Conflict Amid Community: The Micropolitics of Teacher Collaboration

BETTY ACHINSTEIN

University of California, Santa Cruz

A major reform surge that began in the mid-1980s has generated a renewed interest in fostering teacher community or collaboration as a means to counter isolation, improve teacher practice and student learning, build a common vision for schooling, and foster collective action around school reform. The term community *often conjures images of a culture of consensus, shared values, and social cohesion. Yet, in practice, when teachers collaborate, they run headlong into enormous conflicts over professional beliefs and practices. In their optimism about caring and supportive communities, advocates often underplay the role of diversity, dissent, and disagreement in community life, leaving practitioners ill-prepared and conceptions of collaboration underexplored. This article draws on micropolitical and organizational theory to examine teacher communities. Building from case studies of two urban, public middle schools, this article shows that when teachers enact collaborative reforms in the name of community, what emerges is often conflict. The study challenges current thinking on community by showing that conflict is not only central to community, but how teachers manage conflicts, whether they suppress or embrace their differences, defines the community borders and ultimately the potential for organizational learning and change.*

A major reform surge that began in the mid-1980s has generated a renewed interest in fostering teacher community or collaboration as a means to counter teacher isolation, improve teacher practice and student learning, build a common vision for schooling, and foster collective action around school reform (Barth, 1990; Carnegie, 1986; Johnson, 1990; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Louis & Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Newmann & Associates, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sergiovanni, 1994). A teacher professional community can be defined as a group of people across a school who are engaged in common work; share to a certain degree a set of values, norms, and orientations towards teaching, students, and schooling; and

operate collaboratively with structures that foster interdependence (adapted from Van Maanen & Barley, 1984).

Challenging the individualism and isolation of the dominant school work culture, current advocates of teacher professional community highlight the importance of shared or common values in such communities (Johnson, 1990; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sergiovanni, 1994; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994). Past research on teacher professional communities has often cast a picture of communities rapidly able to achieve consensus, at times undervaluing the complexities involved in managing a diversity of beliefs and practice while maintaining strong communities (see Barth, 1990; Johnson, 1990; Lieberman, 1995; Newmann & Oliver, 1967; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sergiovanni, 1994; Sizer, 1984). The conflicts within teacher communities that are recognized are sometimes characterized as aberrant or pathological community behavior leading to fragmentation, rather than a naturally occurring phenomenon, which could foster growth (see, for example, Hartley, 1985; Nias, Southworth, & Yeomans, 1987; Pollard, 1985; Yeomans, 1985; as cited in Nias, 1987). Although more recent studies have begun to explore more of the complexities of difference amid community, the policy and practice enacted from the research on community often does not capture these nuances, instead offering a simplified and overly optimistic vision of collaborative reforms. Yet an understanding of conflict within community is crucial to practitioners', reformers', and researchers' understanding of how such communities form, cope, and are sustained over time.

This study extends the discourse of the recently emerging field of more complex conceptions of teacher professional community, which takes into account dilemmas, tensions, and challenges involved in building teacher communities that impact school reform and teacher norms and practices (Hargreaves, 1994; Lima, 2001; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Merz & Furman, 1997; Westheimer, 1998). These include theoretical and empirical works, some of which offer textured pictures of teachers engaged with struggles of collaboration, identifying tensions between individual, subgroup, and collective autonomy. Although this body of work critiques an overly harmonious picture of community, with the exception of Lima (2001) it leaves the dilemma that is at the heart of community—how members really manage conflict amid unity—underexplored.

This article analyzes how teachers in community manage conflicts. It explores how teachers suppress or embrace their differences, how that defines the community borders and ultimately the potential for organizational learning and change. I found that active engagement in conflict, a dialogue of differences, is a normal and essential dimension of a functioning teacher community. Conflict can create the context for learning and thus ongoing renewal of communities.

THEORETICAL FRAME

I draw from the literatures on micropolitics and organizations, as well as a study of two schools to strengthen this recent research on teacher community. The study and the two kinds of literature examine often hidden aspects of life in schools, exposing how teachers interact formally and informally and how that impacts school change.

A MICROPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

The micropolitical perspective arose as a challenge to traditional-rational theories of organizations that highlight clear and shared values and goals, formal power arrangements, and an objective notion of organizational life (such as Parsons, 1951; Taylor, 1947). These traditional theories often do not account for the everyday lived experiences of those inside the organizations. Micropolitical theories instead spotlight individual differences, goal diversity, conflict, uses of informal power, and the negotiated and interpretive nature of organizations (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1987, 1991; Hall & Spencer-Hall, 1982). Blase explains, "Micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part, political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect" (1991, p. 11).

   Micropolitical studies of schools, among other things, have identified conflict dynamics over policy and practice, organizational control by administrators, teacher resistance, ideological or normative influences, and teachers' political orientations to students (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Sparks, 1990). Micropolitical theory thus offers a new lens for understanding collaborative reforms in schools by uncovering power, influence, conflict, and negotiating processes between individuals and groups within school organizations. It is particularly relevant in a study of teacher community-building initiatives because teachers activate micropolitical processes as they increase their interactions and expectations for coordination. They generate "heat as well as light," (Little, 1990b, p. 188) as they peer into one another's classroom practices and examine one another's beliefs to form consensus.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

I also look to school change and organizational theorists (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Fullan, 1993; March & Olsen, 1975; Martin, 1992; Stacey, 1992), who highlight how conflicts can challenge institutional norms and spark new ideas, which can be transferred to other occasions—thus promoting orga-

nizational learning. Organizations can thus make meaning and learn from past events (March, 1995) by adapting or transforming norms and practices. Organizational learning is defined in various ways. Rait (1995, cited in Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999) summarizes four definitions: using past events to transfer knowledge for future decisions (Levitt & March, 1988; March 1995); identifying and correcting errors (Argyris & Schön, 1978); routinely questioning values that guide organizational actions (Rait, 1995); and generating new insights through gathering information and sense making to change behavior (Huber, 1991).

It is important to note that there are different kinds of organizational learning, some that tend to maintain stability and the status quo versus those that result in ongoing inquiry and fundamental change. Learning that results in reactive, adaptive, or superficial changes falls into the status quo category. Here an organization seeks to adjust to its environment while maintaining core norms and practices. Argyris and Schön (1978) call this single-loop learning, in which members of an organization respond to changes in the environment by detecting problems they can correct and perhaps undertaking incremental changes while maintaining the norms and practice already in place. In contrast, learning that results in generating new insight to change behavior and routinely questioning values that guide organizations describes a different kind of learning. Argyris & Schön (1978) call this double-loop learning, which "consists not only of a change in organizational norms but of the particular sort of inquiry into norms described as learning" (p.22). Such inquiry fosters, "a new sense of the nature of the conflict, of its causes and consequences, or of its meaning for organizations' theory of use" (theory that governs action; p.11).

MICROPOLITICAL PROCESSES ASSOCIATED
WITH CONFLICT IN COMMUNITY

In particular, I have found that three concepts, informed by my study, micropolitical and organizational theory, cast a new light on understanding teacher professional communities: conflict, border politics, and ideology. I identify them as micropolitical processes associated with conflict in community because they describe the political activity of teachers as they negotiate differences among colleagues, define which ideas and members belong to their community, and make meaning of their shared framework of values in relation to their school context. I focus on these three concepts because my research exposed differences that reflect significant variations in how teacher communities dealt with conflict, shaped their community borders, and defined their shared ideologies, thus expanding our conception of teacher professional community. Furthermore, conflict, borders,

and ideology proved to be critical dimensions that impacted the nature of organizational learning experienced in the schools I studied.

Conflict

> I take schools, in common with virtually all other social organizations, to be *arenas of struggle*; to be riven with actual or potential conflict between members; to be poorly coordinated; to be ideologically diverse. I take it to be essential that if we are to understand the nature of schools as organizations, we must achieve some understanding of these conflicts. (Ball, 1987, p. 19)

Understanding conflict is essential to building a fuller conception of teacher professional communities. Both within and beyond the school-house walls, the purposes of schooling and the practices of teachers are highly contested, giving rise to conflict. As Ball highlights in the previous epigraph, schools are arenas of struggle. Micropolitical theory helps to highlight these struggles by addressing the goal diversity, lack of consensus, and the range of conflict (from covert to overt) within organizations (Ball, 1987; Burns, 1961; Gronn, 1986; Mangham, 1979).

Conflict can be understood as both a situation and an ongoing process in which views and behaviors diverge (or apparently diverge) or are perceived to be to some degree incompatible. That is, conflict can be an event whereby individuals or groups clash, in which divergent beliefs and actions are exposed. It is also a process whereby individuals or groups come to sense that there is a difference, problem, or dilemma and thus begin to identify the nature of their differences of belief or action. In this way, conflict is a social interaction process, whereby individuals or groups come to perceive of themselves at odds. It is the process of conflict definition that I have come to focus on—the interactive states, the socially constructed meanings, the understandings arrived at by individuals and the group about the nature of their differences in beliefs and actions.

Fostering a culture of collaboration within a teacher professional community may spark conflict. Communities are often born in conflict because they demand substantial change in school norms and practices, challenging existing norms of privacy, independence, and professional autonomy, and may question existing boundaries between cultures and power groups at school sites (Hargreaves, 1994; Johnson, 1990; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Little, 1990a; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Talbert, 1993). They remain in conflict as their valued norms of consensus and critical reflection, of unity and discord, are oftentimes incompatible. As many have argued, critical reflection is as essential as collaboration to strong communities (Dewey, 1916; Gardner, 1991; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Newmann, 1994;

Westheimer, 1998). Critical reflection involves challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions of teaching and schooling practices and imagining alternatives for the purposes of changing conditions (Freire, 1983; Louden, 1992; Schön, 1983; Tabachnich & Zeichner, 1991). Such reflection fosters alternative perspectives and growth and thus serves to counter myopia and stagnation in communities. Yet critical reflection, by uncovering competing ideologies and interests, may result in ongoing conflicts within the community.

Border Politics

A second dimension of collaborative teacher reforms left underexamined by past research is the process involved in defining community borders—negotiating which people and ideas belong. Borders identify the extensiveness or inclusivity of the community. Thinking of schools as communities foregrounds notions of belonging, connectedness, and caring relationships (Noddings, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1994). For teachers, the metaphor of community may be particularly powerful in countering their experiences of isolation (Hargreaves, 1994; Lortie, 1975). Yet those same movements to define a sense of community construct walls and borders that define outsider status as well. As Noddings explains, "we tend to draw circles around groups to which we belong" and often define those outside our circles in disturbing ways (1992, p. 117). Putnam's (2000) distinction between bridging (inclusive) and bonding (exclusive) is relevant here. Communities may simultaneously construct insider and outsider status. As they reinforce shared identities, they distinguish members from nonmembers.

Border politics are the micropolitical processes of negotiating the bounds of membership and beliefs of a given community. Conflict offers a key site for making border politics visible as members articulate insider and outsider status (including people and ideas). For instance, Nias (1985) writes about a professional community that defines their groupness by "locating the opposition." In this way, as Simmel (1955) and Coser (1956) found, conflict can be a powerful source of group cohesion through construction of a common external enemy. Alternatively, other communities may use conflicts to continually embrace outsider perspectives, expand their borders, and reshape the bounds of thinkable thought (Chomsky, 1989).

Ideology

A third underexamined dimension of teacher collaboration is how communities are shaped by ideology. Ideological stances represent "educational perspectives and commitments of teachers" (Ball, 1987, p.281) and are a central concern of micropolitics. For teachers, ideology defines the frame-

work of shared values about education, schooling, and students. It includes an orientation about student learning and outcomes, notions about how school should reform and change, and conceptions about the relationship between school and society. Ideology as a political process refers to the management of meaning, how individuals and communities make sense of their work and ultimately take action (Ball, 1987).

Although past researchers and advocates of teacher community identify the importance of having shared values and commitments, they ignore the content or ideological substance of such values (Westheimer, 1996, 1999). For example, Sergiovanni described the importance of communities bonding around shared values or philosophy, while finding "the subject matter of this focus and clarity may well be secondary" (1994, p.100). However, not all teacher communities are alike. For example, Westheimer (1998) documented the diverse norms and values of two middle school communities, identifying one as "individualistic" (focused on individual autonomy, rights and responsibilities) and the other more "collectivist" (with a collective ideology and solidarity). Teachers, individually and collectively, hold values that shape their practice. The content of a teacher community's ideology, especially as it pertains to values about education, schooling, and students does matter. These conceptions frame how school is enacted.

Ideologies are not solely framed within the teacher community. Both within and beyond the schoolhouse walls, people hold conceptions about the ways that schools should be (Cuban, 1984; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Schools cannot be understood without understanding the environment or larger social contexts in which they operate (Anderson, 1991; Ball, 1987). Micropolitical theorists often find that macro- (ideologies found in the larger environment) and micropolitical (ideologies within a community or organization) factors frequently interact (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Iannaccone, 1975; Meyer & Rowan, 1978; Wamsley & Zald, 1973). For instance, Anderson (1991) examined how the school and district level ideology that prized harmony and conflict avoidance influenced the ideological control used by school principals to dissipate conflict with teachers. The relationship between the outside and inside of school ideologies may exacerbate or minimize conflict within the community and ultimately shape how a community addresses conflict.

THE STUDY

This article examines examples from a study of two school-wide teacher professional communities located in urban, public middle schools in the San Francisco Bay Area that are engaged in collaborative reform initiatives (Achinstein, 2002). The study explored how each community approached conflict between teachers and what outcomes resulted. I chose a case study

approach using ethnographic techniques to emphasize richly contextualized data to get at often hidden processes. I combined both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative work facilitated studying conflict as a process, teachers' interpretation of meaning, and my participant observer role in the fieldwork and analysis. The quantitative work, in the form of a survey, enabled both corroboration as well as new lines of thinking (Rossman & Wilson, 1991).

I chose two sites that self-identified and were recognized by outside agencies as strong professional communities distinguished by their collaborative reform efforts. Through further study, I also found that they measured as strong communities on scales identified by researchers on teacher professional community. Both schools exhibited shared norms and values, common work and purposes, and collaborative cultures and structures. Further, both scored as strong communities by scales developed in terms of opportunity to learn, collegial support and collaboration, collective problem solving, culture of experimentation and innovation (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1996; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994). Both also met Louis and Kruse's (1995) criteria of shared norms and values, reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, collective focus on student learning, and collaboration. California middle schools, with their explicit focus on supporting collaboration and challenging traditional boundaries of secondary schools' departmental divisions, are important sites for both community and conflict. They were actively involved in regional reform initiatives, national reform initiatives, or both, that focused on collaboration. I also chose urban sites that reflected the kind of diversity that can give rise to conflicts among teachers.

Although I conducted research at one site for more than 4 years (intensively examining conflict for 2 academic years), I studied the second site intensively for 1 academic year. I collected data through four primary means: ongoing interviews with approximately 50 teachers and administrators;[1] observations of formal and informal meetings and interactions; document analysis of current and archival documents; and a teacher survey.[2] The tape-recorded and semistructured interviews included questions about the nature of teacher community, specifically whether or not teachers felt a sense of community, how they defined community, how the community dealt with differences and conflicts, and what their responses were to current conflicts in the community.[3] I observed both formal and informal meetings 1 to 4 days a week at each of the sites, spending time in staff rooms, classrooms, school yards, and faculty social gatherings.[4] I collected a variety of documents, including minutes from meetings, school portfolios, report cards, policy statements, internal memos, and historical artifacts. I distributed a survey to the whole faculty at each school addressing conflict within teacher communities and teachers' work culture.

Based on Miles and Huberman (1994), the qualitative data was analyzed on three levels. The first level involved preliminary coding, which aided in the development of descriptive as well as interpretive statements that led to the major findings. The second level involved writing case vignettes and generating pattern codes. Cross-case analysis represented the third level. I adopted a "mixed strategy" approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to cross-case analysis, writing up each case and then using matrices and other displays to analyze them. These displays were combined to form a "meta matrix" that I further condensed and compared. I used NU*DIST, a software program for analyzing qualitative data, to develop the initial and ongoing codes, locate patterns, and create matrices for the cross-case comparisons. Surveys were analyzed using a statistical package (SPSS). I conducted descriptive statistical analyses (means and frequencies) as well as a *T*-test to determine statistical significance of specific items across sites. I also conducted exploratory factor analysis to aid in the construction of key concepts. Correlations were run between the variables to assess bivariate relationships between them. As a "member check," I sought feedback from the participants in the study. After I had written a draft of each case, I shared it with the school. I held a school-wide session in which I reported my findings, asked for feedback, and specifically solicited detailed written comments from a few key informants.

For the purposes of this article, the data shared is primarily from two case study vignettes. Displaying teachers' experiences through representative vignettes can help clarify understandings of teacher professional community. As an analytical tool, a vignette is "a focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical, or emblematic in the case you are doing" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 81). The incidents chosen in the vignettes were representative of the conflict responses exhibited in most other conflicts found at each school during the study and expose dominant patterns of processes associated with conflict within each teacher professional community. These vignettes highlight the dramatic differences between the two case schools, although there were many similarities between the teacher communities. Compared with most traditional schools, these teacher communities are remarkably similar in their collaborative stances. These school cases should thus not be seen as polar opposites with neatly contrasting experiences, rather I emphasize the differences to help illuminate a spectrum of conflict responses. These vignettes serve to dramatically represent the three dimensions of conflict, borders, and ideology to the reader. Each vignette describes the school and teacher community and then highlights a story of a teacher conflict about how to meet the needs of their diverse student population. For further discussion of the entire study see Achinstein (2002).

WASHINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL[5]

Washington Middle School is an urban public school of 650 seventh- and eighth-grade students located in the San Francisco Bay Area. Standing atop a hill in a lower middle- and working-class neighborhood comprised mainly of ethnic and racial minorities, the school is a collection of rectangular flat buildings and outdoor corridors. The student population is highly diverse: 37% Latino, 26% Filipino, 12% Asian, 12% white, 9% African American, 3% Pacific Islander, and 1% Native American. About two thirds of the students are immigrants or first generation citizens. Sixty percent speak a native language other than English. Over the past 10 years, white students have decreased by about 10%, whereas Latinos have increased by about the same percentage.

Washington is 1 of 15 schools in its district of 8,000 students. The principal, Ted, a white male, joined Washington 12 years ago. Ted identifies himself as "conflict avoidant," even though he often is the one to mediate conflicts among teachers and make final decisions. The school has engaged in restructuring efforts, which emphasize teacher teaming and interdependent work, consensus-based decision making, school-wide standards, and high expectations for all students. Teachers collaborate at multiple levels: Interdisciplinary teams plan together for 2 hours on a weekly basis and develop integrated curriculum units, subject matter departments agree on common performance standards, and school-wide decisions in weekly staff meetings involve the whole school in coordinated reform efforts.

The teachers at Washington share close ties. One eighth-grade teacher named Karen explained, "These are my professional friends. [It is a] loving, warm, close collaboration." In contrast to their diverse student population, Washington's teachers are highly homogeneous. Its staff of 29 is predominantly white and female, with 2 teachers of color and 6 men. Laura, a seventh-grade teacher, explained, "[The principal] calls us 'a white women's school.'" All but one teacher lives outside of the (working-class/low-income) community in which they work. Almost all of the faculty has been at the school for more than 5 years, and some teachers (at least five) have been at Washington for over 20 years. Teacher turnover is low. The principal reported that one to two teachers leave a year. In many ways the reported educational ideology of the teacher community is in alignment with dominant local and national public conceptions of schooling. This includes views about schooling that promote socializing students to be productive members of our current society and offering equal opportunities for all to advance based on individual ability. The school's vision statement describes how the school will help students to become "productive members of our richly diverse community," and their reform agenda is

conceptualized in the following way by Karen, "It's not about changing society. It's about bringing these students' scores up."

Conflict is a challenge for the Washington teacher community. Conflicts are described as painful for teachers who perceive themselves as a tightly knit community of friends. As Sara, an eighth-grade teacher reported, "I've never worked in a place with such close friends. . . . When conflict happens, it's not a head thing, it's a heart thing. . . . It becomes a conflict in my soul. I'm emotionally involved in the conflict. I do care and it really hurts." Although the school has some formal mechanisms to address conflict, such as a leadership team consisting of teachers and the principal and monthly faculty meetings, conflict is often suppressed in these arenas, relegated to the private domain or transferred to the principal for outside arbitration. In public formal settings the community comes to rapid consensus (they often do so by finding what the majority wants and calling it consensus), suppresses dissenting voices, and maintains a sense of unity. A lunchtime conversation between teachers about a time when the staff members were at odds over the introduction of collaborative reforms demonstrates the community's stance towards conflict and consensus, which ended disagreement by getting rid of the dissenters:

> Ellen: There are horror stories of our faculty at incredible odds.
>
> Dan: It used to be that way.
>
> Val: But people like each other here now.
>
> Ellen: An approach has been implanted so we don't see the conflict. [The principal] uses the term—consensus.
>
> Dan: Yeah, we took those who disagreed and shot them. (Laughter)
>
> Val: That's true. They are not here. If you are not going to conform, you are going to leave. The precedent has been set up that those unwilling to do that will not be here.

During the course of my study, teacher debates arose about how best to address students who were perceived as behavioral and academic challenges. The school's published vision statement and student performance standards emphasized the faculty's belief that "all students can learn," and expressed a commitment to high expectations for all. But many teachers expressed other sentiments. In formal faculty meetings, the teachers and principal publicly referred to certain students or groups of students, who were perceived as academic and behavioral challenges, as "problem children," "unreachable," "dysfunctional," and as "driving us crazy."

Teachers referred to "the 30%" as the label given to those students who were not succeeding either academically or behaviorally (Morgan & Rizzo, 1995, p.17). These students received two or more D's and F's, or three or more N's for "not-acceptable" behavior. These students were publicly referred to as the "Nons" and denied privileges to after-school activities. To add to the challenges of addressing at-risk students, bilingual and some special education students were mainstreamed. Most teachers expressed frustration at the challenges of integrating bilingual and mainstreamed special education students within their classrooms. Finally, teachers identified growing problems with student disruptions in classrooms, including students swearing at teachers, defying teachers' orders to go to the office, breaking school property, and getting out of their seats and disrupting the class. These discussions of problem students often collapsed poor academic performance, behavioral problems, and challenges of special education and bilingual integration into one category.

Although a few teachers privately acknowledged concern about not serving all of the students, others in more public forums saw the issue as a problem that resided within the students. Sara, an eighth-grade teacher, explained,

> We don't feel that hard core bad students are getting what they should get. . . . Some kids just won't get any better. It's a parental issue. It's a home thing. We can't go any further. The parents don't care. The kids need help that is psychological. It's not my job. I can't help a kid with a horrible home life.

Faculty reported that teachers at the school saw student failure as caused by student background and family (3.67).[6]

The primary solution to this conflict between high expectations and problem students was to remove or exclude the students. Some teachers concluded that these students should go elsewhere, "the 30% need alternative kinds of schooling. I don't think a regular school can deal with them" (Morgan & Rizzo, 1995, p.20). Most advocated tougher disciplinary measures, more counseling, and referrals to special education.

Only in the privacy of their team meetings or individual interviews did I hear a few teachers raise the idea of teachers' role in this conflict. This voice of dissent challenged the publicly perceived unanimity that the problem lay outside of the teachers' locus of control. Eliza, a special education teacher, identified teachers' shortcomings in addressing certain students, "But our population is 30% at risk. . . . We are still not reaching a significant part of our population." In a discussion with a group of teachers at a team meeting, Eliza disclosed teachers' "blaming" approach to dealing with difficult students:

When [the 30%] is talked about as a faculty, I perceive there are a lot of people laying blame rather than looking for change. . . . When I have brought it up in meetings . . . what I get back is that "you have to understand the population we are dealing with. These parents don't communicate with their kids. The kids don't communicate with their parents. They don't have parental support. So there is nothing we can do. So why even bother trying to deal with it?"

Eliza, who as a special education teacher often represented a marginalized perspective, privately identified teachers' role in the conflict about students in the following way:

I think that every time we say things like, "look at their background; look where they're coming from; look at their home life; look at their parents; we can't help this kid because their parents are this way or we can't help the kids because their sisters are this way," . . . I think that goes back to [the fact that] we just don't know how to talk to those Black kids.

These are very brief moments of including themselves in sources of conflicts about students. It was also one of the only times that a teacher identified race as a factor in this conflict and one of the few instances of teacher identification of disagreement among colleagues in ways to address student concerns.

At a November faculty meeting teachers displayed frustration with a "problem child." The episode involved an African American student and the faculty's attempts to remove her from the school. Karen, an eighth-grade teacher, described how this student who had confronted her refused to go to the office. Karen reported that "the student reacted violently and aggressively towards me . . . waving her hands in a threatening manner." The student was suspended for 5 days, and the faculty was extremely upset. Following another incident with the same student, the faculty came together again for discussion in March. The subsequent faculty discussions included comments such as one from Ellen who said, "we need alternative classes for some of the social misfits." Their discussions moved from the specific student to disruptive students in general. Maria, an eighth-grade teacher said, "you send them out because you can't deal with them and they're infecting everybody else." This medical metaphor of disease was heard again when teachers identified negative student behavior as spreading from one bad student to another; "it's infectious" and "it's growing." The group then moved to strengthening existing policy and developing stronger disciplinary actions for "the problem students."

When some teachers began to focus attention on adult responsibility for different approaches to teaching or interacting with students, others quickly turned the focus back on students. One suggested a focus on developing an

affective component connected to their academic reform effort. Another mentioned exploring some avenues for more professional development for teachers. Comments quickly turned back to identify the problem within the children. At the end of one discussion, teachers zeroed in on the problem as rooted in certain students who needed to be isolated from others or removed from the school. Cora, a seventh-grade teacher said, "We need to have special places for these kids. They don't belong here." As a teacher named Pam asked, "Are we really willing to suspend and expel students?" Cora called for solidarity among teachers, "Aren't we going to support our own?" The teachers reinforced their existing discipline policies, leaving their own practice unquestioned. At the end of the school year, Eliza, the special education teacher with the dissenting opinion, left the school. Teachers at Washington continue to struggle with their approaches to problem students.

The community's framing of a conflict between problem students and teachers, and their subsequent actions to remove these students, echoed a pattern of unity in opposition to others. This approach avoided conflict among the adult community by transferring the problem onto the students. In defining these challenging students as "other," the professional community of teachers may have created solidarity within their own borders. Further, this framing served to diminish changes within the organization, maintaining the status quo. These debates also disclosed a rarely explored conflict between Washington's public statements about high expectations for all students and their ongoing practices of talking about "problem" students. This more subtle conflict was rarely publicly debated or, when brought up, quickly brought to closure. It was revealed in private interviews or in brief moments in lunchrooms, and impromptu or informal faculty meetings. In this way, the public perception of unanimity among schoolteachers was sustained.

CHAVEZ MIDDLE SCHOOL

Chavez school stands like a tower on a hill, next to a fenced-in blacktop playground in San Francisco. The 525 sixth- through eighth-grade students come from low-income and racial minority communities and are bused into a middle class neighborhood. The student body is diverse: 44% Latino, 29% African American, 12.8% other white, 7% other nonwhite, 3.4% Filipino, 2.9% Chinese, and 0.8% American Indian. Over one quarter of the students are limited- or non-English speaking. Two thirds are educationally disadvantaged youth, and 18% are in special education.

The district in which Chavez is situated has experienced the turmoil of other urban areas, including desegregation battles, budget crises, political controversies, and problems of a large bureaucracy. In 1979, the NAACP

sued the district, charging that African American students received a low-quality education. The suit was settled in 1982, when the district and the NAACP signed a "Consent Decree," which set terms for school reform and desegregation. As a Consent-Decree school, Chavez had to meet certain standards each year, demonstrate improvement in areas including student test scores, and maintain a certain level of racial integration and balance. In 1989 the district closed Chavez for not meeting the standards. Chavez students and teachers dispersed to five other schools. Then, in the middle of 1989, the school was reconstituted. Reconstitution involved hiring a new staff. The school reopened with a new principal and an almost totally new faculty (only 10% of the former Chavez teachers remained). The entire faculty signed on to the Consent Decree philosophical tenets, which emphasize teacher responsibility for student achievement and equitable education. They include the following kinds of principles: "all individuals can learn" and "if individuals do not learn, then those assigned to be their teachers will accept responsibility for this failure and will take appropriate action to ensure success." The school has documented improvements in student performance, a decline in disciplinary incidents, lower staff turnover, and better school climate since 1992, when they undertook numerous reforms.

Since reconstitution, the school has had four principals. The principal during the 1st year of my study was a white woman named Julie, who had been at Chavez for 4 years. Julie was highly collaborative and defined her stance towards conflict as open, identifying that "conversations about conflicts can create new ways of thinking and new ways of doing things." The 2nd year of my study, Glenn, an African American man took leadership and deepened the reform work around equity. Chavez is engaged in multiple regional and national reform initiatives. In these school-wide efforts, Chavez faculty focused on collective inquiry and critical reflection, teacher teaming and interdependent work, consensus-based decision making, school-wide standards, high expectations for all students, and a commitment to respecting cultural diversity. Chavez has an active site council with teachers, parents, community members, students, and principal engaged in consensus-based shared decision making. It also houses an on-site professional development and youth support organization called Project Respect, which promotes equitable education of low-income students and students of color.

The 42-member staff at Chavez is 61.9% other white, 14.3% African American, 16.7% Latino, 2.4% other nonwhite, 2.4% Filipino, and 2.4% Chinese. The teachers are 64% female and 36% male. Many teachers remark on Chavez's high turnover rate as a source of instability in the school. Turnover was more than 30% in the early 1990s and 17% in the 1st year of my study. Teachers are engaged in multiple forms of collaboration: weekly grade level "family" meetings to coordinate curriculum and student sup-

port; weekly subject area teams that work towards common performance standards; weekly extended full faculty meetings, where they actively engage in consensus-based shared decision making around their focused school reform; twice-monthly restructuring council events that include community members, students, and staff; weekly student/staff dialogue groups; after-school "praxis" and reflection groups; and teacher-parent action groups.

Even with all of this school-wide collaboration teachers identify differentiation, individuality, and strong subgroup identities at Chavez. Ben, a Chavez faculty member, explained that such individuality was a critical part of their collaboration, "I think that's one of the key aspects of collaboration, that it isn't about doing it one person's way. . . . That should also include a nurturing of and a recognition of their individual creativity, expression and priorities. There's plenty of space for dissent here." Teachers identify multiple and shifting camps representing a diversity of views and group identifications throughout the school. Such camps are fluid and seem to shift over time, making them more like temporary allegiances based on a particular issue than entrenched parties.

Chavez teacher community's educational ideology is in line with critical theorists such as Giroux (1988), who see the purpose of schooling as social transformation. Ben explained, "I think that we have, here, a lot of people who come from political activist backgrounds in some way, shape or form so their critical thinking skills and capacities are pretty well developed." An eighth-grade teacher named Sam explained that he saw education as "changing the society, changing attitudes, changing issues of power, and making social change. . . . I see schools as change agents. What education should be is liberatory; it's to challenge the existing social system, to change it." These values are linked to the school's consent decree, social justice, and equity mission. Chavez makes their focus on race and equity explicit and central. They identified their reform and inquiry work around targeted groups—African American, Latino, and English language learner student populations—that have not experienced the same overall improvement in academic achievement as their other student populations.

Chavez teachers actively engage in public conflict about ideological and professional differences. A common refrain of teachers is to "get real," "push hard," and confront one another. Sam explained, "When conflict is brought to the surface, people are uncomfortable with it. That's when it becomes real . . . it will go somewhere." Another staff member, Sara, explained, "It may be uncomfortable when we have conflicts. But we may need conflicts to resolve things. We can't just have the status quo." Norms of self-reflection and collective critique bring conflict and action to the core in public settings. The school has a broad repertoire of mechanisms to solicit and address conflicts publicly, including a formal and well-practiced school-

wide consensus decision making protocol, multiple teams and committees, inquiry and critical reflection protocols at weekly faculty meetings, a number of professional support providers, and a principal who hands conflicts back to the faculty to resolve. The teachers tend to confront differences directly and publicly. But such open conflicts also increase levels of discomfort among teachers. The teachers identified stress associated with the level of conflict at school (3.58).[7] Some teachers withdrew from responsibilities, and others considered leaving the school from a sense of burnout and frustration.

At the heart of many teacher conflicts at Chavez is how to address their diverse student population. Conversations about approaches to teaching a diverse student population, including concerns of curriculum and pedagogy, standards, discipline, assessment, special education inclusion, bilingual immersion, and racial integration, are occasions for teacher controversy. In faculty meetings in the 1995–1996 school year, the faculty began to address the issue of teacher accountability for low student achievement and high rates of disciplinary referrals of African American students. Peter, a seventh-grade teacher, described how teachers publicly expressed concerns that "we are sending too many African American boys to the counseling office." Gary another teacher expressed, "we are not meeting the needs of our African American youth whom we are supposed to address as a consent decree school."

In response, the faculty began a discussion about piloting a district-initiated experimental program called IRISE (Infusing Responsibility for Intellectual and Scholastic Excellence), which involved African-centered curriculum and pedagogy. The assistant principal was active in creating the program at the district level and supported a pilot at Chavez. Two teachers named Sam and Larry, both African American males, were trained during the summer and proposed trying the program in four classes of 15 African American, low-achieving students, who would spend half the day in an African American-only setting. The program's goals included language acquisition, disseminating cultural precepts, and mathematics proficiency using African-centered content.

In the spring of 1996, conflict and heated public debate arose at a faculty meeting. Some teachers saw the conflict as one of resource allocation. For them, the conflict was over equitable funding for African American students or fair allocation of class sizes (as IRISE classes would have 15 students rather than the norm of 30). Beyond a battle over resources, teachers opened up a public debate over ideological issues. Teachers acknowledged that the IRISE conflicts were over basic values and goals about integration, tracking, segregation, and desegregation. As Tanya, an eighth-grade teacher, expressed, "we have not yet agreed on philosophy."

In the discussion that followed the faculty meeting, some teachers voiced support for the program in terms of meeting the needs of underserved African American students who were targeted as part of Chavez's consent decree mission. Chavez teachers disagreed on methods for integration. Some found segregation a means for greater long-term integration. Some teachers began to question their stance on segregation and integration because of Chavez's inability to reach some African American students. Tanya explained that she turned to IRISE as a way to address this lack:

> Are we really segregating the kids? Well, yeah, we are. People see segregation as a totally negative thing. I don't necessarily see that's true. I definitely am an integrationist, but at the same time I don't feel like the structures in this school work for a certain population of the African American community. I think that this program has a chance of doing that if it's done well.

In opposition, other teachers expressed concern about resegregating students after legal desegregation had occurred. Peter, a seventh-grade teacher, said, "That's tracking and that's segregating, and what are the implications of that?" Such opinions were shared publicly in faculty meetings. One teacher named Kati in the eighth grade team said, "We worked so hard to integrate and have heterogeneous classes and now you want to go this way?" Uncovering even deeper roots behind the IRISE conflict, some teachers (including both white teachers and teachers of color) identified racism and low expectations among their colleagues. Teachers' discussion of how to create equity and support the achievement of all students extended beyond the school walls to the larger society. Sam explained his support of the IRISE program as part of "liberatory" form of education that challenged the "existing society."

After much discussion in full faculty meetings, Restructuring Council meetings, and informal gatherings, the faculty came to consensus that they were interested in trying IRISE as an experiment. There was a recognition that the status quo was not working, that as Anna a seventh-grade teacher explained, "we need to try something different with this group of kids." They agreed to pilot the project in two classrooms and evaluate its impact throughout the year. Peter explained, "I think there was some trepidation but I also think . . . that people said, 'O.K. let's try it. . . . Yeah, but let's see if it works. Let's try anything. What's been going on certainly isn't working.'" There were still ongoing public and private debates about the program, as well as frustration and stress associated with these conflicts. Issues of race, professional practice, and resource allocation were not easily resolved.

At the end of the school year, the staff as a whole reviewed their students' standardized test scores and found that although all groups of stu-

dents showed improvement from the previous year, African American and English language learner students showed the least amount of improvement. As they geared up to apply for membership in a regional reform initiative, they planned to focus their reform efforts on the achievement of those underperforming groups. The IRISE program, particularly its instructional practices focusing on African American students, was one of the pieces of the reform. Although it would lose its structure as an African American-only intervention, its new incarnation involved more teachers using African-centered instructional strategies along with other pedagogical strategies. The school also hired more teachers of color to reflect their student population and engaged in more extensive professional development about examining beliefs and practices to improve achievement within their diverse student population. The success of the pilot program was never formally evaluated, one of the original piloters pulled out, and the later incarnations of the program were different from the original proposal. Yet, the efforts around addressing equity and underserved students of color remained central at Chavez. Teachers in different groups continued to debate the "right" way to address the needs of their diverse student population and to work to close the achievement gap.

The community's acknowledgment of adult responsibility for students who were not achieving academic or behavioral success, and their subsequent debates about addressing diverse students' needs, echoed the pattern of critical reflection and ownership of conflicts seen in their responses to other conflicts. Chavez had many mechanisms for openly raising and addressing conflicts about students' race and culture. Throughout the year there were multiple professional development opportunities that fostered adult reflection about racial attitudes and teaching that prompted teachers' confronting each other to "own" their own racism as a means to changing beliefs and practices. The outcomes of such activities resulted in some organizational changes during the course of my study, including introducing an African-centered pilot program; hiring more teachers of color; organizing student-teacher dialogue groups; designing a new school-wide standardized test preparation procedure to address slower gains in African American test scores; and focusing a school-wide reform initiative around closing the achievement gap.

The conflicts at Chavez, debated in the faculty meetings and expressed in multiple interviews, opened up conversations about how teachers should teach, how schools should be structured, and even how society should be changed. The conflict about meeting the needs of their diverse students was never completely resolved, though a new program was piloted, revisions instated and a school-wide focused effort around issues of equity established. The debates would continue at Chavez.

DISCUSSION

These case vignettes reveal how teachers engage in conflict amid community, how communities can navigate disagreements in vastly different ways, and, ultimately, how these different approaches impact a communities' capacity for organizational learning.

COMMUNITY AND CONFLICT FORM AN UNEXPECTED MARRIAGE

Although the teacher community literature promises greater consensus and shared values, these cases reveal that community and conflict formed an unexpected marriage. Collaboration and consensus—critical elements that build community—actually generated conflict. Not only did the teacher professional communities experience multiple conflicts, but the core norms and practices of collaboration that define teacher communities promoted the conflicts. At both schools, the search for consensus paradoxically raised the level of public dispute. By airing diverse perspectives in a collective setting, by raising expectations for teacher input, and by allowing teachers to debate what and how to do schooling, these schools generated new conflicts because of their commitment to creating community. Structures that fostered teacher–teacher collaboration, such as school-wide decision making, made public collective decisions about practice that were at times at odds. Whereas, historically, teachers could retain their private and diverse beliefs behind closed classroom doors, innovations that supported collaboration opened up such differences for scrutiny and often resulted in conflict. The adoption of consensus-based decision making meant the faculties had to come to agreement on values and practices. Thus, differences among colleagues had to be addressed. Ultimately, conflict was neither the antithesis of community nor aberrant. Rather, it was an essential component of community.

A CONTINUUM OF MICROPOLITICAL PROCESSES

Given the presence of conflict amid community, how did each community respond to its conflicts and what were the results? These cases demonstrated that communities manage conflict quite differently. Through this research and a review of the literature, I have come to see a spectrum of micropolitical processes associated with conflict within teacher professional communities. The cases helped bring to light a continuum that demonstrates variation in how communities manage conflicts, negotiate borders, and define ideologies. Ultimately, exploring the spectrum of each dimension of the continuum helps reveal micropolitical processes that shape different kinds of organizational learning within schools (see Figure 1).

Conflict Stances	*Avoidant* ◄————► *Embracing*	
	Exclude, rapidly absorb, or transfer conflicts; seek harmony and unanimity; low levels of dissent; limited repertoire of mechanisms for public debate while active informal mechanisms privatize conflict	Acknowledge, solicit, and own conflict by critically reflecting upon differences of belief and practice; active dissent and opportunities for alternative views; broad repertoire of mechanisms for public debate
	"An approach has been implanted so we don't see the conflict. The principal uses the term consensus." —Washington Teacher	*"When conflict is brought to the surface . . . that's when it becomes real. It will go somewhere."* —Chavez Teacher
Border Politics	*Unified/Exclusive* ◄————► *Diverse/Inclusive*	
	Highly bonded social ties; homogeneity within community; rigid or impermeable borders that form barriers to outsiders	Individual and subgroup identities upheld; heterogeneity of beliefs and participants fostered; fluid social arrangements; open boundaries that form bridges; sometimes fragmentation
	"We took those who disagreed and shot them." *"You send them out because you can't deal with them and they're infecting everybody else."* —Washington Teachers	*"There's plenty of space for dissent here."* *"We are not meeting the needs of our African American youth."* —Chavez Teachers
Ideology	*Mainstream/Congruent* ◄————► *Critical/Counter*	
	Mainstream ideology about the purposes of schooling—to socialize students into current society; teacher's role is socialization; inside school ideology congruent with dominant messages from the environment	Critical ideology about the purposes of schooling—to build critical thinkers and actors to transform, rather than reproduce, current society; teachers as change agents; inside school ideology in conflict with dominant messages from the environment
	"It's not about changing society. It's about bringing the students' scores up." —Washington Teacher	*"What education should be is liberatory. It's to challenge the existing social system; to change it."* —Chavez Teacher
Organizational Change and Learning	*Stability/Static* ◄————► *Change/Learning*	
	Solutions result in maintenance of existing social relations and norms	Conflicts result in questioning core norms; organizational change; potential for organizational learning
	"Aren't we going to support our own?" (explanation for strengthening the existing discipline policy) —Washington Teacher	*"Let's try it [IRISE]. . . . What's been going on certainly isn't working."* —Chavez Teacher

Figure 1. Continuum of Micropolitical Processes about Conflict within Teacher Communities.[8]

The purpose of having a continuum is to represent variation. The two cases I studied fall on different places on the continuum, rather than at opposite ends. It is often tempting to dichotomize, placing the cases at polar opposites of a continuum, but this would not represent the complexity of the similarities and differences between the two teacher communities. Further, in no way should communities be seen as static, fitting in one place on the continuum at all times. Because teacher professional communities vary and the same community changes over time, members might find themselves at different points along the continuum at different times or over different issues.

Conflict Stances: From Avoiding to Embracing Conflict

Conflict stances represent a community's processes to negotiate conflict among its membership. The continuum depicts a range of responses to conflict. At one end of the spectrum lies an avoidant stance, identifying a community's ability to rapidly absorb, exclude, or transfer conflicts and thus maintain a unified community and stable school environment. The avoidant stance includes approaches to conflict that sustain a highly bonded and harmonious community through the exclusion or suppression of dissent. A limited repertoire of mechanisms for public debate exists, while active informal systems tend to privatize conflict. At the other end of the spectrum sits an embracing stance, which involves a community acknowledging and critically reflecting on their differences of belief and practice in efforts to foster fundamental change in the school. Active dissent and promotion of alternative perspectives are sought. A broad repertoire of mechanisms for public debate is developed

In general, Washington's stance toward conflict remains closer to the avoidant side of the continuum and Chavez's closer to embracing. Although Washington's teacher community raised some conflicts, its culture of strong consensus, norms of minimizing dissent and transferring conflict outside of its borders, and its tendency to privatize differences all served to exclude other conflicts. Their conception of consensus was unanimity where "we don't see the conflict" or "if you are not going to conform, you are going to leave" and served to submerge conflict. In contrast, Chavez teachers acknowledged diversity of beliefs and practice, found space for dissent in a public arena, and at times critically reflected on and accepted a variety of conflicts. They found that when "conflict is brought to the surface," when it "becomes real," then transformation could occur because "we can't just have the status quo."

The two contrasting responses to conflicts over students demonstrate the different stances. In Chavez's case teachers talked of how "*we* are sending too many African American students to the counseling office" and publicly

debated philosophies of integration and equity. In this way, they owned and embraced the conflict among the adult community. Alternatively, Washington teachers attributed the conflict to "defiant" students and sought ways to exclude them. Rather than identify a discrepancy between their own vision statement and practice in reaching "all students," Washington teachers located the source of difficulties in "problem students," transferring the conflict and thus avoiding teacher-to-teacher disagreement.

Border Politics: From Unity to Diversity

The responses to conflict expose and shape border politics as communities negotiate membership and acceptable beliefs. Borders delineate inclusivity and permeability, both within the boundaries of the community and in relation to those outside, such as students or parents. The two cases illustrate contrasting kinds of border politics that result in exclusive and inclusive boundaries for their communities, thus demonstrating points along a continuum of border negotiation.

Washington's teacher professional community defined its border by identifying unified membership in opposition to others. Border negotiations were heard in the community's language of exclusion: "resistors," "problem students or parents," and "nons," all of whom in some way or another "don't belong here." At times they used medical metaphors for students "infecting" others that resulted in quarantining strategies, building walls between the "us" and "them." In an extreme example of outsider status, teachers resistant to the collaborative reforms were not just described as excluded but (albeit jokingly) eliminated—"We took those who disagreed and shot them." This pattern was echoed as teachers sought to "support their own," defending their borders. While the teachers maintained solidarity, they may have done so by unwittingly excluding 30% of the children (labeled "problems"). Thus the high walls that formed their community borders kept out a large group of students for whom they were responsible. Ultimately, outsiders (i.e., teachers resistant to the collaborative reform initiatives, the dissenting special education teacher who aligned herself with marginalized students, and problem students who were suspended) left. Yet this construction of outsiders was not simply a search for an enemy. At Washington, I saw an ethic of care between teachers and certain students and among teachers. This ethic of care was defined by "a world of relationships [that] . . . gives rise to a recognition of responsibility for one another" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 30). However, this ethic was circumscribed by the boundaries of the perceived caring community. Those who fell outside of it or threatened the community were excluded.

Washington's was a community that oftentimes sustained its unified border by achieving rapid public consensus, privatizing differences, or trans-

ferring disagreement outside its bounds. The community's conception of collaboration as unanimity that lacked dissent or alternative voices meant borders were often impermeable and unshifting. The dominant group's beliefs were rarely challenged.

In contrast, Chavez teachers' responses to conflict defined a more diverse community with more open boundaries. These teachers often included students as part of their community, particularly when they took ownership for not reaching African American students. They used "we" language to include students within the community—"we are not meeting our students' needs." Less projection of conflict upon outsiders meant Chavez teachers often identified with historically marginalized stakeholders in schools, such as students and parents. Multiple and shifting camps of teachers within the community allowed for more fluid borders as well. This may at times have raised some sense of fragmentation and less clear unity within the community.

Chavez teachers' conception of collaboration with an openness to dissenters and alternative voices, including students' perspectives and minority teachers, made their community a more dynamic one, with inclusive and expanding borders. "There's plenty of space for dissent here," explained the teachers. Their acceptance that "we have not agreed on philosophy" and their openness to hearing and experimenting with different solutions, such as IRISE, also demonstrates how permeable the boundaries are to new conceptions. It was a teacher community expanding its borders—acknowledging and, at times, embracing conflicts for the purposes of change and learning.

Although dissent and diversity were the norm at Chavez, there was still a unity of commitment found in their shared ideology of schooling for social justice and equity. This shared ideology served as a common framework that united the community, while debate and dissent remained about the means for achieving such ends.

Ideology: From Mainstream to Critical

Stepping back from the microprocesses of border politics, I am left with the question of what explains such different approaches in the two schools. How come one community tended to avoid while the other embraced conflicts? Micropolitical processes are not separable from the ideologies already present and working within and beyond the schoolhouse walls. The content of such ideologies, and the relationship between the macro-level and the internal school ideology, shapes how conflict is received and managed. Any given teacher community could hold ideological values that are in concert with or in opposition to macro-level messages, thereby increasing or decreasing levels of conflict experienced among the teachers. Thus, the degree of consistency in ideological stances between micro and macro

ideologies influences the nature of the micropolitical processes associated with conflict.

The continuum depicts an ideological spectrum from mainstream conceptions about schooling for socialization that are congruent with dominant messages from the environment to critical conceptions of schooling for transformation of society that conflict with local and national messages. Ideologies of schooling shaped contrasting experiences in the two cases. Washington teachers tended to uphold mainstream notions of education, identifying school as a site to socialize students into the current society and ultimately serve as a stabilizing influence for society. This ideology aligns with reigning messages and models of schooling, thus diminishing conflict within the walls of the school. In contrast, the Chavez teachers tended to support a more critical view of schooling practices, a notion of schooling for social justice, and a transformative vision of the role of education in society. Such views challenged dominant, mainstream ideologies and thus promoted acceptance of continual conflict. These contrasting insider ideologies are captured in the following teachers' comments from each school.

> It's not about changing society. It's about bringing these students' scores up. It's about meeting the goals of the district in raising test scores. We hope that by making the curriculum . . . coherent from kindergarten through 8th grade, the students will improve. (Karen, an eighth-grade Washington teacher)

> Education is an institution of change. Changing what? Changing the society, changing attitudes, changing issues of power, making social change, hopefully beneficial social change. [Generally,] people don't see it like that, my perception is that they see it more as a job and they're good people and they're helping to educate young people and these sort of platitudes but when it comes to helping them, educating them to do what? It's to maintain the status quo. . . . I see what education should be as liberatory, it's to challenge the existing social system and change it. Because it's evil and it's corrupt. (Sam, an eighth-grade Chavez teacher)

Chavez communities' ideology placed conflict at the core. Their conception of their roles as critically transformative educators within a diverse community supports their approach to embracing conflict, upholding dissent, and exploring multiple perspectives. If their values challenged schooling as it existed, then continual struggle and the exposure of inequity and difference needed to be at the center of their work. Thus conflict became inherent within their community, and conflict was embraced as positive community behavior (e.g., a capacity for "getting real," a challenge to the "status quo").

Furthermore, Chavez is linked to an ideology for which there are no prevailing models in the macro-mainstream environment from which to draw. Chavez is trying to invent a different way of doing school—a socially just and transformative way. There are no robust conceptualizations or determinate ways to doing school this differently. Teacher conflict is further exacerbated as they struggle with competing conceptions of how to construct such a school. As teachers collaborate to invent something new, they run into more conflict. For example, they chose IRISE as an experiment, finding that they would have to debate about whether this was the "right" way to go because there is not a given answer to creating an equitable school. Having to invent through collective work, within the context of counterpressure from the macro environment to reproduce current models of schooling, increased conflicts.

In contrast, the congruence between Washington teachers' values and the larger society's expectations for schooling elicited less conflict. The teachers organized around less critical notions that saw education as providing opportunity for social mobility within the current system. They saw the function of schooling as a socializing mechanism for students and a stabilizing influence for society. Conflict played a lesser role in the community, and they tended to minimize dissent or divergent perspectives. This ideology aligns with reigning macro messages and models of schooling, thus diminishing conflict within the walls of the school.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Of all the aspects of a teacher community, why focus in on conflict, border politics, and ideology? The kinds of organizational learning purported to result from building community among teachers are deeply linked to how they manage the differences amid their collaboration. The processes of conflict are critical to understanding what distinguishes a professional community that maintains stability and the status quo from a community engaged in ongoing inquiry and change. In the cases, the micropolitical processes played an essential role in organizational learning that impacted structures, reform efforts, norms, and the whole school community. In one case these processes fostered a kind of learning for inquiry and ongoing renewal through challenging deeply taken-for-granted norms, whereas the other case showed how the community used these processes to maintain harmony and the status quo.

Washington teachers scored high on teacher learning community factors in the survey (with a mean score of 4.08 out of 5-point scale).[9] Current research on communities applauds unified or "bonded" communities (Siskin, 1994), such as Washington's. Such communities counter the kinds of isola-

tion and individualism endemic in schools. By diminishing conflict, reasserting consensus within their community, clearly delineating borders, and aligning ideologically with the macro environment, teachers reaffirm their bonds and sustain harmony.

One of the dilemmas of such harmonious communities is that while promoting positive outcomes, they may become static settings with few mechanisms for reflection, change, or transformation. In underplaying dissent in favor of consensus, such communities limit inquiry and change and easily fall prey to myopia, losing an outside perspective. By transferring conflicts onto outsiders, community members never challenge their assumptions and practices. Lima's 1998 study found that such bonded communities based on friendship limit teachers' opportunities for professional development as friends reduce access to alternative perspectives and do not address improper professional conduct. Moreover, organizational theorists report that conflict suppression, concurrence seeking, and homogeneous groupings reduce innovation and the quality of organizational decisions (De Dreu, 1997; Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). Extreme consensus seeking is predicted to lead to collective rationalizations, stereotypes of outsiders, limited exploration of alternatives, and impaired decision making (Turner & Pratkanis, 1997, p. 54).

In Washington's conflicts over students, teachers strengthened their discipline practice, leaving unexplored teachers' expectations for students, differences of teachers' beliefs, and a potential to change teacher practices. This allowed teachers to relinquish responsibility for up to 30% of their student population. Further, by constructing impermeable borders, challenging ideas, alternative perspectives, and new thinking were diminished. The congruence between micro and macro ideological stances toward school further limited any questioning of the status quo.

Thus the very communities currently highlighted as successful by the literature may not be as generative or capable of organizational learning for fundamental change as other more conflict-ridden ones. Critically reflecting on conflicts within a school enables the potential for the kind of organizational learning and change advocated by reformers. An embracing stance towards conflict involves a community in an inquiry process that explores divergent beliefs and practices of the community; acknowledges and owns responsibilities for conflicts that may result; opens the borders to diverse members and perspectives; and, at times, questions the organization's premises to change them.

Conflict played such a role in changing structures, reform efforts, and norms at Chavez. Reviewing, critiquing, and challenging themselves, particularly around equity issues, meant there was a climate that supported organizational change. Open borders, collective responsibility, and critical ideology enabled teachers to learn from conflicts and make changes in the school.

Conflict and diversity were situated as central to the working of the community, to its future growth and transformation. In response to conflict about reaching African American students, a concerted effort was made and achieved to hire more teachers of color, to pilot the IRISE project, to continue to work on professional development for racial awareness, and to develop a school-wide reform effort to address their students' needs.

At times, Chavez's teacher community demonstrated a potential for double-loop learning when critical reflection about conflicts exposed challenges to the core norms of the community (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Questioning the nature of desegregation and consent-decree mandates challenged theories in use at the very foundation of the reconstituted school. Teachers deeply questioned the very premise of an integrated school by experimenting with IRISE and segregation patterns within the school, while at the same time continually revisiting questions about the purposes of integration. Although actively engaged in conflicts, Chavez still maintained a high degree of consensus about their ideology of schooling. Without that framework of shared purposes, they may have been too conflictual to change. Within this context though, Chavez teachers were endeavoring to challenge, negotiate, and renegotiate their beliefs and practices. This enabled greater risk taking and flexibility. In this way, Chavez was potentially a more responsive organization, and for some organizational theorists (Argyris & Schön, 1978; March, 1995) this flexibility makes organizations such as Chavez more viable over time.

These cases thus reveal an important lesson that communities that can productively engage in conflict, rather than those with low levels of conflict or those that suppress their differences, have a greater potential for continual growth and renewal. Reflection and conflict offer a community the opportunity for change. The ability to engage in critical reflection and openly explore dissent is vital to fostering a renewing and learning community. Dissent, the voicing of alternatives and the challenging of the majority, offers a great stimulant for inquiry and organizational learning. Nemeth's (1989) study on minority dissent found that the quality of group decision making and performance was raised through dissenting views. New types of learning are possible because dissent fosters divergent thought processes, opens up possibilities, and questions the previously unquestionable. The open dialogue of opposing views that makes cooperative settings productive has been characterized as *constructive controversy* (Tjosvold, 1985). Constructive controversy allows individuals to begin to doubt the adequacy of their own perspective and seek to understand one another more. Ultimately, this can lead to greater creativity, a higher quality decision, and one the group is willing and able to collectively implement (Tjosvold, 1982; Tjosvold & Deemer, 1980).

A CAUTION

Although the evidence demonstrates a greater potential for inquiry and ongoing organizational learning at Chavez, this is not a simple story where we can conclude that one community's culture is better than the other's. The costs are significant in both cases. Just as previous researchers pathologized conflict, I do not want to fall prey to pathologizing consensus. There are lessons to learn from Washington, and there was a toll to pay for Chavez's approach. In most school settings, fostering a sense of caring between teachers is a challenge because of their isolation in their own classrooms and their norms of autonomy and individualism (Noddings, 1992). Washington's stance towards conflict, one sensitive to relationships and bonds of community, serves an important function for teachers. The school offered a powerful vision of strong ties, harmony, and close collaboration.

Some organizational theorists may glorify embracing conflict, paradoxes and chaos, fluid borders, and critical stances, ignoring its impact on practitioners (Bolman & Deal, 1984; Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1976). Such ambiguity may be less appealing to the very teachers who experience it. Instead, Chavez teachers identified as painful and frustrating what some theorists advocate as moments of creativity and change (Hargreaves, 1997, p. 3). Many teachers were frustrated with repeated conflicts, with not getting to solve the problems. Stress, burnout, and teacher turnover may have been high prices to pay for such an openness to conflict. Further, a lack of attention to the ties of the community, to that which is shared, may create fragmentation as individual and subgroups form islands onto themselves—thus contributing to, rather than countering, the isolation that collaborative reforms were initiated to address.

The challenge then is how to conceptualize a community that maintains the ties and connectedness of a caring and stable community while sustaining the constructive controversy of a learning community. Gardner's (1991) "wholeness incorporating diversity" is central to this new understanding of community. "The play of conflicting interests in a framework of shared purposes" is the image needed for our schools (p. 15). Examining, rather than overlooking, the role of conflict amid community is critical to this endeavor. Conflict generates opportunities to strengthen communities, for in the conflict lies an occasion to examine differences of beliefs, solicit alternative voices, bridge across differences to find common ground, and seek opportunities for change and growth.

CONCLUSION

This study suggests that counter to the consensus-based literature on teacher community, teachers engaged in collaboration generate and at times thrive

on conflict. The conflicts and the teachers' responses to them played a crucial role in defining the boundaries of the communities, and community and conflict formed an unexpected marriage. Moreover, how the communities navigated their differences resulted in contrasting potentials for organizational learning and change. A micropolitical analysis of conflict processes proved critical in understanding the nature of the teacher collaborative reforms in these cases.

In drawing conclusions, it is important to note some limitations of this work. Case study research can generalize to a theory, not populations (Yin, 1989). Further, the study is limited because of the primary focus on teacher community, with lesser focus on the experiences of student.

It is time to reframe notions of conflict amid community. To engage in conflict and question one's beliefs with the possibility of deep change is fundamentally a positive and hopeful act rather than a problematic one within community. If conflict processes are a natural, inevitable, and at times fruitful part of teacher professional communities, then conflict talk, deliberation about ideology, border negotiations, dissent, and disagreements over practices can no longer only be relegated to the domain of unprofessional or dysfunctional.

The three concepts of conflict, border politics, and ideology drawn from micropolitical and organizational theory offer a way to explore phenomena inherent in teacher collaboration. Research should no longer ignore or pathologize these micropolitical processes but explore them. Policy makers should reconsider naive initiatives that put teachers in groups and expect them to learn and grow, disregarding the complexity of the collaborative process and the time needed to navigate differences. Practitioners who understand the micropolitics of collaboration also may be less alarmed when conflicts do arise, learn to navigate them in more overt ways, and more explicitly discuss the kinds of communities they want to maintain.

The reason it is important to focus on the micropolitical processes in teacher communities is that different stances provide different opportunities for organizational learning. One of the dangers of collaborative reform initiatives is reinforcing a type of groupthink, uncritically accepting group beliefs and perpetuating false assumptions that stagnate organizations. "Groupthink," coined by Janis (1972), refers to going along with group decisions without questioning or allowing dissent (Fullan, 1993, p. 82). Open debate and conflict prove vital to the growth of some professional communities. The micro and macro ideologies can interact to foster or inhibit learning as well. Communities with a greater congruence with reigning macro conceptions of schooling could serve to perpetuate the status quo, often leaving assumptions unquestioned and the organization unchanged. Finally, how a community negotiates its border politics also raises questions about issues of learning within collaborative reform efforts. Do some collaborative reforms

foster "gated communities" that barricade out those ideas and people deemed "outsiders," or do they generate a sense of openness to newcomers and outside perspectives? These micropolitical processes help disclose the reality of teacher professional communities, demonstrating a double meaning of "the ties that bind"—how group bonds can both unite and restrain.

Notes

1   Participants were selected via "snowball sampling," whereby key informants were referred through other informants based on their perspective or participation in conflicts. I also tried to select teachers who might bring different perspectives, including male and female, new and experienced, as well as teachers of different races, ethnicities, and from different subject and grade levels. At each school I chose a subgroup of 7 target teachers who comprised an eighth-grade-level team with which to conduct a more intensive series of interviews and observations.

2   I adapted a survey from McLaughlin and Talbert (1996).

3   I also used a hypothetical scenario of two schools, which handled a specific conflict differently as an eliciting device. I then asked if there were conflicts of this kind or others at their school. I also asked about the outcomes of such conflicts. A sample of a few of the interview questions includes the following:

1. How would you describe how teachers work together at your school?

2a. What issues of difference or conflicts have arisen between teachers?

2b. Can you think of 2–3 events, which represent how your staff deals with differences or conflicts among teachers? Can you tell me about them?

5. What was the outcome of those conflicts? How did they impact the teacher community?

6. How does the staff deal with those who disagree with decisions that a majority of the staff endorses? Can you think of a time that happened? Can you tell me about it?

4   There were some important ethical considerations involved in doing a study on conflict in schools. I maintained strict confidentiality to avoid exacerbating conflicts or disrupting the teacher community. This work required good judgment and a sympathetic ear to respect individuals and the larger community with whom I interacted. My goal was to understand more about the processes of conflict, not to cause it. I came to this topic as a former teacher and reform coordinator and understood well the experience of conflict within community.

5   Both school names are pseudonyms and all respondents were given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. All direct quotations were taken verbatim from participants.

6   This represents a Likert scale value from the teacher survey. The scale ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 represents *strongly disagree* and 5 represents *strongly agree*. The $n = 28$, or 97% of teachers.

7   This represents a Likert scale value from the teacher survey. The scale ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 represents *strongly disagree* and 5 represents *strongly agree*. The $n = 33$, or 79% of teachers.

8   Figure 1 is adapted from Achinstein, 2002, pp. 102, 115.

9   The scale ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 represented *strongly disagree* and 5 represented *strongly agree*. Eight items from the survey were used to create the variable *teacher learning community*. Exploratory factor analysis was used to demonstrate that items measured the same underlying concepts. All had a factor loading of at least 0.62. The survey items addressed cooperative effort, continual learning, collaboration, collective critical reflection, identification of whole school community, regular meetings to discuss common challenges, shared beliefs and vision for school, belief that all students can succeed.

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BETTY ACHINSTEIN is program director of research and teacher development at the University of California, Santa Cruz's New Teacher Center. She studies professional communities and teacher development and teaches on issues of education and diversity. She is author of *Community, Diversity, and Conflict Among Schoolteachers: The Ties that Blind* (Teachers College Press, 2002).