to come here because they are not here. That is a question that I would find difficult to answer and sometimes there's different rationales or reasons. One thing I do hear about and we help the families with is transportation issues.

Mustapha explained that he has asked the parent-teacher organization to organize a carpool system and that they have had some success with that. One other solution to the transportation problem that Mustapha identified was setting up a public bus route that picks up and drops off students at the front of the school. I asked about the cost of the bussing for individual students and Mustapha explained that regardless of free and reduced status:

It's like a dollar a day and parents pick up the cost of that. We have no other funds to do that and we can't provide that transportation so we do everything we can to help parents get here but they have to know that there is no such thing as a free lunch. They have to pay at some level. But there is no tuition, there are fees but once again we provide for free or reduced fees.

I asked Mustapha about fees associated with the school and he reported that parents must pay a \$100 fee for each of their children enrolled at Plains Charter School. With regards to free and reduced financial status, he said:

If it's this much for free then its reduced by this much. We have real bills here. We have real financial costs. So those financial costs have to be paid for in some way at some point and somewhere. So is anybody removed? Limited? No.

For clarification, Mustapha was clear that all families pay a fee even though they are eligible for free status. His comment suggested that if students were eligible for free status then their fees were reduced, and if they were eligible for reduced status then their fees were reduced less than free status students. In conclusion to the topic about limitations, Mustapha expressed: "You know it's always about what are the limitations but then I'm thinking about what are the excitements and why do parents... Why is our enrollment so high? Why are these kids doing so well?"

Linda. Linda works as the assistant principal under Mustapha at Plains Charter School. She invited me to her office in order to complete our interview later the same day as Mustapha's interview. As we met and began walking to her office, Mustapha caught our attention and said, "Be careful. He's going to use a bunch of words they made up at the university." Serendipitously, I knew Linda from previous graduate coursework. With a familiar level of comfort, she giggled at Mustapha's comment and asked, "what was that all about?" There were no times were I felt that she was being subversive or dismissive. Her office, again, fit the profile of a stereotypical administrative office. There were no unique or distinguishing features within her office. She provided me her undivided attention at all times during the interview. Several times during the interview we would reciprocate communication in a non-verbal fashion. These communications

were always in response to my own personal stance of not conversing our similarities and differences with regards to educational philosophies until well after this dissertation study had been written, defended, and published. I explained these reservations and apprehensions after we had concluded our interview.

Linda's interview, as previously stated, occurred the same day but after Mustapha's interview. I had several hours in between the two interviews, enough time to begin transcribing Mustapha's interview. With this in mind, I anticipated how she might choose to answer certain types of questions, so I had already prepared follow-up questions with the intention of gaining a clear understanding of the climate and culture of Plains Charter School. Admittedly, I had reservations going into Linda's interview based on the ambiguity I felt from my time spent with Mustapha earlier that day. The comfort of our initial interaction mitigated any reservations I walked in with. This comfort can be quickly identified in her response to the question about potential limitations and access to Plains Charter School. She responded that transportation would be the greatest limitation:

Yeah that would be probably the biggest hindrance to families because charter schools typically don't offer transportation. However, we use come-and-ride. I had a parent that was in that situation last year, he couldn't get his son here and so I suggested why don't you look at come-and-ride. It's a wonderful thing because it's cheap.

She continued by saying: "We have probably, I'd say, anywhere between three and five come-and-ride buses here that are dropped off and picked up. And so, you know, I think that for us at least, the hindrance or limitation is lessened." As a follow-up to possible limitations, Linda commented: "You know the other one that's a struggle, because we

require our parents to put in, you know 20, at least 25 hours service time. However that time doesn't have to be here physically at the school."

In response to potential fees associated with attending Plains Charter School,

Linda Stated:

It's a \$100 fee; I believe its \$100 K-5. Its different rates at higher grades. And so we knock it down for (students that are eligible for) reduced (fees) to \$75 and (students eligible for) free (status) its \$50. And that is per child. So, you know, in economic times that could be a burden. But it, it's a fact of life where you go in education today. I mean, even in your typical public schools, you know, schools are grappling with fees. I know that they're talking – I mean up north in the Heartland area, they're talking about reinstating certain student fees like school bussing fees.

The district to which she was referring, in fact, did reinstate bussing fees for students.

Because it was outside the perspective of this study I did not look into how this reinstated bussing fee impacted families and students that were eligible for free and reduced monetary services but did confirm her suggestion. Heartland School District did reinstate a bussing fee for students needing transportation services.

I explained that student diversity issues and providing equity in access was a focal point of my study. In considering these issues, Linda had this to say:

These are good families, these are caring families. They struggle to speak the language. But they want their kids to have a good education. And we have the same thing with the Indian population. Actually, our Indian population last year was our largest minority population followed by Hispanic. And that population does have a lot better social economic status. And they came here because our school reminds them of their schools in India.

Linda was referring to Asian-Indian students every time she used the word Indian.

Remembering that the selection criterion for schools was based on minority percentages of total school composition, this response became a second reason to go back and re-evaluate my selection criterion. Perhaps I should have used student eligibility of free and

reduced lunch status as my primary descriptor of schools and districts for the purpose of selective criterion. In defense of this notion, minority status is physically apparent and reportable while free and reduced status is solely based on the proclivities of parents wishing to receive such benefits. As we explored the idea of meeting the needs of a diverse population, Linda attempted to explain how Plains Charter School engaged in the reciprocal nature of public education: "So, you know, we really try to work with parents. But they need to know that's a responsibility of having a child." Linda was specifically referring to the fees and transportation requirements of attending her school.

John. I met John at a coffee shop a few minutes from his school. John is a first-year teacher, who taught social studies and history at Plains Charter School. His internship, the previous year, was at another charter school in a different school district. John provided a unique perspective to the questions I asked based on his nascence in the education profession. He seemed to have the excitement of a newly-hatched teacher along with an unadulterated perspective of the charter school movement central to the phenomena in question: how do charter schools provide equity and access to all students. At times, his responses came off as the text-book types of responses one might hear during an initial job screening interview but other times offered a staggering acumen found only in seasoned professionals.

When asked about activities or programs that are aimed at celebrating diversity, John responded:

Celebrating student diversity at my school? Well this shouldn't be hard. Again, as a new teacher I can't really speak for the entire school, but as a high school team that we were in the 1st year I can't think of anything that specifically gear towards celebration of diversity, those systems are just not in place just yet.

John continually wanted to couch his answers from the perspective of "as a new teacher" not realizing that he might act as the fulcrum from which I might be able to pivot some sort of understanding. I attempted to calm his apparent anxiety by explaining my background with charter schools and public education. While John did seem to settle his initial tension surrounding the interview, he continued to remind me that he was a first year teacher. Once settled, John began to open up about ideas and beliefs surrounding public education. When asked how he would define a free and appropriate education for all students, John responded: "Well, this goes all the way back to history that we are talking on. Thomas Jefferson who was pretty big on a public education for everybody." Within this same context, John continued his explanation by stating:

I think it's one of the foundations of American society, this access to education. And you really see it in American culture too: this; you are going to go to school, you are going to be successful, you might go to college and if you go to college then you get a good job, you get a white picket fence and a dog and a wife. When I think about access... equal access to education... Well then that's why there are laws about it. It suggests that our society is deeply entrenched with this idea of everyone having the opportunity, the American opportunism everyone seems to have. The opportunity to succeed, and the way to do that is through education. How true or not that is I don't know at times.

Canyon Preparatory

Canyon Preparatory is a 6-12 middle and high school that receives most of its students from its k-5 elementary feeder school. The school is located in the northern central part of Colorado. The curricular focus for grades k-8 is Core Knowledge. The focus at the high school level is the national Advanced Placement (AP) program which allows high school students to earn college credit based on a student's achievement score on an end of course standardized assessment. The mission statement at Canyon Preparatory is: "We strive to inspire all students to reach their fullest potential in academic achievement, character development, and citizenship in a safe and innovative

learning environment” (Canyon City, 2012a). As reported on the Canyon Preparatory website (2012b): "You have a Choice in Education Choose Excellence. What Makes Canyon Preparatory Unique? Canyon Preparatory is markedly different from other district schools in several ways, including the following: Core Knowledge Curriculum, The Dress Code, The Environment, and Our Volunteers" (Canyon Preparatory, 2012b). With respect to volunteerism, the school's website stated: “families are expected to give four hours each month to the school and many families give much more. Parents can volunteer in a wide range of areas, including the classroom, during special projects or even working at home.”

One other unique characteristic that is markedly different from surrounding schools is the demographic composition of Canyon Preparatory. Demographic characteristics of Canyon Preparatory include 19% of the student body being students with minority status and 17% of all students reported as being eligible for free and reduced lunch status. These figures show a stark contrast to their sponsoring district who reported having 63% minority students with 60% of all students being eligible for free and reduced lunch status. The student population at Canyon Preparatory represents 7% of the district’s total student count. Free and reduced status is often used as one indicator of at-risk students (NCLB, 2002; Rapp & Eckes, 2007). Canyon Preparatory charter application had this to say in considering at-risk students:

The parties recognize the responsibility of the Charter School with regard to at-risk students, a specific category of students addressed by the Charter School Act, and in particular, the utilization of "proven, field tested and sequential" programs to teach at-risk students to read. The parties will look to the Charter School to fulfill the aspirations and standards set forth in those portions of the Application which are approved and incorporated herein by reference. (Canyon Preparatory, 2012a, para. 17)

There is no other mentioning of at-risk students within the charter application for Canyon Preparatory.

Helmholtz. Helmholtz works as the assistant principal at Canyon Preparatory. I met Helmholtz at a coffee shop in the town in which he lives. As we discussed student enrollment trends and demographic composition of Canyon Preparatory and public non-charter schools in the sponsoring district, Helmholtz had this to say: "I also know that there are some schools within the district whose demographics match the district as well as we do, meaning not matching." Helmholtz explained that demographic composition of schools in his district depended on bussing and location of school: "Yes, whereas schools who do not have bussing their demographics look more like their neighborhood wherever that may be." These comments prompted a deeper analysis of other public schools within the sponsoring district of Canyon Preparatory. The next four schools that come close to mirroring Canyon Preparatory's demographic composition with regard to minority student representation were: 1) Mt. Gallant Elementary (non-charter) with 31% minority students, 2) North Crest (k-8 charter) with 32%, 3) Academy Preparatory (k-12 charter) with 33% minority student, and 4) Confederate Settlement (6-12 charter) with 35% minority students. The next school that would appear in that list was a k-5 non-charter school with 43% minority students. Including Canyon Preparatory in the list of the top five schools that have the lowest minority representation, 4 of 5 schools in this list would be charter schools which reside within a district that has more than 25 public schools. These 4 charter schools are the only charter schools within the district. Comparisons of schools based on students eligible for free-and-reduced lunch resulted in a similar ranking profile.

Helmholtz had a unique perspective on the effects of his school with regard to closing the achievement gap between historically advantaged and disadvantaged students.

It's just mathematical. So when we close our achievement gap, we close the districts gap to some degree. When ours widens, theirs widens to some degree. I think it is a very small degree. Our school specifically is maybe 5 to 8 % of the districts population. I believe sponsored charter schools are approximately 20% of the districts population I think. I'm just extrapolating there but I mean it's just mathematical, what we do has a small impact on them for better and for worse.

This response reflects all best intentions but upon closer scrutiny one inaccuracy begins to emerge. The minority students at Canyon Preparatory represented 2% of the district's total student population while the entire student body represented 7% of the district's entire student count. If Canyon Preparatory were to close achievement gaps within their student body while increasing achievement levels of all students, the net effect on the district would be to widen the achievement gap due to the gross misrepresentation of district demographics. Only under very specific circumstances could Canyon Preparatory truly close the district's achievement gap.

The experimental nature of charter schools came up as we discussed the potential benefits of charter schools. Helmholtz said:

That's the great thing about the county and charter schools is that we are able to experiment, is sort of the right word, to see what works and see what doesn't work and learn from those and go with the ones that work and avoid the ones that don't work. And that is exciting. That's what a lot of people like about charter schools specifically is that that is allowed to happen where in non-charter settings it's not allowed to happen.

Helmholtz explained why charters schools have the opportunity to experiment:

One of the factors is the size of the organization. Its generally one school and so the bureaucracy, the ability to make good decisions in a relatively timely manner, can happen more easily than when you are talking about a district with more than 25 schools.

As we continued to explore these ideas, Helmholtz juxtaposed this perceived experimental quality of charter schools with providing parental choices in order to meet the needs of students. Choices ranged from behavioral to academic:

For example, somehow that student's needs are not being met. It's not as extreme as needing a regular nurse or medical facility, but there's something that's just... that student is just really really struggling. It may be behaviorally, even academically. I haven't seen it just behaviorally in that the student refuses to turn in any work or anything. Refusing to do anything academically and when a parent says, what do I do now? There have been times where we say we will do everything we can but you need to know that there are other options. If what we are doing isn't what you like then you are not locked into us. There are other choices. We would love to have you stay if you can follow the rules. If you can go by the policies we have in place and take the support we are trying to offer then that's what we'll do. But, if you don't like that then there are other choices and you can take those other choices.

Bernard. Bernard is the athletic director at Canyon Preparatory. I met Bernard in his office. His walls were covered with graduation pictures of students along with pictures from any variety of school sporting events. Bernard described his job to include aspects of school and program management; discipline issues that might arise during the school day; and some teaching responsibilities. From the perspective of athletic director, Bernard offered a novel perspective to the final question in the interview concerning skimming students into schools and counseling students out of school. So far these topics have primarily been presented as applying to behavioral, academic, or special learning needs. Bernard reported that other local public non-charter schools regularly scout his successful student athletes:

I have seen schools come to our games where their coaches have guaranteed my 8th graders starting position uniforms on their field which is against policy. It's against the state law. You cannot do that and so I think... But do you hear about that? You don't hear that at all. All you hear is skimming by charter schools from public schools.

Bernard also reported having worked in other public non-charter schools where similar practices took place with respect to recruiting student athletes. As we continued discussing this topic, Bernard made one other interesting point. Bernard stated that they lose as many students to other public schools as they bring in at the high school level. To that point he stated:

So if you want to say that our quality of education is high, then we're feeding good educated students into the public schools. We're pulling in what we are pulling in, and well what if they got OSS, they got expulsions, whatever, and then they come in here. So we get that type. It's a flat wash across the board, but because of that perception that it's just us skimming, it doesn't help us.

Other than this isolated statement, the feeling that I got from Bernard's, Helmholtz's, and Lenina's (soon to be discussed) interviews was not one that would suggest Canyon Preparatory would knowingly enroll students that had a history of disciplinary infractions. But, Bernard did identify that there is a public perception of charter schools using skimming practices.

Similar to Mustapha, Bernard expressed a feeling that I might have an agenda based on the nature and topic of this research. He was more explicit than Mustapha however. Bernard pointedly stated: "I think just from what I'm seeing and hearing here is that... I would guess that this research is more prone to trying to support public education versus the charter schools just because the way the questions are worded." This statement exemplified one of Bernard's own beliefs about the public's perception of charter schools. During the interview, Bernard suggested that the general public has a misconception about charter schools not only with regards to skimming but also that charter schools are more like private schools. By Bernard's own implicit admission found in the previous quotation, he too suggested that "public education" is a separate entity from charter schools.

Lenina. Lenina works as the 6th through 8th grade special education teacher. She described her job as providing student and teacher support. She described the student population at Canyon Preparatory as mainly "middle class white kids." Describing her belief of the sponsoring district's perception of Canyon Preparatory, Lenina stated:

I think that our school is resented a little bit because we don't have the achievement gap that the district has. And they feel like we take all the good kids away to our school until they get left with the kids who are educationally not in good places as far as family support which I can understand, but I also understand that if I were a parent I would want my kids to go to the school where they are likely to be pushed because there is not as much babysitting going on and that's no fault of the district's.

When asked about what she believes is her school's effect on the district's achievement gap, Lenina said:

So I think you know there is a bigger achievement gap in the district. I think that we are resented a little bit for it, but there is still an achievement gap at our school and I don't feel like it is being... that there is enough attention necessarily given to our achievement gap because things are working, but the gap is still there. So we are not trying to necessarily effectively fix it. I feel like we are band-aiding it, versus actually closing it.

It sounded as if she was very aware that the school district faces an entirely different set of problems related to meeting the needs of all students.

One particular perspective that Lenina offered was a comparison of Canyon Preparatory with her experience teaching in Wyoming. She said:

In Wyoming, it was hell. That school had more money than god, teachers were paid so well, technology all of that was there, everything that you could want was there, but the population was really hard to work with. And so of course you come back to Canyon Preparatory were... like the kids listen to you, and there are expectations, and they follow them, and so that's great and grand and wonderful. But the reality is, it's where we are, and I love Canyon Preparatory I do. But we are a little hoity toity, it makes it a little pretentious and we don't... It's sad that we don't have a more diverse population.

With this one statement, Lenina not only acknowledged her belief that funding alone would not solve the issues found within her sponsoring district but she also identified the idea that the culture of her school could be perceived as homogenized or classist.

Common Themes

Six essential systemic themes related to charter schools promoting student diversity emerged from all data sources during the process of data mining and coding. These themes are: 1) Parent Choice and Influence; 2) Enrollment Process and Strategies; 3) Mission and Curriculum; 4) Academic Accountability and Interventions; 5) Discipline and Behavioral Expectations; and 6) Transportation and Physical Access. The purpose of enumerating the themes should not be perceived as ordination along a continuum of importance. Instead, enumeration has been used simply to organize the themes for the purpose of discussion. Each of these themes will be discussed independently. It must be recognized that several themes may seem inextricably linked, but once the aspect of how leadership within each school can play a vital role on the effects of each theme, it will become apparent why each theme has been disaggregated into its own identifiable category. The interplay between each theme will be identified in an explanation of the emergent theory. In attempting to develop a grounded theory model, one final contextual theme began to surface. Theme 7, Charter and Public Non-Charter Schools, identifies the contextual dynamics between public systems of education. A model for the first six thematic interactions is depicted in figure 3. This model is shown prior to the development of each theme in order to give a sense of the interconnectedness between each theme. Without the model, it becomes particularly difficult to discuss each theme in isolation mainly because the themes do not exist in isolation.

Figure 3: Six Thematic Interactions

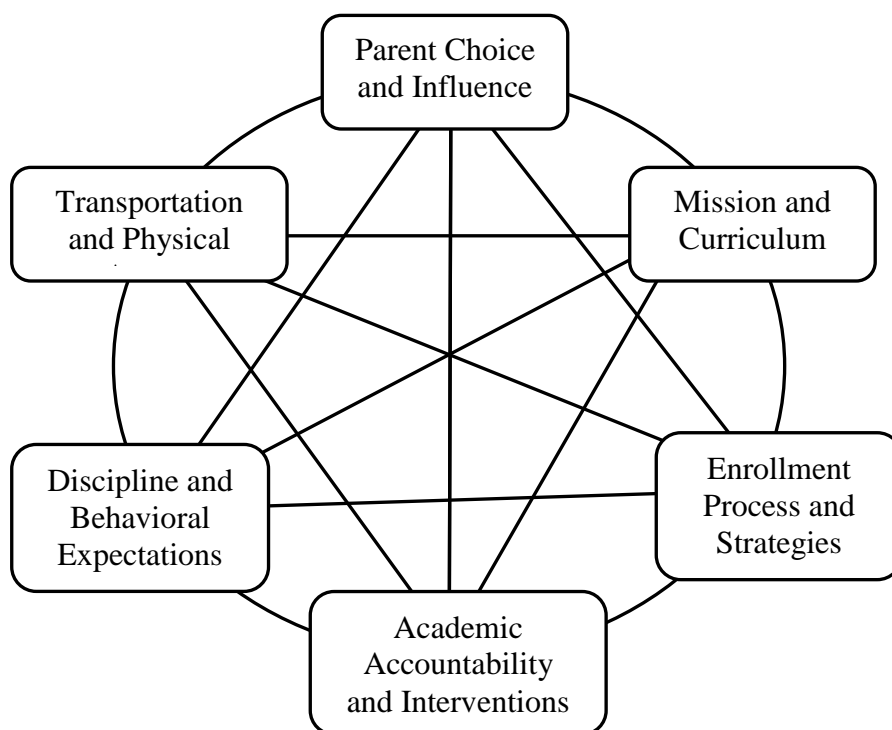


Figure 3. This model represents a web of interactions that can influence student access to charter schools. Charter school leaders have some degree of discretionary control over how each of these themes might inhibit or increase student access.

Theme 1: Parent Choice and Influence

The entire school-choice movement is framed in the perspective of offering parents and students a greater variety of choices in public education. John explained how school choice is perceived in his school:

And yeah it's so that's the policy if somebody wants to come if they like what we are selling so to speak, if they like the programs they like the emphasis of the charter school, if the parents want their children to go in a certain direction that we are offering that's what it is, it's a school of choice.

This truly implies offering parents the option of choosing where their children will attend public school, and this theme will be framed as such. Defining and inclusive characteristics of this theme are: dominant culture of parents, parents wants for their student, and parents' abilities to meet a school's requirements. These are broadly

characterized in order to fit the data procured from interviews. For example, the characteristic of parents' wants for their student distinctly includes the perspective of individual students needs. This is because the language and intent of the participants placed parents at the intersection of choosing what they want for their student with the crossroad being what the student might currently be receiving versus what they might be able to receive at a different school. Mustapha stated:

Counseling out? I have a lot of people who come here but if you don't want to fall under the guise (of our school) or want to follow the mission statement is it not a choice to choose to leave here? Have there been conversations about leaving? Absolutely I've had people leave in frustration. I've had people leave in also saying that this isn't what I expected or I wanted something different for my child.

With respect to behavioral expectations and parental choice, Lenina had this to say:

You get put on the behavior plan. It's like you know it takes three strikes and you're out. Instead of expelling they will say you have a choice to enroll in another school right now or we can move forward and go through expulsion.

Not only can parents choose which school their student will enroll, but in the perspective of charter schools, they can also influence the development of new schools or provide some guidance in association with policy and procedural protocols within existing charter schools. This first becomes apparent within the statutory language of the Colorado Charter Schools Act:

the best education decisions are made by those who know the students best and who are responsible for implementing the decisions, and, therefore, that educators and parents have a right and responsibility to participate in the education institutions which serve them. (C.R.S. 22-30.5-103, 2011)

This statute goes on to say:

In authorizing charter schools, it is the intent of the general assembly to create a legitimate avenue for parents, teacher, and community members to take responsible risks and create new, innovative, and more flexible ways of education all children within the public school system. (C.R.S. 22-30.5-103, 2011)

The word choice of "flexible" will become increasingly important when explaining the emergent theory. Who is it that must be flexible? Parents? Schools? Students?

Parental involvement, on some level, was identifiable in all interviews.

Involvement always included choosing the school and was then followed by any of the following; support meetings, payment of fees, providing transportation, or commitment.

Mustapha stated:

I have had parents say they want something, they want something, they want something but that's no different than the district school whose parents left upset at a district school to come here. Have I turned anybody away purposefully? No. Have we skimmed the cream and then left everybody else? No.

In follow-up to how parents might choose his school, Mustapha explained:

Parents need to get their student into the lottery yet at the same time you've got to be searching for something too. You've got to get off the couch. I'm not going to go to everybody's house so I guess if it meant that if I didn't go to everybody's house in the neighborhood then I might be considered guilty of skimming.... Families don't give up their right to parent or their personal values, but when you come to this school it is all defined around our mission

In a similar perspective, Helmholtz said:

So we say that we would like parents to be as actively involved in their children's education as possible, supporting them at home with homework, being involved with transition periods like into 6th grade and again into 9th grade. But that doesn't help in the biggest road block which would be the transportation piece

In a bizarrely different context that was not recorded but was spoken by Thomas before our recorded interview began, Thomas stated: "I know he's fucking his mother." He then explained a scenario where a student and his mother needed continual support from the school beyond general special education services or academic interventions. He said that the student would walk in to their meetings "beating on his mom" and would walk out doing the same. Thomas: "In my years of dealing with the judicial system, that type of behavior only implies one thing." I took that as evidence of the grotesquely and

disheartening comment he previously stated. I got the sense that Thomas had evidence of his claim that he did not want to share with me considering the relationship of participant-researcher. Considering my obvious personal appall to such a possible suggestion, Thomas followed with: "I've had a mom come in carrying a car load of boys and later that day all the boys were talking about taking turns on her."

The perspective of the dominant culture of parents emerged as a characteristic under this theme based only on a few specific comments and then upon tacit suggestion. Thomas described the college acceptance graduation requirement at his school as he explained that he gets some backlash from parents who have never gone to college. He said:

You know I get a lot of more of this so you are a smart college guy ha, you are smarter than me I know, you are going to be the big guy on campus, you think you are smart now.

As a brief aside, I must explain how I am using the frame of culture. As an undergraduate student, I became enamored with Clifford Geertz, a cultural anthropologist. Geertz wrote:

Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (1973, "Thick Description," para. 5)

I too take culture to be those webs and this is the meaning that should be applied to culture as I use it here.

Its is within this frame of culture that I began to find suggestions of what Mustapha seemed to keep from me during his interview. Mustapha described the demographic characteristics of his school as "61% Caucasian, 39% minority here, 28-29% free and reduced. our highest demographic within that is Asian-Pacific Islander,

Hispanic is next, our lowest demographic is black or American Indian." In reference to acknowledging historically disadvantaged students, Mustapha quickly touted the minority population at his school. He specifically included Asian students in his description of historically disadvantage students. Again, applying the notion of the dominate culture of parents, I am not sure that Asian students have typically fit within the frame of historically disadvantaged within American public education from the perspective of cultural values. Linda's response to this same question offered the cultural explanation that Mustapha did not seem to recognize. With regards to Asian students she said:

That is actually – what was last year our largest minority population followed by Hispanic. And that population we do have a lot better in the social economic status. And they came here because the school reminds them of their schools in home country. You know. The dress code. The character. The high expectations and, so you know we have that population of at risk students that would be considered, that have come here for that reason. Because they know that there's, there are expectations. And there's going to be challenges, but that they can meet them.

Theme 2: Enrollment Process and Outreach/Marketing

The theme of enrollment process and potential marketing strategies includes each of the following referential points: any process associated with enrollment, fees associated with enrollment, contracts that students or parents must sign precluding enrollment, demographic composition of each school, and any potential of skimming or counseling students out of a school. This theme certainly overlaps with the first theme in that parents are often the student's agent responsible for the application and enrollment into a school of choice. John provided one clear example of how students and parents might choose a different school in order to meet the student's needs:

As far as counseling out, do you mean students who have needs that are beyond the capacity of the school? I have an example of that. So for instance at the

beginning of the year we got a student who didn't speak English. He spoke only Spanish and while we didn't, we let him come to the school because it was ultimately the parent's decision because it is a school of choice. There was a meeting and the meeting was basically: Here is what it's going to look like if you stay here. We are going to have to find a way to make it happen because we don't have an ELL specialists at our school. The student ultimately went back to the district. So that might be an example of counseling out.

Once the perspective of students being their own agent in terms of advocacy and the enrollment process becomes an option, and in light of the differential effects of leadership on each theme, each strand becomes the disaggregated theme discussed in each section. The effects of leadership across each of the themes will be discussed in the summary of this chapter.

The apparent interaction between parental influence and enrollment process is easily identifiable in Mustapha's response to being asked about skimming or counseling out:

I guess in some instances people could accuse us of skimming. I look at it like this, awesome parents tend to know and have awesome friends. Does that make us guilty of skimming? Because of the relationship within the neighborhood and then they tell us about it and then we reach out to those families, is that skimming?

In diametric opposition to this statement Fanny stated, "we get the kids nobody else wants. We get everything that remains after all the skimming has taken place and we love it." Fanny also worked in the school whose mantra, as per Thomas's suggestion, was "free-no-fee."

Participants from both Canyon Preparatory and Plains Charter School described the enrollment process of their respective schools as having open enrollment that is filled via using a lottery system. Linda described how students become entered into the lottery at her school:

We have to enroll students regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, gender. That's our process. They come to our enrollment meetings and that's one thing we do require because we want our families to know about our charter school and what we have to offer and what our – what their responsibilities are. Because you're making a choice. When you make a choice you, you have a responsibility.

Thomas described the enrollment process in his school to include an entrance interview that is used to identify each student's strengths and potential weaknesses. Students are asked to sign a no smoking contract as a condition of their enrollment. In reference to the smoking contract, Benito had this to say:

I have seen kids who have finally got to the point where they're not – They're just not doing what they're supposed to be doing. They're not getting it. They signed that contract seven times. It's just not happening. However I've seen them also get a chance, after chance, after chance, after chance.

I gathered that students at Mt. Vista Academy would be given several, if not almost unlimited, opportunities before any serious consequences were doled out as long as the student was making some attempt to participate in the educational process offered at Mt. Vista Academy. Benito's statement begins to highlight the fact that behavioral manifestations, e.g. smoking, could in fact influence enrollment due to the potential consequence of being expelled, or counseled out, because of some behavioral proclivity.

Demographic composition of a school entered as a characteristic of the enrollment theme for the obvious reason that demographic composition is directly mediated through student enrollment. In reference to marketing strategies Canyon Preparatory might use to get students to enroll in their school, Lenina stated: "I don't really feel like we use a lot of marketing strategies because I feel like there is already a waiting list and it's a lot of word of mouth things." Bernard's response carried a similar theme:

We did a kind of a study to see financially if we could support a second and that was when we did the research from outside entities that was some of the

researches that came back with is that we do not put ourselves out in the public as much as we should.

Theme 3: Mission and Curriculum

The third theme, mission and curriculum, is somewhat allusive upon first glance. For example, no participant from Mt. Vista Academy specifically mentioned the mission or vision behind the charter school which was identified tacitly within its original charter and explicitly on the school's website:

The mission of Mt. Vista Academy is to help transform youth-at-risk into college bound youth-of-promise. Mt. Vista Academy encourages the pursuit of knowledge and education as an intervention for youth. We educate by inspiring in each student an enthusiasm for learning and the self-confidence needed for intellectual, physical, and ethical development. We will not give up on students even when they give up on themselves. (Mt. Vista Academy, 2012b)

While this mission was never specifically referenced by any of the participants chosen from Mt. Vista Academy, the intent of the mission was apparent across each of the interviews. Fanny reflected on the curriculum and beliefs that focus the intent of Mt. Vista Academy:

Our education for peace program that we promote, it's sort of our underlying part of each class curriculum that's taught within each class. So within math you can promote peace and it's not just like the hippie peace but rather more like conflict resolution so that people do not resort to violence and hatred and that kind of stuff.

Buried within this response is one clue that begins to link mission and curriculum as one identifiable theme. Mustapha's responses provided direct connections between these two potentially disparate concepts as he discussed the mission and vision at Plains Charter School:

Maybe there are foundations of virtue and character that all men or all students should have. That's what the premise of this is and we want students to be culturally literate. Having more impact on our program and how our curriculum is built using core knowledge as our modus operandi at the k-8 model and having that structure I think is a huge advantage and we have control of that. And we

also have control of our instruction and we manage that. That is the pursuit of what we try to do every day.

John explained that the Core Knowledge curriculum used in their feeder K-8 program, referenced in Mustapha's response, served as the model upon which their high school has developed its "classical curriculum," in John's words.

Mustapha continued to explain how his school's mission and vision impact the work done at his school:

The highest role is to be free in ourselves and discipline ourselves for the common good of man so that our culture can benefit. How does our school fit into that definition? To fulfill and to live our mission statement. To provide the foundations of virtue and character in an encouraging environment unabashedly. Who could argue with that?

This response provides some context as to the interaction between the themes of mission and curriculum with discipline and behavioral expectations but begins to beg a deeper point. As the principal and primary educational leader within his school, the word choice of "unabashedly" begins to suggest a bold certainty that the mission and curriculum used to focus the work at Plains Charter School no longer needs to remain flexible in respect to meeting the needs of all students.

The link between mission and curriculum is further strengthened when looking at the specific mission statements of each school. For example, the words "cultural literacy" are used to identify the mission of Mt. Vista Academy and curriculum used within the school. In similar fashion, the mission statement of Canyon Preparatory identified the need for character education. Embedded within one of the unique characteristics identified on the school's website is the character development program Core Virtues, an extension the Core Knowledge curriculum.

Theme 4: Academic Accountability and Interventions

The words and ideas that acted as the congealing factor for this theme included: achievement gaps, graduation requirements, evaluation of student work, consequences stemming from academic accounts, and other assessment related inputs and outputs.

Linda provided a clear response that helped make sense of this theme:

We use the response to intervention model framework. We don't rely on C-SAP because feedback comes well after those kids move on. So we use our own internal benchmarks in combination with C-SAP and then we also look at any evidence we have like if there's Cognitive Abilities Test information or if they've taken other assessments. So we use that to find out who are the kids that we're noticing are struggling, or will struggle. And then we use some diagnostic testing beneath that.

The accountability behind all of this enters both at the school and student level. For example, each of the participants identified in this study reported using interventions as a means to meet the academic needs of students. Helmholtz stated:

We regularly watch what is happening with every student. We have seen our students for whom English is a second language struggling in math so we have interventions specifically in math. We have our English language learner (ELL) coordinator work alongside our math and science teachers specifically supporting those students who would benefit that support by using non-academic time to offer support.

Lenina suggested a different interpretation of her school's intervention offerings: "I don't feel like we have enough interventions for those struggling populations whether it be ELL or students on individualized education programs." Lenina provided further explanation:

This year is our first real attempt, I feel like, at having any sort of ELL support and with it that looks like 20 minutes a day for high school kids. You know so it's not even like we have strong supports in place for those kiddos.

Accountability enters the student level from several contrasting perspectives. First, the mission at Mt. Vista Academy poignantly stated that the school will not give up on a student even if that student gives up on him or herself. In contrast, Helmholtz explicitly stated in an earlier comment that when a student refuses to turn in work on a

regularly basis then it becomes grounds for offering parents the choice of choosing another school. He did, however, suggest that that is a behavioral consequence rather than an academic one.

The academic piece also emerged as a manifestation of pride behind each schools perceived accomplishments. One example already identified was the graduation requirement of Mt. Vista Academy being college acceptance. Both Fanny and Thomas touted a 100% college acceptance by all of the school's graduates. From one perspective at Plains Charter School, Mustapha exalted:

The biggest question we always get is, how are you guys doing this. I think it's a credit to our staff and our teachers here that have put in the work, the time, and the effort. And it's like jeez if that school can take those kids and be that successful with them, and that population is the same as our population, then how come we are not doing it. I think it raises the bar for them as well.

Bernard showed a similar pride in his schools Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings, "We are actually increasing the amount of AP classes that we have I've had discussions with local public schools within our league that we offer a ton more AP classes than they do."

Theme 5: Discipline and Behavioral Expectations

The theme of discipline and behavioral expectations emerged as a common general characteristic of each school's guiding practices. Again, there are suggestions within each mission's framework as to these categorical expectations. These suggestions would include any character development pieces that specifically address behaviors such as the Core Virtues program embedded within the unique characteristics of Canyon Preparatory.

Within the previous theme, Helmholtz identified one possible conclusion to a repeated behavioral non-conformity being that students that repeatedly refuse to turn in

any work might be offered other school placement options. Lenina offered some clarity to the this idea:

I do understand that, behaviorally, you get put on the behavior plan you know it takes 3 strikes and you are out. Instead of expelling they will say you have a choice to enroll in another school right now or we can move forward and go through expulsion process.

Along a similar context, Mustapha explained a situation that occurred within his school:

It's always fun to watch the legal ease of the language, the political correctness, especially at the university level to try to secularize, pluralize, and privatize everything and then it does weave within the social fabric of our schools all in the name of equity. Were the students who brought dope into the high school a couple of weeks ago, were they counseled out? They had to leave. They were dismissed.

Both of these statements were made in response to question 21 (see Appendix D) about any practices of counseling out that might occur within the charter school setting.

In contrast to these examples, Thomas explained why his school received a waiver for accepting students with expulsions and suspensions:

Yeah so a lot of times the research indicates that students who were at the zero tolerance level of a policy, you lose the period of time where the students are highly motivated to change their behavior. And if they are so highly motivated and you just let them hangout, then when they do come back they tend to be less motivated. So we got a waiver on suspensions and expulsions. A lot of times the suspensions and expulsions are for under circumstances that would not exist to here.

Thomas went on to describe a Native American student that had been suspended from a nearby public non-charter school. The student was feeling ostracized and was being treated as a "token" due to being the only Native American at that school. It sounded as if this was occurring in a specific classroom and by one specific teacher. The student reached a boiling point and then began yelling at the teacher and got suspended due to that behavior. Thomas explained that given the cultural diversity within Mt. Vista

Academy, the student is now successful and has had no behavioral situations along those lines.

Theme 6: Transportation and Physical Access

Transportation and Physical Access emerged as its own theme across all schools included in this study. All participants from both Plains Charter School and Canyon Preparatory had very similar comments on the topic. For example, when Helmholtz was asked about the biggest limitation for students enrolling in his school, he responded:

I think the biggest limitation is that we don't offer transportation and we really aren't able to offer transportation. If there are families who want to send their students to our school then they have to get their students to our school. The school district has not to do bussing to our school. We are not able to do bussing to our school. So I think that's the biggest limitation.

In response to the same question, John stated:

I would say the biggest limitation to our school, because we really didn't restrict, yeah I mean we really don't restrict anybody who wants to join the program, but the biggest limitation I have noticed is that my school does not offer any public transportation, we don't have any busing and I know this isn't the case for all charter schools

Conspicuously, this was not found to be the case for all charter schools involved with this study. This contrast is clearly identifiable in the responses of the participants from Mt. Vista Academy who all discussed the fact that their school pays for public transportation via the city's bussing system.

What options exist for parents who want their students to go to these other schools that do not offer some form of transport? Mustapha said, "They can take the park-and-ride. It's like a dollar a day and parents pick up the cost of that." Both Mustapha and Helmholtz suggested that carpooling was another source of transportation that was available to students and parents. The idea of transportation, or lack of it, first emerged in the language of Colorado Charter Schools Act:

A description of how the charter school plans to meet the transportation needs of its pupils and, if the charter school plans to provide transportation for pupils, a plan for addressing the transportation needs of low-income and academically low-achieving pupils (C.R.S. 22-30.5-103, 2011)

The implications of the language used in this statute juxtaposed to the practices found within each of charter schools included this study will be explored in Chapter V of this study.

Theme 7: Charter and Public Non-Charter Schools

This theme was the most obscure to initially identify within the framework of this study because the specific intent was to focus on charter schools. Throughout the coding process, I created a category that seemed to operate as a catch-all for anything that did not specifically fall into the other emergent themes. In reviewing my own notes and coding structures, this theme emerged once interactions between all of the other themes became conceptualized and dimensionalized from the perspective modeled in figure 4. Characteristics that belong to this theme include the similarities between charter and public non-charter schools, globally attempting to meet the needs of enrolled students, and external environmental pressures that seemed to be a condition of all public schools.

Throughout each of the interviews, a sense of there being not much difference between public non-charter and charter schools was echoed. Bernard stated, "I've taught public and I've taught charter and I think they both serve the same role and it pisses me off to see that there is that separation because that's not really how it is." The separation that Bernard was referring to was the public's perception of how charter schools operate within their community. Mustapha made a similar suggestion as he discussed enrollment and schools of choice within his district:

If you are going to be a school of choice do you provide those normalizing strategies? It's funny because you try to provide that school of choice within your boundary or your zone and then you have open enrollment saying I can enroll this student from way over here if I want to. But as the administrator, a good research topic might be: those kids that get from way over there to here, how come that student from this cross town can't enroll or have equal access to this school over here in this neighborhood. Nobody looks at that. Who controls whether that person has equal access to that facility. Well there's open enrollment. Will that school allow that child who might not be performing well over there into that school.

Mustapha was referring to other non-charter public schools of choice within his district and boundary parameters. He suggested that other schools of choice had the option of not enrolling a student based on the students home-school boundary and perhaps based on that student's behavioral or academic record.

The primary external environmental pressure that surfaced across each school selected for this study concerned finance. As Helmholtz previously identified, not all public schools in his district offered transportation. This included non-charter schools. He suggested that conservative financial practices could be the reason that these non-charter neighbor elementary schools might not offer bussing. In response to how students are marketed for by Plains Charter School, Linda had this to say:

You know, there's a lot more competition these days. And the districts are losing money and then they have more charters. And so it's interesting because we've actually seen some of the marketing we've done used by the district. It almost looks exactly the same as what we have been using.

Summary

The seven themes previously discussed were used to develop the emergent theory modeled by figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 represents a two-dimensional perspective of the interactions between themes 1-6. The effect of each of these themes can be controlled, to some degree, by the leadership professionals in place within each school. This topic will be explored in greater detail in Chapter V. If the model depicted in figure

3 is used to represent a metaphorical fish net with students being the fishes that public education should catch, educational leaders within each school and policy writers have some degree of culpability with respect to the effects of how each interaction effects access to charter schools and perhaps other public non-charter schools of choice. Specifically, responsible individuals can either increase or decrease the effect of each interaction.

Figure 4 attempts to incorporate the contextual dynamic of the seventh identifiable theme: Charter and Public Non-Charter Schools. When the previous net of interaction is dimensionalized by rotating figure 3 along the z-axis, a new perspective begins to emerge with both reassuring and potentially frightening results.

Figure 4: Three Dimensional Perspective Diagram

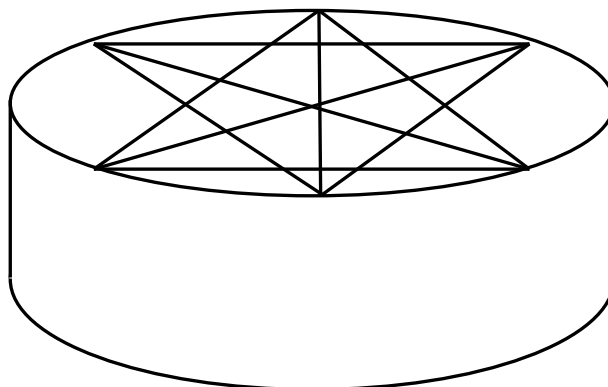


Figure 4. Individual charter schools and other public non-charter schools enter the model along this dimensionalized perspective.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The focus of this study was on charter schools and issues dealing with student access to public schools of choice. As charter schools grow in number and enrollment due to the increased public and legislative support for schools of choice, research in this area grows increasingly important. Having worked in both public non-charter and charter schools, I became aware of seemingly discrepant values and cultures between these two varieties of public education offerings. In Chapter IV I presented the data collected during this qualitative, grounded theory, study while making every attempt to not infuse my own voice or opinions. In this chapter I will discuss the three main research questions used to guide this research, recommendations for leaders of charter schools and policy writers, limitations of the current research, implications of the developed models used to explain thematic interactions, and suggestions for future research. These topics will be presented as a reflection on my findings accompanied with the inductive conclusions drawn from these findings.

Grounded theory methods are suggested when no theories exist that could explain a phenomena (Merriam, 2009). While the charter school movement is not specifically a foundational novelty within the enterprise of public education, research methodologies used to develop theories surrounding charter schools have not yet become the *en vogue* movement that currently surrounds the ubiquitous nature of charter school development- especially within Colorado public education. This lack of attention, and perhaps acknowledgment, has warranted and focused this research. The specific phenomena in question has been framed from my own experiences working within public non-charter and charter schools and is identified in the guiding research

questions. I have chosen to focus and frame logical conclusions based on participants that represent the highest order of leadership responsibilities within each school. This choice was made due to their potential to affect policies and practices within their schools. Other participants responses were used to verify emergent themes and logical conclusions.

Through a series of reflective and peer analysis, it became clear that some participants voices were expressed more than others. To this point, I have come to the conclusion that all participants involved in this study were attempting to meet the needs of students as they see fit. Also, I felt throughout the interviews that some participants become more emotionally leaden and tethered to their own perspectives. As participants became increasingly emotional, I believe they also became more honest about their own philosophies and practices. The goal of this research was to identify the temporal reality of Colorado charter schools. It is my belief that reality can sometimes be obscured by written policy only to be enacted and contravened by personal experience and individually philosophical underpinnings. If I have chosen to imbibe certain voices more than others it was only to discover temporal truth. At the same time, all participants' responses were used to form each of the emergent themes identified in figures 3 and 4.

Research Questions

The following three primary research questions guided this study:

- Q1 What evidentiary support suggests that charter schools provide equal access to all students especially those identified as historically disadvantaged?
- Q2 How can leaders of charter schools influence student diversity and enrollment trends within their school?
- Q3 What are the beliefs of leaders of charter schools with regard to student diversity within their school?

Research question 1: What evidentiary support suggests that charter schools provide equal access to all students especially those identified as historically disadvantaged?

What does equal access entail and how are charter schools providing their services to historically disadvantage students? During the process of interviewing participants and then discovering some common understandings behind each of the participants' recorded responses, I too questioned any motives or intentions I might have had prior to embarking on this study. Was I asking the correct questions? As Mustapha, principal at Plains Charter School, stated, "That's the part where there's the assumption that that is even the right question to ask." He was referring to my question, "does your district require any demographic equalizing or normalizing strategies as a condition of your charter authorization?" His intentions went well beyond this specific question. Based on his derisive nature during the entire interview, I was sure that his question was an indication of his feelings towards the research I was conducting. Once Mustapha decided to answer, he said:

At some level it has probably come up to cut down on the term that has been coined as white flight, and you know you are going to get pockets of that with anything. But you are also going to get pockets of black flight, you are going to get pockets of Latino flight.

In a similar fashion, once the digital recorder was turned off, Linda, assistant principal at Plains Charter School, asked me, "so what is your opinion on all of this."

Mustapha was correct, there are pockets of all varieties of cultural flights both into and out of charter schools. According to Colorado Department of Education, minority student enrollment (during 2010-2011) in charter schools comprised 42% of total charter school student population while all Colorado public schools were comprised of 44% students with minority status (Colorado Department of Education,

2012). One of the schools chosen for this study, Canyon Preparatory, enrolled 7% of its sponsoring district's total student enrollment. Based on the demographic composition of this school and its sponsoring district, Canyon Preparatory could be deemed a white flight school. Considering the state level demographics of both charter and public non-charter schools, for every school like Canyon Preparatory that has an over-representation of Caucasian students when compared to its district, there must also be another charter school in Colorado that services a much greater percentage of minority students when compared to its district's student composition. From this perspective, it seems that Colorado charter schools are providing equal access to all students with regard to student diversity. The enrollment trends at Mt. Vista Academy certainly provided evidentiary support to question 1. Thomas, the headmaster at Mt. Vista Academy, was involved with creating the mission and purpose used to guide the practices at Mt. Vista Academy. The school's focus is on at-risk students with the term "at-risk" being interchangeable with historically disadvantaged students.

From the perspective of students eligible for free and reduced lunch status, Colorado charter schools reported 37% of their students were eligible while all public Colorado schools reported 41% of its population was eligible for these services. Again, these statistics do not show any glaring disparity between students served by charter and public non-charter schools based on students' eligibility for free and reduced lunch status. Within the context of free and reduced lunch status, two of the schools identified in this study (Canyon Preparatory and Plains Charter School) did not provide free transportation to students enrolled in their schools. Participants from these schools reported the inability to offer transportation to their schools was because the sponsoring

district did not provide such services. Bernard, athletic director at Canyon Preparatory, reported that not only does his district not provide bussing to his charter school, but that they had started charging students to use the bussing services for transport to the public non-charter schools within the district. He said, "my understanding is that, yes, they did incorporate that this year which, in reality, I think that if public education is free I believe that transportation to those facilities should be free as well." At the same time, participants from Mt. Vista Academy reported giving students bus passes in order to freely use the city's public transportation services along with offering students gas money for their own vehicles so that they could make it to school.

The confusing side of offering equal access to all students enters when schools begin to counsel students out for whatever the reason may be. This practice does limit access to these public charter schools of choice. Take, for instance, the two students that "were dismissed" (in Mustapha's own words) from Plains Charter School for bringing marijuana to school. Mustapha suggested that the students would transfer back into one of the district's schools and would most likely not receive expulsions. He said that the district is more tolerant of those behaviors. From this example, one logical conclusion would be to suggest that these types of "counseling out" practices will ultimately create homogenized pockets of students with less than desirable behaviors with the public non-charter schools within the district. In touting his school's academic accomplishments, Mustapha rhetorically asked, "how are we getting these scores?" He reported that other schools in his district would ask him how they have had such great success when servicing roughly the same population of students. Remember, Plains Charter School was chosen for this study because its student demographics matched the sponsoring

district's demographics. Helmholtz, the assistant principal at Canyon Preparatory, reported similar dismissive practices (due to behavioral situations) at his school even though they might happen only occasionally. Helmholtz: "even when I say occasionally I think, maybe, once a year."

I now have a response to Mustapha's rhetorical question. Any school that has the ability to dismiss students based on behavioral infractions will ultimately make greater academic gains versus those schools that do not have these dismissive abilities or desire to do so in the first place. I think about and visualize my world as a series of metaphorical interactions. In this case, I imagine Plains Charter School as a ship floating in the vast ocean of social interaction and context that all public schools attempt to remain buoyant within. The students that were dismissed would be represented as some rare species of fish (with an unmarketable bitter taste) that were mainly serving to pull the otherwise academically focused vessel down. By dismissing them, the ship no longer needs to displace their weight and ultimately rises just bit higher than before. And now, that ship has just a little bit more room to fit a few more savory fishes. Not only does a rising tide raise all ships, but tossing unwanted cargo from any one ship will ultimately serve the same purpose -at least for that one ship. But then the other public schools are left with the responsibility of ensuring that the tossed cargo still receives educational services.

In direct response to question 1, charter schools are providing equal access to all students based on student enrollment demographics at the state level. No glaring exclusivity was reported by any participants for any of the schools chosen for this study. All schools reported having academic intervention support services, free and reduced

lunch services, and English language learner support services. All schools had an open-enrollment policy based on a random lottery system. Thomas reported not needing to use the lottery system within his school because it was not at student capacity. During our conversation, just after I turned off the digital recorder, Thomas stated that he has considered requiring a \$200 enrollment fee simply to present his school as being on equal footing with regard to the value of services available at Mt. Vista Academy. He said that he sometimes gets the feeling from parents that because his school is "free-no-fee" then the parents get the idea that somehow the school is sup-par because (as he stated) there is a perception of, "you get what you pay for." He did explain that it would only be for the gimmick purpose of mitigating that perception and that students who could not pay those fees would receive scholarships to cover those fees. Thomas clearly reported not needing an enrollment fee to cover the costs of his school's expenses. As he was explaining all of this, Thomas did say that what kept him from advertising this \$200 fee gimmick was his fear that some parents and students might look on the school's website and then identify the fee as a financial burden they could not bear. This could ultimately limit access to those students and Thomas was not yet convinced that the benefit of increased enrollment would outweigh the cost of potentially limiting access to those otherwise financially burdened- historically disadvantaged students.

Research question 2: How can leaders of charter schools influence student diversity and enrollment trends within their school?

The emergent grounded theory developed during this study is best couched in an analysis and reflection of the findings that have contributed to answering question 2. Figure 3 (Essential Thematic interactions Diagram), presented in Chapter IV, serves as a visual representation of the two-dimensional grounded theory model. In direct response

to question 2, charter school leaders can influence student diversity and enrollment trends within their schools by controlling the effects of the six thematic interactions; parent choice and influence, enrollment process and strategies, mission and curriculum, academic accountability and interventions, discipline and behavioral expectations, and transportation and physical access. Theme 7, public non-charter and charter schools, identified in figure 4 (three dimensional perspective diagram) then serves as the entry point of each schools' ability to provide access to all students.

Theme 1: Parent choice and influence. Leaders of charter schools are responsible for creating the culture and climates within their respective schools. This became very apparent when looking at the charter authorization documents for both Plains Charter School and Mt. Vista Academy. The principal and headmaster of these schools, Mustapha and Thomas respectively, were involved in creating the original chartering provisions for their respective schools. These documents identified expectations for parents including volunteerism and how parents will meet the expectations embedded within Themes 2-6.

Working with parents, providing opportunities to parents and students, and allowing parental influence on policies and practices ultimately resided and seemed to be mediated by the leaders of the charter schools identified in this study. Leaders have the option of making suggestions concerning how parents will be included through the entire process of choosing a school. For example, Helmholtz clearly stated that parents could choose other schools if Canyon Preparatory was not currently meeting the needs of their student. In developing and saturating each of these themes, parent choice and influence first seemed to be so deeply connected to each of the other themes that I

considered it to not be a standalone theme. From the perspective of both Canyon Preparatory and Plains Charter School, Theme 1 would not behave as an isolated theme because of its inextricable link and influence on each of the other themes. Taking the situations and reality of Mt. Vista Academy into consideration, this theme emerged as a standalone theme.

Flexibility of schools and parents to meet the needs of all students now becomes an important piece of the dialogue. Mustapha did not seem flexible as he described the dismissal of the two students who brought marijuana into Plains Charter School. At Canyon Preparatory, Helmholtz suggested a level of flexibility in helping parents make the best choice for their student. The flexibility is implied in his suggestion that parents will be provided behavioral contracts before students are counseled out of Canyon Preparatory. In contrast, participants at Mt. Vista Academy hardly mentioned parents as being a factor in successfully educating its students and when parents were mentioned, it was either in a dark context or was in response to what parents are not required to do. The dark context was evident in Thomas's story about his belief that one of his students was having an inappropriate sexual relationship with his mother while Benito, teacher at Mt. Vista Academy, explaining that parents do not have to worry about paying any enrollment fees or transportation costs is a clear example of what parents are not required to do. In counting the number of occurrences the word "parent" was used across all participant interviews aggregated by school of employment; Canyon Preparatory had 59, Plains Charter School had 96, and Mt. Vista Academy had 21. This appears to provide some idea as to each school's expectations for parents.

The story Thomas shared provided a dismal reality of what some students are subjected to in their own lives. It is my belief that all students should have equal opportunity and access to any public school of choice, especially successful schools where the student's potential social conditions can be mitigated. As Mustapha explained that the best marketing strategy of his school was word of mouth between parents, he boldly stated that "awesome parents tend to know and have awesome friends." Again Mustapha was correct when stated he did not think that I was asking the right questions. Why was he correct? Because the question now becomes, what shall we do with those students whose parents are not awesome? Should they too be dismissed or remanded back to other public non-charter schools based? I think that the answer is clearly no. Students should have access to any school, especially more successful schools, with or without the condition of having "awesome parents" as a preclusion to the students enrollment or continued acceptance.

Theme 2: Enrollment process and strategies. The best way to introduce this theme is by first explaining why the word "strategies" was chosen to be a part of this theme's title. Strategies serve to include any marketing or public-outreach activities that might be used to bring in students or provoke enrollment trends. As a teacher in public non-charter schools, I have been involved with neighborhood canvassing walks. We would drive around to several neighborhoods and park so that we could walk through them for the purpose of introducing ourselves and meeting the parents within these communities. The first district I worked in took all of the district's new employees on a bus ride through the entire district. That bus ride helped me to understand the social and contextual circumstances of the students that I would be teaching the upcoming year. At

that time, I only wanted to get into my classroom and attempt to invest in my new profession. As we drove around to all of the corners and obscured edges of that district, I began to realize that my initial ambitions for public education would only be actualized if I were to meet all students not from my own paradigm of social understanding but from theirs. I quickly recognized that I must meet students from their perspective of cultural understanding of public education and its role in providing equal access to opportunity and academic success.

The potential practice of "skimming the cream," presents itself within this theme. This practice was not explicitly reported by any participants but can be found as implications of marketing strategies and possibly start-up practices. Marketing strategies are directly under the purview of any top level administrator in a charter school. No participants identified any specific marketing strategies common to all schools other than word-of-mouth advertising by community members and parents of enrolled students. Linda stated that Plains Charter School has a parent committee that puts together flyers and newspaper advertisements, at the same time, this school was near capacity and did not require a large influx of students to meet its enrollment cap. Mustapha did suggest that his staff would go out and canvas neighborhoods in selected communities but he did not identify how those neighborhoods were chosen. To that point he said, "I'm not going to go to everybody's house, so I guess if it meant that if I didn't go to everybody's house in the neighborhood then I might be considered guilty of skimming." Mustapha continued, "Have we skimmed the cream and then left everybody else? No. We've been around too long to do that. I think initially you have that at the start up of new schools right away." Considering that Mustapha was involved with

creating the original charter for Plains Charter School, I am curious if he was indicting himself of skimming at the start of his school. Lenina, a special education teacher at Canyon Preparatory, also reported that she believed skimming used to take place in her school but that now they are operating under a "true lottery."

In light of Mustapha's previous sentiment, it becomes necessary to revisit the use of a lottery system for the purpose of selecting students who will be allowed to enroll in a charter school. The Education Commission of the United States & National Conference of State Legislatures (1998) reported:

Lotteries are the most widely used method for selecting students because they are perceived as fair and equitable. Some states, however, give preference to "founding families" (parents who spend many hours organizing the charter application) or to siblings or students already enrolled in the charter school. Such preferential treatment, no matter how reasonable or well intended is seen by some as inappropriate in a public school system. (p. 6)

Participants from both Plains Charter School and Canyon Preparatory confirmed using the enrollment selection strategy of sibling preference. Sibling preferential enrollment cannot be taken as anything other than a skimming enrollment practice based on the following premises:

1. By Mustapha's own admission, charter schools are guilty of skimming during their initial startup phase.
2. Students are counseled out of charter schools based on continued behavior infractions and sometimes isolated events (i.e. the two students who were dismissed from Plains Charter School).
3. Charter schools primarily use word-of-mouth marketing strategies and we now know that "awesome parents tend to have awesome friends."
4. Siblings of enrolled students are given preferential enrollment.

Combining these four ideas leads to only one possible conclusion, charter schools that employ these practices ultimately increase the density of students (within their schools) with more desirable behavioral manifestations in exchange for giving other students with less than desirable behaviors and their parents the choice of enrolling back into other sponsoring district schools.

Theme 3: Mission and curriculum. A survey of job descriptions for principals and assistant principals available on Colorado's League of Charter Schools website indicates articulating and developing mission while creating and using appropriate academic curriculum at the forefront of administrative duties. These two seemingly disparate ideas become joined when looking at the mission statements of each of the schools chosen for this study. Within each schools' mission statement, there are either explicit or implicit identifications of the types of curriculum that are used to guide instruction within each school. For example, the words used to describe the Core Knowledge curriculum (as published on the schools website) are nearly identical to the words used in the school's mission statement with the only difference being editing and arrangement. The school's mission:

Canyon Preparatory strives to inspire all students to reach their fullest potential in academic achievement, character development, and citizenship in a safe and innovative learning environment. This will be achieved by engaging students in:

- Intentional and meaningful instruction
- Content-rich curriculum
- Purposeful extracurricular programs (2012)

Just below the mission statement is a description of the Core Knowledge curriculum, "The Direct Instruction teaching method and the overall academic atmosphere that stresses personal excellence, citizenship and a desire to achieve" (2012). One line from Mt. Vista Academy's mission statement reads, " Mt. Vista Academy encourages the

pursuit of knowledge and education as an intervention for youth" (2012b). Again, this is indicative of the curricular focus at Mt. Vista Academy in that the school's professionals strive for 100% college acceptance of its student body with college acceptance being one of the graduation requirements. Of the more explicit variety, Plains Charter School's mission statement is reported on the school's website as, "Plains Charter School provides students with the foundations of virtue and character, building cultural literacy through a rigorous, content-rich curriculum in an encouraging environment" (2012b). The term "cultural literacy" is synonymous with the Core Knowledge curriculum used to focus instruction at Plains Charter School.

While administrators have some control over forming and articulating mission and choosing or developing curriculum, these specific areas of control do not necessarily limit access to students. Critics of Core Knowledge suggested that its focus is on monocultural Western-based values which might not equally serve diverse learners needs (Johnson, Janisch, & Morgan-Fleming, 2001; Peterson, 1995). These ideas are purely speculation and, even when taken into consideration, this does not necessarily limit access to any specific demographic set of students. From the metaphorical stance, at worst it would be similar to saying to minority students, "you can get on this bus, but you have to sit at the back." Arguably, access is not limited in this scenario but there is the implied dominant-cultural piece that minority students are somehow different and that their cultural perspectives do not offer the same educational value as those identified by E.D. Hirsh's *Cultural Literacy* (1988).

Theme 4: Academic accountability and interventions. Academic accountability, at the student level, must be the primary driving motivation behind any

school and thus the leaders of that school. Interventions are used to assist students in working to their potential so that schools can hold students accountable for their achievement. Within this theme, interventions include any support that might influence academic achievement. This theme emerged as one area that charter school leaders had influence over. Surprisingly, no participants reported any explicit dismissal, skimming, or counseling out due to academic accountability. Here enters the massaging of language in order to espouse adherence to best ethical practices in regard to fair and equal treatment of all students. For example, Helmholtz reported a student's refusal to turn in any work as a behavioral manifestation rather than an academic one. Due to this type of behavior, the student was put on a behavioral plan so this should not be regarded as an academic accountability issue. This type of grey-area interaction between students and their school of choice is indicative of how logic and language can be molded in order to fit any legal parameters including due-process procedures that must be followed even by public charter schools of choice.

Interventions (or lack of appropriate ones) have been reported as one area that could influence whether or not a student is counseled out of charter school. Again, the student is given choices so that the student and parent can make the best decisions for that child. For example, John, a teacher at Plains Charter School, reported that he was involved in meetings with parents and school administrators when parents were told that it would be in the best interest of the student to transfer back to another district school. He explained that this is a common practice when students "have needs that are beyond the capacity of the school." It becomes a situation of not just offering that student a seat at the back of the metaphorical bus but instead recommending that another bus would

be better suited to transport that student. In the pilot to this study, I interviewed Dr. Vogelcheck, a teacher at Canyon Preparatory, who reported that an academically sub-par student diagnosed with paranoid-schizophrenia had been counseled out of Canyon Preparatory because they were not able to meet the student's needs. Serendipitously, Dr. Vogelcheck also reported having accidentally run into this student at a neighboring charter school that had no different resources than his own. As these types of individual accounts begin to accumulate, I start to wonder if charter schools are more forgiving of a student's condition or behavioral manifestation if that student is also a high achieving student.

The purpose of identifying each of the unique cases previously discussed is to acknowledge that charter schools, especially leaders of these schools, do not directly report academic achievement as being a reason to counsel students out of these charter schools. I have found through my experiences and this research that truth and reality can sometimes be identified by recognizing *ad hoc* omissions or absences. A personal aside that helps to explain this subversive phenomena occurred when my wife and I moved back to Colorado from South Carolina. She was born, raised, and taught in Colorado. When we first moved to South Carolina she commented on what she perceived to be a high-level of racism towards African-Americans. She confessed, at that time, that she was not accustomed to that degree of racism having grown up in Colorado. She reflected that teachers would openly discuss (behind closed doors) their disinterest in meeting the needs of African-American students. Once she experienced overt racism towards African-Americans and then after moving back to Colorado, she reflected that teachers in Colorado schools exhibited the same degree of racism as the teachers she had worked

with in South Carolina. She explained that the difference was that there was a culture of accepting racism in South Carolina based on its historical fabric that was not a part of the historical context of Colorado. A similar percentage of Colorado teachers would make comments like those in South Carolina but that they would put their hand over their mouths before uttering derisions. Here is the connection to this study in Helmholtz's words:

We do the best we can but at some point the family and we might meet and say, hey we will do what we can but if you are looking for what is really best for your student there is this program in the district (that is better suited for your kid) and they may choose to go with that.

By couching most, if not all, statements about counseling out as being a matter of choice for the parents and in response to the needs of a student, it's almost like putting a hand over the mouth that is repeatedly muttering "academics, academics, you don't fit our model so you should go someplace else." The re-assuring aspect of this theme came from Mt. Vista Academy as its mission statement clearly stated that they will not give up on a student even when that student has given up. As Fanny, the special education teacher at Mt. Vista Academy, stated, "we find a way to meet the needs of all students." She did provide some clarification to this statement by explaining that only in extreme cases such as a student with a feeding tube that would require a full-time nurse, the school would assist in finding a more appropriate setting. She went on to question if Mt. Vista Academy still would not try and meet that students needs somehow.

Theme 5: Discipline and behavioral expectations. Discipline and behavioral expectations emerged as a theme that, much like Theme 1 (parental choice and influence), was closely tied to all other themes. On some level, each of the other themes could be described through the lens of discipline and behavioral expectations. One clear

example already discussed was how Helmholtz identified a student's refusal to complete or submit academic work. Again, figure 3 (essential thematic interactions diagram) should be used to disaggregate each theme in order to model how they all interact on some level.

Leaders of charter schools set policies and develop discipline matrices that are used by all school personal for the purpose of identifying inappropriate behaviors along with providing consequences that will follow each type of behavior. The discipline policy concerning the possession of illegal drugs at Plains Charter School stated:

If a student is found using, possessing or being under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol, intoxicants or other substances as defined above: Consequences of first violation: The student shall be suspended for a minimum of five days. The matter shall be turned over to the police. (2012a, pp. 24)

I referenced Plains Charter School's discipline matrix after Mustapha explained that his two students were dismissed for possessing marijuana. Just after he spoke that story, I pointedly asked, "were they expelled." To this Mustapha responded:

No they were dismissed. The district has to expel them, if the district is even going to expel them but they can't be here anymore. No we don't and we don't want (the ability to expel students) but what we do have as a school of choice is here are the guidelines and if you are not going to follow these choices then we can dismiss you and can go back to the district school.

In consideration of this disciplinary reaction not being coherently in line with the expectations laid out in Plains Charter School's policy, I began to wonder if these students were high or low achieving in the academic sense. It is certainly possible that these students had already received some prior consequence in response to a prior drug possession on campus, but Mustapha's narrative causes me to believe that this had been their first drug possession violation. These policies and practices are in dichotomous contrast to those found at Mt. Vista Academy. Thomas reported having a no smoking

contract (30 minutes prior to all classes) that students had to sign. Still, this represented a disciplinary expectation and consequential procedure, but as Benito expressed, students would be given multiple warnings and forbearances before any extreme measures were taken. I can only assume that these same measures were applied to situations involving illegal drugs as this was never mentioned in any of the participants interviews.

Theme 6: Transportation and physical access. Transportation to charter schools is not typically provided by a sponsoring district's transportation system. This was the case for each of the schools chosen for this study. Transportation emerged across all participants as being the greatest limiting factor to each school's academic offerings. The reason that this emerged as an independent theme that charter school leaders can influence was based on how each school chose to deal with transportation issues.

Mt. Vista Academy covers all fees associated with transportation including public bussing fees and student gas expenditures for student owned vehicles. While no participant shared this specific sentiment, the motivating philosophy behind Mt. Vista Academy was to remove all potential barriers that might limit access to the school so that students could achieve their maximum potential. Thomas and Fanny both reported purchasing bus passes in bulk so that they could receive a better deal on them rather than purchasing individual passes as needed. In contrast, parents were required to pay any costs associated with transportation at Plains Charter School and Canyon Preparatory. Both Mustapha and Linda reported having a parent organized carpool system that families could access at Plains Charter School. Helmholtz suggested that some car-

pooling took place at Canyon Preparatory but it did not seem as organized as the system found at Plains Charter School.

How can charter school leaders influence transportation so that it does not become a limiting factor? The answer can be found within the various systems previously identified. First, even if a school does not have enough expendable revenue to totally subsidize public transportation costs, the school could still serve as a liaison between parents, students, and local municipality public transportation services. Just as Thomas and Fanny stated, they have more purchasing power by buying bus passes in bulk. Schools could work out a plan to purchase bulk allotments of bus passes and then offer them to its students at the same discounted rates. Also, school leaders could be vigilant in planning and organizing comprehensive carpool systems with incentives or reimbursements, even if those were not directly monetary in nature. For example, both Canyon Preparatory and Plains Charter School required some level of parental involvement. It could be that leaders in these types of schools plan carpool routes for available parents and then count this as their required parental involvement time.

Theme 7: Public non-charter and charter schools. This category emerged due to participants' acknowledgement of their beliefs that charter schools were not drastically different from other public non-charter schools. Bernard clearly expressed a reciprocal nature between enrolling students from surrounding districts. He said that students are recruited, for athletic purposes, from his school at approximately the same rate that his school enrolled district students and in that respect he felt that if Canyon Preparatory was academically benefiting students, then he was satisfied that this benefit would matriculate back to the district. He explicitly expressed his opinion that, based on

working in both public non-charter and charter schools, there is a general public misconception that charter schools were private schools. Benito expressed similar concerns in expressing his apprehensions about charter schools prior to working at Mt. Vista Academy as its art instructor.

The difference between charter schools and their public non-charter counterparts is the fact that charter schools have an independent governing school board that is, usually, focused only on one specific charter school. This allows the purpose of the individual charter school to be focused on an identified set of needs based on community expectations and individuals involved with the development of that charter school. Once again a metaphor will be used to help explain how I perceive the benefits of charter schools when compared to their public non-charter counterparts.

I remember receiving a Swiss army knife when I was about eleven years old. It had the iconic grey plus sign superimposed on the dull red plastic frame. As I began pulling out all of the included accoutrements, I was especially impressed with its variety of tools. It had 3 different knife blades, a small pair of scissors, bottle opener, tweezers, and toothpick. I remember thinking, "how could anyone want a different knife?" As the years progressed and I began camping and hiking, I found that the Swiss army knife was a great tool to have access to, but it never was my first tool of choice. Having all those tools packed into one device was convenient at times but it was never particularly good at any one thing. This is how I have come to view the relationship between public non-charter and charter schools. Non-charter schools have been developed and guided by school districts that must serve the needs of the entire public constituency. In this case, these schools are the Swiss army knives of public education while the charter schools

are represented by specifically developed tools such as a serrated bread knife. The bread knife serves one main purpose. Sure, it can be used to cut up a steak or even pick the food from in between a set of teeth, but few people would logically gravitate to using this tool in that way. It would be a personal choice to use a bread knife as a tooth-pick. I am not sure that there are any laws against it or that many people would make this choice in the first place.

The seventh theme of public non-charter and charter schools allows a degree of parsimony when explaining why charter schools have become such a popular alternative to other public non-charter schools. Having been trained in physical and biological science, I was first introduced to the idea of parsimony under the moniker of Ockham's razor. This principle states that when competing ideas can be used to explain the same phenomena, then the most succinct idea (the one with the least contingencies), is urged to be accepted. The only contingency in accepting the hypothesis that I have proposed is predicated upon accepting the notion that charter schools are designed to meet very specific needs while other public non-charter school are primarily designed to meet the needs of all students. In proposing this hypothesis, the idea that parents choose certain curricular options espoused by Helmholtz and Mustapha easily fits within any explanation of why Thomas might have chosen to create Mt. Vista Academy.

Summary of grounded theory. Figure 3 (thematic interactions diagram) can be used to explain how an individual charter school influences student access to that specific school. Educational leaders within these schools have the ability to determine how each thematic interaction will either increase or decrease student access to their school of choice. Within the leadership paradigm of school governance- the decisions

that educational leaders must make on a daily basis fall into one of two categories; 1) ministerial and 2) discretionary. Ministerial decisions are typically dictated by school board policy and include procedurally-based decisions. Discretionary decisions are guided by policy but are made when clear procedures do not apply. Take for instance Mustapha's discretionary decision to dismiss his former students who brought marijuana into Plains Charter School. This type of decision is made at the discretion of educational leaders. Mt. Vista Academy has a no smoking policy and contract that students must sign. Having students sign the no smoking contract is a ministerial decision that Thomas had already made but how he truly chooses to enforce consequences associated with the contract becomes a discretionary decision. From Benito's perspective, students are given several chances to meet the demands of the no smoking contract before any serious consequences are discretionarily administered.

The crux of all thematic interactions influencing student access hinges upon educational leaders making discretionary decisions. From this perspective, figure 3 can then be described as a filter that either allows a student to sift through to another situation or retains the student within that particular school. Figure 4 (three dimensional perspective diagram) then represents all possible schools within a student's possible traveling radius. Each individual school enters this diagrammatic model at whatever level based on its filtering process identified in figure 3.

Re-enter the metaphor of students as fishes. These fishes are poured through the opening of the cylindrical model represented by figure 4. Mt. Vista Academy would be at the very bottom of the cylinder due to the description that it catches all of the remaining fishes that choose to be caught. Fanny clearly expressed that Mt. Vista

Academy is often a last resort for students that have not found success in any other public school setting. Based on student demographic composition, Canyon Preparatory would be represented at the very top of the cylinder due to it having not caught the diversity of fishes that is indicative of its sponsoring district. Plains Charter School would then be some place in between the other two charter schools identified in this study.

Research question 3: What are the beliefs of leaders of charter schools with regard to student diversity within their school?

Leaders of charter schools reflected a collective belief that student diversity within their respective schools was a condition of public education mostly mediated by physical access to each charter school. As previously stated, all participants reported that transportation was the greatest limitation to student access. It follows that student diversity is then predicated upon access to transportation. Concerning specific beliefs about student diversity, Helmholtz had this to say:

Students are all diverse. We define student diversity as individual students we see based on all of the circumstances a student is in whether it is based on academics, background, family... we see that students are different. They are not necessarily in patterns that are easily defined. And so the way we try and do a fair job is actually looking at students as individuals. So looking at their behavior, their circumstances at home, academic achievement and looking at what their needs are and how we can help them.

Mustapha had a different perspective on diversity. He said:

There is diversity of demographics, diversity of thought, with that there is the assumption of diversity of abilities. However, when you come to our organization, that's our pursuit (the pursuit of virtue and character building cultural literacy through a rigorous content rich curriculum in an encouraging environment.) And so, is there really any diversity if that is our pursuit, if that is our mission and vision. you really try and codify it around that. Kids still have their own personalities, they still have their own ideas. Families don't give up their right to parent or their personal values but when you come to this school it

is all defined around our mission. So how do I define student diversity? Interests, habits, experiences, thinking.

Upon further review and reflection, it began to sound like Mustapha did not identify a need to recognize diversity. Based on his reference to cultural literacy and his comment, "is there really any diversity?", it sounded like he prescribed to the mono-cultural perspective that critics of Core Knowledge had identified as this curriculum's greatest weakness. Similarly, Linda also identified diversity of thought as being a primary characteristic of student diversity. She said:

Diversity of thought. I'd rather have a large population where there's competing ideologies because it keeps you on your toes and it keeps you fresh and it keeps you being reflective and thoughtful about truly are you operating the way that you want to operate. Are you living your mission? So, you know, that's definitely an area of diversity.

Even though both Mustapha and Linda identified diversity of thought as a characteristic of student diversity, I got the sense that Linda believed that this provided a richness to her own life and the educational process while Mustapha saw it as something that his school might want to mitigate through pursuing his school's mission. The most interesting facet to all of this was that Linda worked under Mustapha as his assistant principal. They shared a common vernacular that no other participants used by identifying diversity of thought, yet they had divergent feelings about this form of diversity.

Thomas most succinctly summed up his thoughts on diversity as he said, "I define diversity as not having the majority of a particular group." He continued by explaining:

We have been able to do that in a very organic way. I mean I know of other charter schools that are trying to enforce that by having enrolment manipulation, but we have never had to do that or have a lottery or anything like that, but as

you noticed in selecting us we have a very different demographic than our sponsoring school district.

Thomas was correct, I purposefully chose Mt. Vista Academy because its minority student composition was drastically higher than its sponsoring district's.

The guiding research question, "what are the beliefs of leaders of charter schools with regards to student diversity within their school?" was developed in direct response to a complete void in available literature addressing this topic. Prior to beginning this study, I attempted to develop a quantitative study that would explore student enrollment trends in charter schools as a possible function guided by beliefs of these charter school leaders about student diversity. I had no luck in developing a rationale that could be used to effectively guide that research. I believe that educational leaders responses to diversity-based questions within this study could now be used to develop a rationale for future quantitative studies in this area.

Implications

Educational leaders have a collective priority to meet the needs of all students. Charter schools have become one option for meeting the needs of students. Statutory language used to promote the development of charter schools specifically identifies at-risk students (otherwise referred to as historically disadvantage) as a primary consideration for granting charter authorization. Prior research on charter schools has been primarily focused on delineating differences between charter and public non-charter schools including: curricular options, enrollment strategies and trends, and student achievement. These limited efforts reflect the nascence of the charter school movement in consideration of the historical frame of public education in American society.

Four distinct implications emerge from this study. First, it is clear that charter schools (when described holistically) provide equal access to all students, including those who are historically disadvantaged. Second, educational leaders of charter schools have discretionary control over factors that could limit or increase student access to their schools. Third, beliefs of educational leaders might impact how they choose to make discretionary decisions. Lastly, charter schools should be considered a part of the public system of education. The last implication carries with it suggestions for school districts that currently sponsor charter schools or are considering sponsoring charter schools. Districts should leverage the independent control of charter schools in order to develop finely tuned and focused instruments designed for specific purposes. For example, Mt. Vista Academy was developed not with a specific curricular intent but with the intent of meeting the needs of specific types of students, namely at-risk students.

It is my belief that school districts can become mired in procedural protocols that sometimes limit their ability to make focused decisions. It goes back to the metaphor of the Swiss army knife. Districts must attempt to meet the needs of all learners, and this is a good thing. But, charter schools have the ability to focus on specific sets of students which, in turn, allows an individual charter school to become a specialized tool. This is also a good thing. I do not believe that the two potentially disparate varieties of public education should be disaggregated as a this versus that type of scenario. While I have found no reference in surveying available literature to what I am about to suggest, this does not mean school districts have not attempted this idea. School districts should become the vanguard for developing and opening new charter schools within their communities. This suggestion is more closely tied to Albert Shanker's original

proposition about how charter schools should be formed (1988b). This would allow charter schools to be developed that focus on specific sets of needs as identified by each community and school district rather than the currently dominant paradigm of charter schools being developed by groups of interested parents. As an educator, I am not nearly as concerned for students whose parents have taken a motivating interest in their children's education as these students do not typically fit within the category of historically disadvantaged. My concern is focused on those students that have given up on education or that have become disenfranchised from available public education sources not purposefully designed to meet the needs of these unique learners.

Limitations of this Study

Qualitative research deals with subjective interpretations of social contexts (Merriam, 2009). The limitations involved with any subjective interpretations include: researcher bias, inability to specifically replicate a study, generalizability of the study, and social desirability bias. Each of these limitations were considered prior to engaging in this research. Research design and methodology were purposefully chosen to mitigate potential limitations.

Researcher bias within this study was predicated upon my experiences working in both public non-charter and charter schools. To this point, I had firsthand knowledge of the types of conversations that occur behind closed doors about counseling students out of charter schools. Also, based on my experiences, I know that these types of conversations are typically had in such a way as to reflect political correctness. Based on these experiences, I was looking for hidden and unspoken cultural norms within each school. In this case, this limitation of researcher bias may also serve to strengthen any findings I have reported. Also, no experimental conditions were arranged given the

qualitative nature of this study. Due to this condition, qualitative studies are not repeatable in the same way that experimental designs are. This is why generalizability is not applicable to this study. Transferability, the qualitative variety of quantitative's generalizability, should be determined based on the richness of description I have provided along with the proclivities of the practitioner choosing to apply the findings of this research.

Social desirability bias can skew the results of any research, be it qualitative or quantitative. Applied to this study, social desirability bias could be categorized by the degree of honesty found within each participants' responses. Using member checks and constant comparative analysis techniques, social desirability bias can be mitigated to some degree. At the very least, it can be acknowledged so that future readers and practitioners of this research can choose how to consider this bias while constructing their own implications. I have taken the liberty to provide lengthy quotations from participants' responses within Chapter IV in order to assist anyone in determining how best to interpret these responses.

Suggestions for Future Research

Throughout this chapter, I have identified and qualified areas of future research. This section will serve as reminder of these previously mentioned areas. One area that must be developed concerns exploring educational leaders beliefs about student diversity and if these beliefs can be used to predict student enrollment trends or achievement patterns. Also, the intent of this study should be replicated at the national level to include all states that have passed charter school legislation. Transferability to other states' charter schools was not mentioned as a limitation due to federally sponsored charter school initiatives and it is my belief that charter schools operate and sever similar

purposes across all sponsoring states. Developing this area of research would increase the transferability, of this and other similar research, and illuminate other considerations not yet identified. One final suggestion for future research is based on one of the implications of this research. School districts should begin their own research and development of how best to leverage the unique qualities of charter schools.

Conclusion

Charter schools have been lauded as providing parents and students increased choices in public education. Potential choices can only exist if students have true access to these choices. Leaders of charter schools have discretionary control over how best to implement procedures and policies. Six themes were identified in which educational leaders have some level of influence: 1) Parent Choice and Influence; 2) Enrollment Process and Strategies; 3) Mission and Curriculum; 4) Academic Accountability and Interventions; 5) Discipline and Behavioral Expectations; and 6) Transportation and Physical Access. It then becomes the charge of educational leaders to become creatively involved and invested with each of these nuanced themes. A seventh theme emerged when considering the entire context of public education in regard to meeting the needs of all students. This theme identified how all public schools operate to filter students into and out of public schools. As policy writers and leaders of public schools consider meeting the needs of all learners, especially those students who are historically disadvantaged, the models and grounded theory developed in this study should be used to guide best practices.

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APPENDIX A

CHARTER SCHOOL ENACTMENT AND ENROLLMENT BY STATE

Charter School Enactment and Enrollment by State

| State | Year Charter Law Passed | Number of Charter schools | Students Served |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Alaska | 1995 | 30 | 6169 |
| Arizona | 1994 | 581 | 142848 |
| Arkansas | 1995 | 32 | 10099 |
| California | 1992 | 941 | 348686 |
| Colorado | 1993 | 176 | 66186 |
| Connecticut | 1996 | 22 | 4992 |
| Delaware | 1995 | 20 | 9581 |
| District of Columbia | 1995 | 101 | 29557 |
| Florida | 1996 | 483 | 150199 |
| Georgia | 1993 | 109 | 57987 |
| Hawaii | 1994 | 32 | 7668 |
| Idaho | 1998 | 39 | 14951 |
| Illinois | 2009 | 99 | 37860 |
| Indiana | 2001 | 62 | 19669 |
| Iowa | 2002 | 9 | 1413 |
| Kansas | 1994 | 37 | 5003 |
| Louisiana | 1995 | 96 | 33083 |
| Maryland | 2003 | 40 | 9792 |
| Massachusetts | 1993 | 66 | 25167 |
| Michigan | 1993 | 299 | 111397 |
| Minnesota | 1991 | 161 | 30184 |
| Mississippi | 1997 | 0 | 0 |
| Missouri | 1998 | 46 | 17684 |
| Nevada | 1997 | 27 | 8033 |
| New Hampshire | 1995 | 11 | 2162 |
| New Jersey | 1996 | 78 | 20626 |
| New Mexico | 1993 | 82 | 14932 |
| New York | 1998 | 186 | 47364 |
| North Carolina | 1996 | 104 | 36577 |
| Ohio | 1997 | 368 | 114554 |
| Oklahoma | 1999 | 17 | 5970 |
| Oregon | 1999 | 109 | 17261 |
| Pennsylvania | 1997 | 155 | 85142 |
| Rhode Island | 1995 | 16 | 3402 |
| South Carolina | 1996 | 45 | 12627 |

Charter School Enactment and Enrollment by State

| State | Year Charter Law Passed | Number of Charter schools | Students Served |
|-----------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Tennessee | 2002 | 28 | 4963 |
| Texas | 1995 | 422 | 139665 |
| Utah | 1998 | 83 | 35019 |
| Virginia | 1998 | 4 | 341 |
| Wisconsin | 1993 | 233 | 40645 |
| Wyoming | 1995 | 4 | 505 |
| Total | | 5453 | 1729963 |

data in column “Year Charter Law Passed” (US Charter Schools; 2011)

data in columns “Number of Charter Schools” and “Students Served” (Center for Educational Reform; 2011)

APPENDIX B
COMPLETE LIST OF WAIVERS GRANTED TO
COLORADO CHARTER SCHOOLS

Complete List of Waivers Granted to Colorado Charter Schools

- 1) Local board duties concerning performance evaluations for licensed personnel;
- 2) Local board duties concerning selection of personnel and pay;
- 3) Local board powers concerning employment termination of school personnel;
- 4) Employment and authority of principals;
- 5) Teacher employment, compensation and dismissal act of 1990; employment license required – exception;
- 6) Teacher employment, compensation and dismissal act of 1990; contracts in writing – duration – damage provision;
- 7) Teacher employment, compensation and dismissal act of 1990; probationary teachers – renewal and non-renewal of employment contract;
- 8) Teacher employment, compensation and dismissal act of 1990; transfer of teachers – compensation;
- 9) Teacher employment, compensation and dismissal act of 1990; grounds for dismissal;
- 10) Teacher employment, compensation and dismissal act of 1990; procedures for dismissal of teachers and judicial review;
- 11) Teacher employment, compensation and dismissal act of 1990; teachers subject to adopted salary schedule;
- 12) Teacher employment, compensation and dismissal act of 1990; license, authorization or residency required in order to pay teachers; and
- 13) Teacher employment, compensation and dismissal act of 1990; payment of salaries.

(Carpenter & Kafer, 2009, p.24)

APPENDIX C

ESSENTIAL POLICES FOR ALL CHARTER SCHOOLS

Essential Policies for all Charter Schools

- 1) Legal policies such as school safety, liability/risk, conflicts of interest, and confidentiality.
- 2) Internal board policies such as more detail than the bylaws would provide in regard to election of board members.
- 3) Policy on how the board will adopt policies, for instance holding two hearings before final adoption.
- 4) Financial policies such as internal audits, signature authority and maximum spending levels without board approval.
- 5) Instructional program policies such as the type of methodology used to deliver the curriculum, instructional beliefs, and assessment beliefs.
- 6) Facilities use policies such as how and when the community can use the facilities.
- 7) Personnel policies, such as how many hours a part-time employee must work in order to be included in benefits.
- 8) Parent and student policies such as student's rights, how a parent (or community member) can get something on the board's meeting agenda, and student conduct.

(CDE, 2010, p.37-38)

APPENDIX D

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Discussion of Policies

- 1) Describe the student enrollment policy for your school?
- 2) What marketing strategies are used to enroll students in your school?
- 3) What limitations exist for students who potentially want to enroll in your school?
- 4) What systems do you have in place to mitigate the effects of those limitations?

Discussion of Historically Disadvantaged

- 5) How would you define the demographic of “historically disadvantaged” students within your school?
- 6) How do you define student diversity?
- 7) Describe student diversity and demographic makeup of your school?
- 8) Describe student diversity and demographic makeup of your sponsoring school district?
- 9) Describe any initiatives/activities within your school that promote and/or celebrate student diversity?
- 10) Describe any initiatives within your school that promotes enrollment and retention of historically disadvantaged students.

Discussion of Achievement Gaps

- 11) What do the achievement gaps look like in your school setting?
- 12) Please share your thoughts about achievement gaps that exist within your school?
 - a) What are they?
 - b) How do you address them?
 - c) How does your school address them?

13) Please share your thoughts about the achievement gap that exists within your district?

- a) What are they?
- b) How do you address them?
- c) How does your school address them?

14) Please share your thoughts about what you believe are the effects of your school on the achievement gap within your district?

Discussion of Free Education, Equal Access, and Racial Isolationism

15) How would you define the role of free and appropriate public education in our society?

16) How does your school fit into that definition?

17) Does your district require any sort of demographic equalizing or normalizing strategies as a condition of your charter authorization?

18) How do you feel about such legislative mandates from the state or district level?

19) Please conjecture what you believe would be the effects of districts enforcing a demographic normalizing strategy on charter schools.

20) There is evidence to suggest that charter schools have contributed to increased racial isolationism. What is your response to these findings.

21) Can you please discuss the following practices as they might apply to your school: skimming and counseling out?

APPENDIX E
IRB APPROVAL

Request for IRB Change

Submit this request and all attachments to Sherry May, IRB Administrator,
Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, Suite #25

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO



Date of Original UNC IRB Approval: March 25th, 2011 (ASRM 680)

Project Title: Education Professionals' Beliefs About Diversity, Charter Schools, and Closing the Achievement Gap

Lead Investigator Name: James Bradford Every
School: University of Northern Colorado
Email: bradforevery@yahoo.com
Phone: 970-590-8512

Research Advisor Name: Current: Anthony Armenta Previous: Veronica Richards
(if applicable) School: UNC -ELPS
Email: Tony.Armenta@unco.edu
Phone: (970) 351-2832

On a separate page, describe and provide justification for the changes being proposed. Be concise and specific in describing methodological changes that affect the experience of participants and/or relate to the risks/benefits of participation. Explain why these changes are necessary.

☒ Yes ☐ No The proposed changes in protocol will necessitate changes in documents such as recruitment flyers, consent forms, debriefing forms, or other project-related documents.

☒ Yes ☐ No If yes, copies of the revised documents with changes highlighted are attached to this request.

CERTIFICATION OF LEAD INVESTIGATOR

I certify that information contained in this request is complete and accurate.

Signature of Lead Investigator

1/3/12

Date

CERTIFICATION OF RESEARCH ADVISOR (If Lead Investigator is a Student)

I certify that information contained in this request is complete and accurate.

Signature of Research Advisor

1/3/12

Date

Approved by:

Chairperson, Institutional Review Board

1/17/12
Date

SPONSORED
PROGRAMS JAN 05 2012

Clear Form

Date Request Received by OSP: _____

APPENDIX F
CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Equity and Charter Schools in Public Education

Researcher: James Bradford Every, School of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Phone Number: (970) 590-8512 e-mail: bradfordevery@yahoo.com

Research advisor: Dr. Tony Armenta, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Phone Number: (970)351-2832 e-mail: tony.armenta@unco.edu

I am Bradford Every and I would like to interview you in order to gain insight into how you believe charter schools provide equal access to public education. I am conducting this study in partial fulfillment of an Ed.D at the University of Northern Colorado. As a participant in this research, you will be asked to answer several open-ended questions. You may also be given excerpts from Colorado News Papers, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Colorado Charter Schools Act of 1993, and other documents associated with your school so that you can discuss your beliefs about the focus and implications of these publications. Your responses will be recorded on a digital audio recording device. Approximately 90 minutes of your time will be required to complete the interview and discussion. Participants will be given the opportunity to perform member checks at some point after all data has been collected and all identifying information has been replaced with pseudonyms.

Your responses will be treated anonymously. You will not be asked any personally identifying questions. All data will be transcribed into a word based document and then stored on a password protected portable hard drive. The audio file will also be stored in the same password protected file. Bradford Every will be the only one who has access to this information. The results of this study may be shared with representatives of the University of Northern Colorado and will be used for scholarly purposes only.

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. Benefits of participating in this research will include receiving a final report upon request. As a participant, you may also benefit by gaining knowledge pertaining to schools providing equal access to all students.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form

will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-2161.



Signature Page

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Equity and Charter Schools in Public Education

Researcher: James Bradford Every, School of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Phone Number: (970)590-8512

e-mail: bradfordevery@yahoo.com

Research advisor: Dr. Tony Armenta, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Phone Number: (970)351-2832

e-mail: tony.armenta@unco.edu

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Would you be willing to volunteer to perform a member check analysis over any or all of the collected data or would you like more information about this opportunity. Please circle your response below.

yes

no

.