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Communication in the classroom: An interpretive analysis of empowerment and choice theory

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COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM: AN INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS
OF EMPOWERMENT AND CHOICE THEORY

by

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Bachelor of General Studies, Secondary Education
Gonzaga University
2002

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in Communication Studies
Hank Greenspun Department of Communication
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2004
The Thesis prepared by

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Entitled

Communication in the Class Room: An Interpretive Analysis of

Empowerment and Choice Theory

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Communication in the Classroom: An Interpretive Analysis of Empowerment and Choice Theory

by

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This analysis synthesizes the psychotherapeutic Choice theory classroom management model with a communication theory of learner empowerment. Four dimensions of learner empowerment: meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice are illuminated as inherent in the classroom management techniques and behavioral plans within the Choice theory paradigm. This in-depth portrayal synthesizes the language employed in the implementation of the psychotherapeutic model with task assessment manipulations of each of the four learner empowerment dimensions. Linguistic and environmental strategies for cognitive manipulation of task assessments for each dimension are revealed. This interpretive analysis advances Choice theory as a method for manipulating task assessments of each dimension and therefore producing learner empowerment.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to Helen Schucman Ph.D. (1909-1981). Her writing inspired me to find the voice for this project. I would like to thank my husband Mike. Without your support this thesis would not have been possible.

To Donald Chvatal, Nancy Bannister, Reverend Virgil Funk, Janet Jones, Jennifer Alexander, Jessica Leitner, and Joy Chvatal, thank you for your love and encouragement. Maureen Sorenson, Shirley Chu, and Diane Robbins gave me the strength to carry this through. Thank you Cora MacMillan, Scott Jason, and Kathy Campion for believing in me.

I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Bevan for agreeing to serve on my committee. Thank you Dr. David Henry for inspiring me not to quit. To Dr. Patti Chance I offer my gratitude for reminding me there are educators who care. Lastly, my sincere gratitude goes out to Dr. Dolores Tanno, who was truly the goddess at the helm of this thesis.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

According to the United States Department of Education (2002) the national public school dropout rate is approximately 11 percent. This number has not changed significantly in ten years. In 1993, 3.4 million persons between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four had not completed high school (United States Department of Education [USDE], 1996). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2001) 43.2 percent of students who withdrew from school during the 1999 academic year were between the ages of fifteen and seventeen. Between October 1998 and October 1999, five students out of every one hundred did not complete high school (National Center for Education Statistics, [NCES], 2001). Reducing the dropout rate is one of the nation’s most important challenges.

The consequences of the dropout rate pose significant problems in America both economically and socially (Asche, 1993). Persons without a valid high school diploma have difficulty obtaining employment. This difficulty contributes to economic failure (USDE, 2002). NCES (2001) reports that students who do not finish high school earn less money and are more likely to be unemployed than students who graduate. Students who drop out are also more likely to receive some form of public assistance. Family
Connection Partnership (n.d.) reports that high school dropouts head almost 50 percent of welfare recipient households. The National Dropout Prevention Center Network (n.d.) cites 13.6 percent of students who drop out do so because they become parents and 31 percent of all female high school dropouts are pregnant. Single parenthood increases the likelihood of dependence on public assistance. Significant social problems due to the drop out rate are evidenced by poverty, crime, and literacy statistics. The National Dropout Prevention Center Network (n.d.) report: illiteracy costs American taxpayers 224 billion dollars per year, 10 percent of students from low income families do not graduate, and 75 percent of all incarcerated individuals dropped out of school.

Students who drop out of school cite negative experiences in school as the primary factor in their decision (Barth, 1991). Negative experiences are the consequences of crisis conditions within schools, substantiated by national education statistics. The Bureau of Justice (2003) reports “students age 12-18 were victims of about 1.2 million crimes of theft and 764,000 nonfatal crimes of violence or theft at school in 2001” (para. 3). They also report “32 school-associated violent deaths in the United States between July 1, 1999 and June 30, 2000, including 24 homicides, 16 of which involved school-age children” (Bureau of Justice, 2003, para. 3). United States Department of Justice (2003) drug abuse statistics reveal, “in 2001, 29% of all students in grades 9 through 12 reported someone had offered, sold, or given them an illegal drug on school property” (para. 1).

Advocates of drastic school reforms claim economic disparity is the root of the problems. Light (1998) explains “as long as school districts are financed through property taxes, kids in poor, urban districts will never receive an equal education with suburban school kids” (para. 6). Moreover, public education has “evolved” into a three-tiered
system, as portrayed by Della-Piana (Light, 1998, para. 10). The top tier reflects peak level education for careers in information technology. The second tier targets students for low paying jobs in service sectors. The bottom rung prepares students for unemployment or “to go straight from school to jail” (para. 10). The three-tiered system perpetuates a cycle of despair.

In an effort to promote solutions, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Enacted into law on January 8, 2002, No Child Left Behind has been hailed as sweeping reform designed to change the culture of American public schools and cultivate student achievement. According to USDE (2002) one facet of No Child Left Behind legislation centers on school dropout prevention. The purpose of the grant program is to support public school reform through the implementation of teaching methods proven to be effective in student retention.

Rationale

Learner empowerment and the quality school model are two methods that support student retention by creating positive experiences for students. Both models are the byproduct of research conducted to contribute to the national cause for school reformation and dropout prevention. They reveal that research from disciplines other than education contributes to the ongoing scholarly conversation regarding the education crisis. The theory of learner empowerment stems from research in the field of communication. The quality school model, developed by William Glasser M.D., is a psychotherapeutic application of Choice theory. Choice theory is Glasser’s (1986) contribution to the field of psychology. Choice theory and learner empowerment

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scholarship contains practical solutions for reducing the incidences of negative school experiences.

Over the past 20 years, Choice theory (Glasser, 1998) has evolved into a classroom management model being implemented into America’s schools. Teachers and administrators working in schools that have adopted the quality school model have made specific changes, within the structure of those schools, to produce positive experiences for students. Glasser (1986) contends that without these changes “we will not make a dent in the growing number of unmotivated students who . . . drop out well before graduation” (p. 6).

Glasser’s (1986) Choice theory is a psychotherapeutic approach to teaching based on communicative acts. He advances, “a major change in the structure of how we teach . . . almost the exact opposite of the traditional stimulus response (s-r)” method that is often employed in traditional public schools (Glasser, 1986, p. 7). He contends that the traditional approach to education, learning, and classroom management results in unmotivated at-risk student populations. His theory is an explanation of human behavior based on internal motivation. He explains students are not motivated to learn unless they “perceive that there is a payoff for them if they work” (p. 9). He proposes needs satisfaction as a payoff. Human needs satisfaction is the fundamental premise of Choice theory. The five human needs, defined by Glasser, are survival, love, power, freedom, and fun. Essentially, students will work hard if their needs are satisfied. The quality school model includes a behavior plan and classroom management techniques using specific language in order to meet the five basic needs of each student. The language of Choice theory results in positive school experiences that support student retention.
A second theory correlated with positive school experiences and student retention is “learner empowerment” (Brunson & Vogt, 1996; Frymier, Shulman & Houser, 1996; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Thomas and Velthouse (1990) define empowerment as the culmination of four dimensions: meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice. In school structures, meaningfulness is produced by assigning tasks personally meaningful and relevant to students. Competence is a student’s sense of adequacy in the ability to complete assigned tasks. Impact is a student’s perception that task completion is significant to themselves or others. Lastly, choices give students a sense of control.

Frymier, Shulman, and Houser (1996) claim empowerment is a state rather than a trait construct. Thus, it is “an outcome variable that stems from communication among individuals” (Frymier, Shulman, & Houser, 1996, p.182). They positively correlate learner empowerment with teacher communication. Learner empowerment does not stem from students. Learner empowerment must be cultivated in students through the communicative acts of their teachers.

Communication research suggests a supporting structural system is necessary for cultivating empowerment. According to Brunson and Vogt (1996) empowerment is “a process” of “transforming the self while working within an organizational structure that supports and encourages transformation” (p. 73). The research presented assumes schools as structural systems. According to Frymier et al. (1996) “empowerment is situational in nature” and “the class environment can affect it” (p. 197). Therefore, learner empowerment is a byproduct of teacher-generated communication behaviors occurring within a supportive and encouraging structural system. The study of learner empowerment is of value to communication research because teacher communication is
the vehicle through which learner empowerment is cultivated (Frymier et al., 1996). The four dimensions of empowerment are fostered by language. Language is the vehicle for the construction of educational conditions.

Research from fields of communication and psychology has contributed to the ongoing scholarly conversation regarding the crisis in America’s public schools. Despite these contributions, national education statistics expose that more must be done. My contention is that synthesizing the theories of Choice and learner empowerment clarifies specific strategies for student retention. Choice theory and learner empowerment are two methods for creating positive school experiences and reducing the drop out rate. I argue that synthesizing these two theories, for dissemination by interested parties, contributes to the ongoing scholarly conversation. My assertion, coupled with the crisis conditions substantiated by national statistics, justifies further analysis of Choice theory and learner empowerment research.

Purpose

My contention is that learner empowerment is produced by the quality school model. This thesis is a synthesis of two bodies of research in an effort to clarify specific strategies for student retention. My purpose is to illuminate the dimensions of empowerment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) as inherent in the Choice theory paradigm (Glasser, 1998). Specifically, I argue the four dimensions of learner empowerment: meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice are intrinsic in quality school classroom management techniques and behavioral plans. My specific aim is to provide an in-depth portrayal synthesizing the language employed in the implementation of the
psychotherapeutic model and each of the four learner empowerment dimensions. In-depth portrayals are the byproduct of a four-phase program evaluation method developed by Della-Piana (1982). The interpretivist program evaluation method reflects a critical theory ideology. I utilize a critical theory ideological standpoint and interpretivist lens to employ critical hermeneutics as a theory-driven philosophical framework. The aim of critical hermeneutics is to apply critical theory in the reading of a text. My in-depth portrayal is the result of examination and evaluation of relevant communication scholarship coupled with a detailed analysis of Choice theory literature. My in-depth portrayal of the scholarship illuminates specific communication strategies for producing positive experiences for students that support student retention. Student retention is critical to successfully addressing the current crisis in American public schools.

Chapter two is a review of communication scholarship associated with the theory of empowerment. It is followed by a sequential examination of Choice theory literature, chronicling the evolution of the quality school model from its origin in psychotherapy. Chapter three is an explanation of the methodology by which I conducted my analysis. Chapter four is an in-depth portrayal of my interpretive analysis. The final chapter is a summary of my conclusions and contains suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Empowerment In Classrooms

Communication researchers argue the importance of creating positive classroom cultures in order to cultivate learner empowerment. Brunson and Vogt (1996) claim, "cultivating an empowering atmosphere can direct fundamental change in traditional classroom power relationships" (p. 73). They advocate "a liberal democratic approach to learning" through the use of empowerment to create a positive classroom culture (Brunson & Vogt, 1996, p. 73). They further identify three requirements to delineate a classroom culture structured on empowerment: trust among participants, active communication, and participation.

Communication is the means by which an empowering environment is produced. In classrooms it is the result of messages communicated between teachers and students. Commitments to others, school, curriculum content, and learning activities are byproducts of an empowering environment. An intrinsic motivation, rather than extrinsic rewards motivation, is generated from collaborative communication exchanges. Brunson and Vogt (1996) argue that trust and participation are cornerstones of this paradigm. Trust is built through participation that requires enhancing every aspect of the educational
process with interaction, collaborative learning, and mutual respect. These processes result in a transformational shift towards empowerment if the organizational structure where the work is taking place is both supportive and encouraging. Respect for self and others create a supportive classroom structure. A supportive structure increases interaction, leads to more participation and involvement, and promotes trust between members of groups.

Gibb (1961) identified six supportive behaviors that create a positive and confirming classroom culture: description, problem-orientation, spontaneity, empathy, equality, and provisionalism. Utilizing these findings, Cooper (1995) generated a list of specific teacher behaviors that support positive classroom cultures. Behaviors include the acceptance and development of student ideas, feelings, successes, and mistakes coupled with praise, encouragement, feedback, and active listening.

Brockelbank and Maurer (2002) describe the simplicity of Gibb’s model. Building trust reduces unproductive and defensive student behavior. Trust allows room for the free exchange of ideas as well as constructive feedback and evaluation. Self-protective behavior is reduced because feelings of judgment are minimized. Just as supportive behaviors promote positive climates, defensive behaviors create negative climates. Six behaviors identified by Gibb (1961) foster negativity: evaluation, control, strategy, neutrality, superiority, and certainty. Adler et al. (2001) cite three types of disagreeing messages identified as contributing to negative climates: argumentativeness, complaining, and aggressiveness. Argumentative behavior is described as verbally defending and attacking the position of another person. Complaining, defined as showing dissatisfaction, promotes negativity. Aggressiveness includes “name calling, put downs,
sarcasm, taunting, yelling and badgering” (Adler et al., 2001, p. 324). Disconfirming messages are the most damaging. This type of communication “implicitly says ‘you don’t exist; you are not valued’” (p. 325). Impervious, irrelevant, tangential, impersonal, ambiguous or incongruous responses to students send messages of lack of regard. Students are de-motivated and communication climates are polluted when teachers do not respond to questions, comments, or requests, make comments not related to what students are attempting to communicate, use acknowledgment only to divert the conversation to another topic, send double or abstract messages, or lecture on impersonal, intellectualized, or generalized information.

Cissna and Sieberg (1990) correlate three types of confirming messages with constructive climates: recognition, acknowledgment, and endorsement (cf. Adler et al., 2001). Recognition refers to contact. In the classroom, it is imperative that each student be recognized in some way. Recognition can be as simple as making eye contact. A greater force than recognition is a direct message of acknowledgment. Messages of acknowledgement involve active listening followed by reflecting back the speakers’ thoughts and ideas. The most powerful type of confirming message is known as endorsement. Both verbal and nonverbal messages of endorsement include praise and agreement, which communicate valuing. Vogt and Murrell (1990) argue that teachers who communicate messages that are “multileveled (verbal, nonverbal, and metamessage) and honest . . . frees individuals to express themselves authentically without fear of judgment or rejection” (cf. Brunson & Vogt, 1996, p. 75). Communication researchers studying the use of language for building empowering structures significantly contribute
to understanding the educational process. Through self-reflection, teachers are able to evaluate messages they are sending and identify ones which need to be changed.

Zepeda and Ponticell (1996) argue that classroom climates must be viewed "holistically" (p. 91). Rather than view instructional and management roles as separate activities, holistic teachers incorporate learning activities that require interaction and construct opportunities to develop relationships with students as human beings. Researchers Teven and McCroskey (1997) claim, "A vital requisite to effective teaching is establishing a climate of warmth, understanding, and caring within the classroom" (p. 160). Their findings support the use of teacher behaviors to promote perceptions of "caring" among students. Caring communication behaviors positively influence empowerment. When teachers are perceived as caring, students evaluate them more positively. Students also report they have learned more in classes taught by teachers whom they perceived as caring. Immediacy, assertiveness and responsiveness are three teacher behaviors positively correlated with these outcomes. Chesebro and McCroskey (2001) report, "behaviors such as appropriate eye-contact, the use of gestures, movement about the classroom, smiling, vocal variety, and the use of humor are highly-effective teaching behaviors" (p. 60). These immediacy behaviors are correlated with positive influence on student perceptions of classes, teachers, motivation, accomplishment, and sense of control.

According to Teven and McCroskey (1997), three behaviors that increase student perceptions of teacher caring are empathy, understanding, and responsiveness. Kearney (1984) reports, "a teacher who is responsive will express warmth, compassion, and friendliness" (cf. Teven, 2001, p. 162). An unresponsive teacher is "one who is a prisoner
to the lectern and reads his or her lecture to the students. Conversely, an interactive, responsive teacher modifies her or his behavior throughout a class depending on how the students are reacting in that class” (Teven & McCroskey, 1997, p. 3). Frymier, Shulman, and Houser (1996) claim students are empowered by “variables such as active listening, open communication, constructive feedback, trustworthiness, credibility, and immediacy” (p. 182). Responsive teachers employ these behaviors. These communicative acts, when exhibited by teachers, are messages from which students determine a teacher’s level of caring.

Students determine how a teacher feels about them by observing the teacher’s communication behaviors . . . It is not the caring that counts; it is the perception of caring that is critical. If a teacher cares deeply, but does not communicate that attribute, he or she might as well not care at all (Teven & McCroskey, 1997, p. 1).

The strongest motivational tools educators have to work with are themselves. Teachers who act as channels of empowering messages, attitudes, and behaviors “encourage communication climates that promote trust, collaborative learning, and a tolerance for ambiguity” (Brunson & Vogt, 1996, p. 73). Students are encouraged to seek expression and evaluate the expressions of others from multiple perspectives, thus they are engaged in a process rather than being isolated.

Teaching Methods

The most frequently cited mode of instruction is the lecture method. Brunson and Vogt (1996) suggest “resistance to a more unstructured, experiential pedagogy does occur
and is to be expected” (p. 81). Therefore, choosing to teach using alternative methods may not be accepted in the context of traditional schools. However, Chesebro and McCroskey (2001) argue that effective lecturing can occur when educators employ supportive verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Freire (1970) argues that traditional teaching methods are dis-empowering (cf. Brunson & Vogt, 1996). Traditional methods reflect a banking concept of education in which teachers make deposits and students receive, file, and store what they drill and practice. Weissglass (1990) suggests the “dominant pedagogy in education still focuses on a scientific, empirical, rationalistic orientation that relegates thoughts and feelings about self to the background” (cf. Brunson & Vogt, 1996, p. 75). Banking methods inhibit empowerment. However, choosing to teach based on a philosophy of empowerment challenges the established pedagogy.

Quality teaching does not have to stop when class is over. Outside the classroom, empowering educators make additional positive influences. Student-teacher out-of-class (OCC) communication is positively correlated with a number of powerful outcomes. Jaasma and Koper (1999) found faculty interactions with students are positively correlated with student retention rates. They also link OCC with higher academic achievement, academic goal setting, assimilation, self-esteem, and efficacy. Teachers can augment the probability of student initiated OCC by using language to encourage rapport between themselves and students. Increased informal connection between teachers and students is positively correlated with both verbal and nonverbal immediacy. OCC also raises trust and motivation in classes taught by teachers who encourage lengthy office visits. Lack of OCC has negative consequences. Lopez (1997) claims:
students who consistently report disengaged, angry, or ambivalent orientations in their relationships with professors and instructors may be at risk for less satisfactory academic adjustment . . . persons with insecure student-professor relationship styles may be less likely to solicit instructional help when needed or less willing to take advantage of mentoring opportunities. In view of these possibilities, early programmatic efforts to help students develop communication skills and other competencies for managing and cultivating these important relationships may prevent the development (or diminish the current influence) of insecure student-professor relationship styles . . . security in relationships with professors may facilitate student's academic performance by encouraging their intellectual exploration and risk-taking, reducing their performance anxiety, and promoting their overall social integration within the university community. (p. 280)

Promoting high levels of academic performance is a primary concern for teachers who realize the importance of OCC. Students who feel insecure about their relationships with their professors earn lower grade point averages (Lopez, 1997).

Assessment

Measuring academic performance provides a unique opportunity for educators to establish rapport with students. Including students in the assessment process supports students in taking responsibility for their own learning outcomes. Brunson and Vogt (1996) stress the importance of soliciting student participation in performance feedback.
in order to encourage group decision-making and collaboration. Collaborative efforts help students take ownership and responsibility for their education. Inclusion strategies help build trust. Geddes and Linnehan (1996) define performance feedback “as messages conveyed about task performance that facilitate self-regulation of behavior” (p. 326). Collaborative decision-making regarding assessment methods are critical. Roghaar & Vangelisti (1996) found that when young adults (18 to 23 years) do not meet teacher expectations they shift the responsibility:

   In the failure situation, young adults blamed other people, events or circumstances for the “F” grade. . . . Most often, the young adults voiced such blame in the form of excuses, (i.e., their schedules, their work-related activities, and their other teachers who piled on assignments) that played into attributional expressions for their failure . . . (e.g., they noted that the test was unfair, the teacher did not prepare them, etc.). Both excuses and complaints are communication strategies that allow speakers to deny responsibility for a negative event without denying its severity. (p. 137)

Promoting an understanding of responsibility through empowerment rests on communicative acts. Teachers who are committed to empowering methodologies reduce powerlessness in students by seeking to eliminate elements that facilitate helplessness, inactivity, incompetence and ineffectiveness. According to Frymier, Shulman, and Houser (1996) these educators substitute “messages that foster student feelings of responsibility, personal meaningfulness, ownership, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation to learn” in a conducive structural environment (p. 183).
Quantitative research conducted by Frymier, Shulman, and Houser (1996) substantiates empowerment as a state rather than trait construct, indicating empowerment is "influenced largely by the environment" (p. 190). Findings were determined based on student responses to a survey measuring empowerment based on four dimensions defined by Thomas and Velthouse (1990): meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice. The multi-dimensional learner empowerment survey is a 30-item questionnaire utilizing a Likert-type scale of zero for "never" to four for "very often". Research conducted by Frymier et al. (1996) substantiates the measure as both reliable and valid.

Results reveal that three of the four a priori dimensions (meaningfulness, competence, and impact) emerged after student responses to the measure were submitted to principal factor analysis. Meaningfulness, measured with eight items (e.g., The tasks required by my class are valuable to me), resulted in an alpha reliability of .89. Competence, measured with seven items (e.g., I possess the necessary skills to perform successfully in class), produced an alpha reliability of .83. The impact dimension revealed a .81 alpha reliability from seven questions (e.g., My participation is important to the success of the class). In Frymier et al.'s (1996) study the choice dimension did not emerge as a factor although "a majority of the a priori choice items still loaded together" (p. 196). The theoretical range of the overall empowerment scale was 0-72 and the obtained range was 9-70. The alpha reliability of the overall learner empowerment measure was .90, with $M = 42.3$, and $SD = 11.47$.

Frymier et al. (1996) did not measure the choice dimension as significant. An explanation posited by the authors is that "students value choice, but choice does not exist in their classes" (p. 196). In post-hoc interviews students "indicated that they are
rarely, if ever, given the opportunity to exercise choice in classes. Usually students are
required to precisely follow the syllabus, which prescribes assignment specifications,
grading criteria, and operational rules for the class” (p. 196). Choice, as defined by
Thomas and Velthouse (1990) is the extent to which students are given the opportunity to
self-direct their own methods of task completion. Choice is a cornerstone of Glasser’s
(1998) theory. His model provides teachers with a specific structural system that
promotes positive classroom structures and caring relationships with students, based on
choice need fulfillment (Holliman, 2000).

Frymier et al. (1996) tested the measure for construct validity. Construct validity
was established when the three emergent dimensions of meaningfulness, competence, and
impact were found to be moderately related as interdependent and summative. These
results reveal existence of all dimensions is not necessary for students “to experience
some level of empowerment; low in one and high in the other two would indicate a
moderate level of empowerment” (Frymier et al., 1996, p. 197). Construct validity was
further established when meaningfulness, competence, and impact were compared with
state-motivation and found to be highly to moderately related. These correlations support
that learner empowerment exists as a state-like construct largely influenced by the
structural environment.

The communication research presented reveals meaningfulness, competence,
impact and choice are critical dimensions of learner empowerment, requiring a supportive
and encouraging classroom environment. Empowerment research provides a context for
understanding the significance of Glasser’s work. For the past twenty years, Glasser’s
classroom management model has been implemented in schools seeking to create
positive experiences for students. The following section provides the reader with a chronological review of Choice theory literature beginning with its origin, Reality Therapy.

The Origin of Choice Theory

In his book “Reality Therapy: A New Approach to Psychiatry,” Dr. William Glasser (1965) explains, “Toward the end of my psychiatric training I found myself in the uncomfortable position of doubting much that I had been taught” (p. xix). He therefore proposes Reality Therapy as an alternative to conventional psychiatry. A fundamental definition of Reality Therapy is “a psychiatric version of the three R’s, namely, reality, responsibility, and right-and-wrong” (Glasser, 1965, p. viii). Reality therapy evolved out of, and was initially implemented in, a correctional institution for delinquent adolescent girls and a hospital for psychotic veterans. Successful results evidenced by changes in patient conditions through psychiatric counseling with Reality Therapy resulted in an application of Reality therapy for public schools.

Glasser’s (1965) contention is that all people needing psychiatric treatment suffer because of an inability to satisfy two basic human needs, love and self-worth. Satisfying the needs of love and self-worth is the purpose of Reality Therapy. The foundation is the establishment of a significant, reciprocal, caring relationship. In educational settings this person is often a teacher. Establishing an essential relationship satisfies the fundamental human need to feel loved. The need for self-worth is established through a person’s ability to “maintain a satisfactory standard of behavior” (Glasser, 1965, p. 10). Standards for behavior are the result of learning “to correct ourselves when we do wrong and to
credit ourselves when we do right. If we do not evaluate our own behavior, or having evaluated it, we do not act to improve our conduct where it is below our standards, we will not fulfill our need to be worthwhile” (p. 10-11). Responsibility is the cornerstone of needs satisfaction. Responsibility is defined as “the ability to fulfill one’s needs, and to do so in a way that does not deprive others of the ability to fulfill their needs” (p. 13). He contends, “responsibility should be learned early at home and in school rather than later from a psychiatrist” (p. 17). Initial implementation of Reality Therapy in public schools yielded the following results from reports by teachers, administrators, counselors, and school nurses: improved behavior among students, improved learning, and an increase in teacher satisfaction (Glasser, 1965). Further developing an application of Reality Therapy for public schools, his aim is to support educators in working effectively with at-risk students by teaching them responsibility. In “Schools Without Failure” Glasser (1969) outlines love as a pathway toward a positive identity:

In the context of school, love can best be thought of as a social responsibility. When children do not learn to be responsible for each other, to care for each other, and to help each other, not only for the sake of others but for their own sake, love becomes a weak and limited concept. (p. 14)

If students are unable to meet their basic human needs of love and self-worth, Glasser argues the result is negative and debilitating emotions that effect self-esteem and cause students to withdraw. The key to supporting students is to help “them understand that they are responsible for fulfilling their needs... No one can do it for them” (Glasser, 1969, p. 16).
Glasser (1969) suggests teachers become actively engaged on a personal level when students misbehave. He supports the use of reflective questioning to help students identify how their behavioral choices contribute to their failure. Reflective questioning engages students in thinking about the consequences of misbehavior and asks them to commit to different choices. Students need to be held accountable through consequences if they refuse to follow through on a commitment to change. The process of reflective questioning results in an “understanding of real love” (Glasser, 1969, p. 22). Guiding students to make a value judgment about misbehavior places doubts within the student’s mind as to whether they are making good choices for themselves. Discipline is applied with lack of tolerance when students refuse to follow through with commitments. Reflective questioning continues until the student chooses and follows through with an alternative choice. “Unlike punishment, discipline is rarely arbitrary; it asks only that a student evaluate his behavior and commit himself to a better course” (p. 23). The result of this model is positive feelings through good behavior as reported by students of Los Angeles city schools during class meetings and personal interviews conducted by Glasser (1969).

Expanding on his notion of reflective questioning, Glasser’s (1972) modification of Reality Therapy into a five-step process is outlined in “The Identity Society.” The book is a byproduct of his experiences working with inner city schools, near Watts in Los Angeles, where teachers face difficulties with unmotivated student populations. The first step of his five-step process is involvement. “Without warm emotional involvement there is no possibility of success . . . the person being helped must begin to understand that there is more to life than being involved with his [her] misery, symptoms, obsessive
thoughts, or irresponsible behavior. He [she] must see that another human being cares” (Glasser, 1972, p. 78). Step two is behavior identification. “Unless we become aware of our behavior, we cannot learn to behave more competently” (p. 85). When applying step two, students must identify their own behavior. Step three requires evaluating the identified behavior. Making a value judgment as to negligent, unsuccessful, or hurtful behavior establishes a foundation for behavior modification. Step four is the planning of responsible behavior by “developing realistic plans for action to follow the value judgment”(p. 93). The final step is making a commitment. “After a reasonable plan has been made, it must be carried out” (p. 95). People who are successful tend to make commitments and keep them. People who suffer from failure require someone else to whom they are responsible.

Shortly after the publication of his five-step process, Glasser (1981) was introduced to the work of William Powers. Working collaboratively, Powers joined Glasser in transforming Reality Therapy into Control theory.

**Control Theory**

Brain functioning with regard to perception is the foundation of Control theory. Glasser (1981) contends that an internal world exists in the brain. It is created throughout life as a result of individual perceptions of interactions with the external world. These individual perceptions are the result of energy striking the sensory receptors in the perceptual system. Glasser identifies three areas of the brain that combine to form an input control system called BCP. The “B” behavioral system is activated when a basic human need is not satisfied. A lack of need satisfaction results in human behaviors to
satisfy unmet needs. The "C" or control portion of the brain compares "what we want . . .
with what we perceive in the outside or external world" (Glasser, 1981, p. 46). If internal
wants or needs are not matched with corresponding perceptual stimulus human beings
suffer, or have "strong urges" to behave in a way that provides matching stimulus. The
"P" portion of the brain is the perceptual system. All of the brain's sensory receptors are
located in the perceptual system. BCP is what Glasser contends is the foundation of
internally motivated psychology. BCP is a sharp contrast to traditional stimulus-response
psychology—the notion that all behavior results from outside stimulus.

Glasser (1981) extended his list of basic human needs to include power, freedom, and
fun in addition to survival and love. The need to survive represents vital necessities
for biological functioning such as food, water, warmth, oxygen, and reproduction. Love,
as explicated, is the need for belonging. Power, is the need for recognition, wanting "to
be somebody" (Glasser, 1981, p. 4). The need for power is satisfied when the self is
recognized as an entity rather than a "nonentity" through hard work, being important, and
receiving recognition for it (p. 4). Freedom is the need to feel a sense of control. It is
satisfied by the perception of options for ways one can conduct one's life. Freedom is the
ability to control thoughts, speech, beliefs, and behaviors without fear of consequences.
Fun is defined as the need for enjoyment.

Glasser (1986) identifies several important behavioral concepts for applying BCP
psychology. First, behavioral motivation is internal rather than external. Students behave
in order to satisfy the strongest need detected in any particular moment. In terms of
learning, "hungry students think of food, lonely students look for friends, and powerless
students for attention far more than they look for knowledge" (Glasser, 1986, p. 20). He

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cites, “when a student is doing badly in school, we too often point our fingers at a dismal home when the reason really is that the student does not find school satisfying enough for him to make the effort” (p. 21). Secondly, he defines behavior as motivated by perceptions of an activity as pleasurable. Students make the effort to learn only if it matches a perceptual “picture” in the brain that learning is satisfying (p. 34). Therefore, teachers must provide students with pleasurable, needs satisfying pictures of learning. His third behavioral concept is that students never feel responsible when they are upset. They always feel victimized by someone else when they fail. Teaching students that they are responsible for choosing their own feelings results in responsibility for behaviors. Lastly, classroom culture conducive to learning supports needs satisfaction for all participants. With regard to discipline, Glasser (1986) suggests:

Discipline is only a problem when students are forced into classes where they do not experience satisfaction. There are no discipline problems in any class where the students believe that if they make an effort to learn, they will gain some immediate satisfaction. To focus on discipline is to ignore the real problem: We will never be able to get students (or anyone else) to be in good order if, day after day, we try to force them to do what they do not find satisfying. (p. 12)

Glasser (1986) correlates a lack of need satisfaction with low student participation levels and high drop out rates. He contends that governmental educational reforms reflect “less caring and more schoolwork” (Glasser, 1986, p. 66). This approach is indicative of traditional stimulus-response methods that he believes perpetuates the problem. His alternative suggestion is the implementation of learning-team models. Learning teams are
“need fulfilling structure[s]” that promotes student success (p. 69). He cites justifications for his alternative methodology based on observations and personal interviews with students and teachers: a sense of belonging that results in internal motivation, a fulfillment of power through contribution and membership in teams, freedom from dependence on the teacher, freedom to self-manage, and a structure in which concepts may be explored in-depth. The traditional stimulus-response method separates high and low achievers, requires students to work individually, limits contribution, bores students, augments cheating, and assesses learning by testing. Cooperative learning involves teacher allocated teams. Each team member is given assigned roles and specific instructional tasks for completion. Individual accountability is inherent within the paradigm by “having each member’s success dependent on the overall quality” (p. 113). The cooperative learning-team model changes the teacher’s role from primary information source to classroom manager. Glasser furthered the notion of teachers as managers when he was introduced to the work of Edwards Deming.

Deming spent thirty years within Japanese companies and his notion of lead-management versus boss-management for quality inspired modifications to Glasser’s theory. Glasser (1990) believes “Dr. Deming’s ideas can be brought undistorted into our schools” (p. 3). He contends teachers should become “modern managers” (Glasser, 1990, p. 80). In “The Quality School: Managing Students Without Coercion,” differences between a lead-manager versus a traditional approach to education are explained based on qualitative results of implementation of the model in Johnson City, New York schools. First, “the manager is willing to expend effort to assign work that is not boring because he or she knows that it is almost impossible for bored workers to do high-quality work”
Second, a lack of need-satisfaction has negative consequences. "If teachers do not teach in need-satisfying ways, then they almost all resort to coercion to try to make students learn . . . effective teachers manage students without coercion . . . . Coercive teachers are the rule, not the exception, in our schools" (p. 8). He argues the traditional education system promotes substandard quality and disregards the notion that students will not make the effort to complete quality work unless they perceive it is in their best interests to do so. It is his contention that teachers and administrators support his approach when they understand that empowered workers work harder. In his companion volume "The Quality School Teacher," Glasser (1993) outlines Deming's Total Quality Management approach for direct application in public schools. The quality school model is a comprehensive process designed for direct implementation in the classroom. Positive results based on qualitative methods, including observations in public schools coupled with interviews of corporate executives experiencing effective results with lead-management techniques, substantiate the usefulness of the quality school model.

The Quality School Model

Building trust between themselves and students is the first step for a quality schoolteacher. According to Glasser (1993), asking students to work, expecting hard work, and then getting it, depends on two things, "1. How well they know the person they are working for. 2. How much they like what they know" (p. 30). Teachers are asked to establish rapport with students. Successful implementation of Glasser's model is contingent on establishing rapport and instituting a foundation of six conditions for
quality. These conditions are taught school wide and posted in classrooms adopting the model:

1. There must be a warm, supportive classroom environment.
2. Students should be asked to do only useful work.
3. Students are always asked to do the best they can do.
4. Students are asked to evaluate their own work and improve it.
5. Quality work always feels good.
6. Quality work is never destructive. (Glasser, 1993, p. 22-25)

Need satisfaction is also critical to the process. Students are taught the basic needs of survival, love, power, freedom, and fun.

In addition to building trust, explaining in full the six conditions of quality, and supporting student knowledge of need satisfaction, Glasser (1993) defines four categories of curriculum content for quality schools. They are defined in order of importance as: information directly related to a life skill, information that students express a desire to learn, information that the teacher believes is especially useful, and information required for entrance into college. He also outlines a model for student self-assessment. He contends that self-evaluation, rather than teacher-given grades, results in internal motivation to improve. Teaching students the model during class meetings throughout the duration of the school year is vital to the process. All behavior issues are addressed using reflective questioning: What is the behavior the student chose? What need or needs were they trying to satisfy with this behavior? What was the picture they were trying to satisfy when they chose to start the behavior? What need did that picture come from? What better behaviors might they have chosen? What suggestions for improvement can be
made for next time? Ultimately, student success is contingent on the communicative acts of the teacher.

In 1998, Glasser's theory was re-named Choice theory. In “The Language of Choice Theory,” Glasser (1999) compares external control psychology with behavioral control perception based on communication. He claims, “External control speech is peppered with the imperative tense, with should, must, and have to, plus threats of punishment if you don’t do what you’re told and promises of reward if you do” (Glasser, 1999, p. viii). He contends that “Choice theory language helps us to work out problems with one another” rather than increase them (p. viii).

By examining “the bossy or controlling language we use when we can’t get along with one another,” Glasser (1999) reveals that external control language involves criticizing, blaming, complaining, threatening, punishing, and/or rewarding to try to get what we want” (p. vii). The result of external control language is damaging. He posits that it “always harms, . . . often destroys,” and is “a plague on humanity” (Glasser, 1999, p. vii). In contrast, the language of Choice theory is “never bossy or controlling, [and] is always an attempt to work out the differences between people in a way that satisfies both parties” (p. viii). To support his claim that “The difference between the two languages is startling” he illustrates a “new way of expressing our selves” using four distinct relationships: love and marriage, parent-child, teacher-student, and manager-worker (p. xiii). He contends that within these relationships “power is almost always in the hands of the parent, teacher, or manager” and therefore “the parties should work to give children, students, and workers, more power than they usually have in the external control world
we live in” (p. viii). By giving subordinates more power, authorities provide more opportunities for others “to achieve his or her goals” (p. ix).

Further validity of the usefulness of Glasser’s (2000) theory in real life situations is evidenced in “Counseling with Choice Theory”. Documentation of the implementation of Choice theory in private psychiatric counseling situations reveals that patient’s symptoms “disappear” (Glasser, 2000, p. xvi). Moreover, empirical evidence from “[b]rain scan research show that the brain’s chemistry changes” in clients as a result of treatment using his theory.

Summary

Based on the research presented, it is my contention that Choice theory, as an educational model, produces empowerment. Therefore, my synthesis of these two bodies of research is justified. I argue that the four dimensions of empowerment: meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice are inherent in the Choice theory model. My specific aim is to provide an in-depth portrayal of the communicative acts associated with the implementation of the model and illuminate messages of meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice as intrinsic to the language employed. Inherent similarities between the emergent themes and paradigms features associated with each of the two theories are interpreted through examination and evaluation of relevant scholarship. The culmination of this interpretive analysis is an in-depth portrayal emphasizing Choice theory language as a vehicle for cultivating learner empowerment and constructing the education conditions necessary for its existence. The following chapter outlines the specific method chosen for conducting this interpretive analysis.

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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Three purposes guide the organizational structure of this chapter. The first purpose is to provide a theoretical framework for the methodology employed in this analysis. The second is to contextualize the chosen framework as justification for its applicability to this thesis. The third is to explicate the specific method used to conduct my analysis. My specific aim is to articulate the characteristics and assumptions of the theories employed and reveal how they bear upon the method. My thesis is argued from an ideological standpoint rooted in critical theory. I use critical hermeneutics and interpretivism as a theory-driven framework for the application of a program evaluation method.

Della-Piana (1982) developed a four-phase program evaluation method. The four phases are sifting, description, reporting, and in-depth portrayal. The theoretical framework guiding my application of this model to the texts examined echoes Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) philosophy of using critical theory, including critical hermeneutics and interpretivism, and lays the foundation for the value of using program evaluation as the method of analysis.
Critical Theory

Critical theorists are agents of change in that they channel incentives to challenge power structures. Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe critical theorists as “transformative intellectual[s]” who expand “consciousness” by illuminating current circumstances in order to facilitate transformation (p. 115). As such, Guba (1978) argues the need for interpretivist methods of program evaluation in educational settings. His contention is that school activities and the effects of interactions among participants of educational environments are difficult to quantify. He suggests that interpretive methods reflect appropriate evaluation practices for illuminating the issues, contexts, and emergent themes associated with schools in order to produce change. He supports the use of interpretive program evaluation methods that result in findings that can be reincorporated back into the educational practice itself. The purpose of program evaluation is to furnish a total composite of the complexity of the realities of the educational program, thereby illuminating current circumstances and facilitating transformation (Guba, 1978). The aim of critical theory is to critique society as well as transform it. The roots of critical theory shed light on the underlying assumptions and characteristics associated with its pedagogy.

Max Horkheimer is often described as the father of critical theory. In 1930 he became the director of the Frankfurt school and sought to revise Marxism during the economic aftermath of World War I. Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) report that in opposition to the established ideology of oppression the Frankfurt school was committed to eradicating social injustice. When threatened in a Hitler controlled Germany, Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno and Herbert Marcuse fled to the United States and
continued to advance critical theory. According to Bronner (1993), critical theory reached its peak during the 1960s when the academic climate, reflecting the culture, was poised for reform by “young intellectuals” (par. 24). Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) explain, “they came to view their disciplines as manifestations of the discourses and power relations of the social and historical contexts that produced them” (p. 139). The consequence was the reformation of the social sciences to include more liberal perspectives.

Kincheloe et al. (1994) claim contemporary critical theory “can be best understood in the context of the empowerment of individuals” (p. 140). Social change requires political action through empowerment of the oppressed. According to Bronner (1993) this process requires the education of individuals to make quality choices about their lives. On a macro level, critical theory functions to transform education by challenging its role in perpetuating hegemonic practices:

schools, as venues of hope, could become sites of resistance and democratic possibility through concerted efforts among teachers and students to work within a liberatory pedagogical framework. Giroux (1988), in particular, maintained that schools can become institutions where forms of knowledge, values, and social relations are taught for the purpose of educating young people for critical empowerment rather than subjugation. (Kincheloe et al., 1994, p. 139)

Contemporary critical theory reflects multiple schools of thought. However, these schools share underlying assumptions. Bronner (1993) calls these assumptions a “cluster of themes” that is “inspired by an emancipatory intent” (par. 6). Critical theorists assume
that societies are grouped according to class structures that privilege some over others. Moreover, these class structures are proliferated by conventional academic practices. Critical theory is concerned with empowering the subjugated through accountability of institutions at the social, political, and economic levels. Kincheloe et al. (1994) explain that a defining characteristic of critical theory is the assumption that human thought is constructed through mental associations with socially and historically produced perceptions of power. Therefore, language is essential to constructing both conscious and unconscious prejudices (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994).

Critical theorists seek to eradicate social injustice through liberal inquiry that challenges power structures assumed to be produced by language. Critical theorists hold that in order to understand something it must be interpreted. Interpretivism shares its roots with critical theory in German philosophy.

**Interpretivism**

Schwandt (2001) argues the primary assumption of interpretivism is “that the meaning of human action is inherent in that action” (p. 134). “Verstehen” the German word for “understanding” denotes the interpretivist method of inquiry to “unearth that meaning” and “distinguish” the empirical sciences from the human sciences (Schwandt, 2001, p. 134). In the empirical sciences, methods are employed as an attempt to discover causal relationships. In contrast, the human sciences from an interpretivist perspective seek to understand the meaning of individual consciousness or social phenomena. Critical theorist Jurgen Habermas (1971) argues a theory of interpretivism centering on the notion
of *verstehen*. He advances interpretation based on dialectical synthesis between communication and social phenomena in order to construct emancipatory knowledge.

Smith (1993) argues, “power relationships in society can be understood by comparing ‘normative structures existing at a given time [in society] with the hypothetical state of a system of norms’” (p. 193). Dialectical encounters with texts are conducted to appraise their meaning in light of the objective circumstances in which they are produced. The defining characteristic of interpretivism is that the intention of inquiry is “to provoke practical engagement – empowerment and emancipation” (p. 192). Interpretivists inquire to empower through understanding. Interpretivist theory assumes that historically contextualized analysis of texts reveals meaning. Smith (1993) advocates critical hermeneutics as an interpretivist method for assessing the meaning of texts.

**Critical Hermeneutics**

The origin of hermeneutics as a thought system lies in a concern with ontology, the nature of being. Hermeneutics is the study of the methodological principles of interpretation. Schwandt (2001) describes hermeneutics as a philosophy of interpretation rooted in “ancient rhetoric” (p. 112). As a philosophy, it embraces the notion that meaning is both generated and constrained by history and language. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define it as a philosophy of interpretivism that seeks to explain understandings through encounters between a knower and a text or object. Schwandt (1994) argues linguistic and historic constitutions of human existence “is what makes the process of meaning construction hermeneutical” (p. 120). As ontological, universal, and dialogical,
it requires willingness to participate in, cooperate with, and attend to the declarations within a text.

According to Schwandt (2001) contemporary hermeneutics as a method of inquiry refers to "the nature and means of interpreting a text" (p. 112). Through exegesis the meanings of texts are discovered. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) detailed the discovery of meaning as represented by the hermeneutic circle, made up of the interpreter, the interpreter's tradition, and the text itself (Schwandt, 2001). A variety of hermeneutical approaches are employed for inquiry including critical, conservative, suspicious, and philosophical. Critical hermeneutics, also called depth hermeneutics, is a contemporary branch of hermeneutical philosophy. The function of critical hermeneutics, as an interpretive method, is to apply critical theory in the reading of a text.

Schwandt (2001) cites three defining characteristics of critical hermeneutical inquiry. First, the intention behind the interpreter's task is to transform society and empower others" (p. 44). Second, interpreters analyze texts in an attempt to expose distorted views. Third, interpreters are concerned with organizational structures at political, social, and economic levels "that shape human beings as knowers, and as social agents" as well as the relationships "between language, meaning, and understanding" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 44).

Subjectivity

Subjectivity is a necessary requirement of interpretivism. As historically situated, interpreters are products of traditions, prejudices, and prior knowledge. Critical researchers do not attempt to deny their pre-suppositions by claiming to be objective
interpreters. The goal of interpretivist critical hermeneutic practice is to identify presuppositions as they contribute to the structure and analysis of interpreting texts. Interpretations are products of encounters between assumptions and the content of a text.

As historically and socially situated, my interpretations are subjective. Therefore, I reveal my historically situated consciousness, and qualify my personal opinions and prejudices, to establish integrity of praxis. This thesis is the result of my historicity, my personal experiences as both a student and teacher in public and private schools, and my personal value system. I chose to pursue this topic because it is an extension of my commitment to advocating for social change. I knowingly bring these biases with me. They operate as powerful filters through which I engage with the texts. My choice to employ a critical theory perspective is rooted in my belief that personal empowerment is critical to a functional society. My choice to scrutinize the writings of Dr. Glasser is based on my belief that the stimulus-response rhetoric associated with traditional teaching methods in public schools, as historically constructed and socially produced, inhibits empowerment. Lastly, I am aware of the limitations of my ideology and therefore surrender to my encounters with the text, realizing the requirement for continued self-reflection.

Theoretical Framework

Critical theory is the root of my ideologically driven standpoint. I am particularly concerned with the empowerment of students as a subjugated population. Critical theorists aim to facilitate transformational change by revealing socially and politically produced conditions of oppression. The public school system, as a socially and politically
produced structural system, must be challenged. As an agent of change and a
communication researcher, I hold that language is the vehicle for the construction of
educational conditions. The criticality of language as a defining characteristic of
contemporary critical theory bears directly on the research presented in this analysis.

My inquiry pre-supposes texts as situated within the context of current objective
circumstances. I therefore engage in a dialectical encounter with texts in order to appraise
their meaning. My interpretive analysis seeks to synthesize the communication construct
of empowerment as its existence is quantified, with the social phenomena of Choice
theory as a psychotherapeutic model. This dialectical synthesis of communication and
social phenomena extends from a key assumption of an interpretivist perspective.

My scrutiny of Choice theory texts, in light of the historical conditions that
produced them, warrants my use of critical hermeneutics for this endeavor. Additional
particulars of my analysis germane to this feature include: the current educational
conditions as they are historically constructed, the interpretation of the meaning(s) within
communication scholarship produced to reform those conditions, and the reformation of
schools as organizational structures that shape human beings.

The aim of critical hermeneutics is to apply critical theory in the reading of a text.
Resonating this ideology, my thesis contributes to the ongoing scholarly conversation
relating to reformation of educational conditions. As a classroom behavioral and
management model, Choice theory contributes to the organizational structure of quality
schools. Critical analysis of texts that produce quality schools, and analysis of texts
produced by quality schools, is a means for deep understanding of how quality schools
are structured. One source for texts produced for schools and by schools is program

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evaluation literature. Program evaluation is an integral part of the organizational structure of public education.

Program Evaluation Method

Program evaluation has become an important aspect of social policy development as well as school reform. Its widespread application in both public and private sectors suggests, "program evaluation is integrally intertwined with political decision making about societal priorities, resource allocation, and power" (Greene, 1994, p. 531). Therefore, program evaluation reflects a critical theory ideology. Greene (1994) argues program evaluation is a "unique form of social inquiry" by nature of its political implications (p. 531). Program evaluation is used to assess social, school, and company policies and programs at the local and national levels. Program evaluation methods are diverse and represent both quantitative and qualitative practices. They span multiple fields of inquiry due to the variety of contexts in which they are used. At both the micro and macro levels, evaluation methods are situated by the requirements of the circumstances. Moreover, they represent the philosophical assumptions, ideological views, and values of the participants.

Greene (1993, 1994) argues for the use of program evaluation for interpretivist method-driven qualitative inquiry. Program evaluation methods, also known as logic models, are used for conducting qualitative evaluations in school settings. These methods provide conceptual clarity and focus to the educational process at both the micro and macro levels. Guba (1978) argues the use of program evaluation for assessing administrators, teachers, curriculum, and learning outcomes. Based in part on the
arguments made by scholars, I have chosen to use a program evaluation method developed by Della-Piana (1982).

Della-Piana (1982) developed a four-phase strategy of program evaluation. It is used to evaluate computer-based instruction. However, her contention is that this strategy is applicable to meta-evaluation. She claims it illuminates complexities and reveals forms and structures. The four-phase evaluation process involves sifting, description, reporting, and in-depth portrayal. Della-Piana's (1982) definition of each of the four phases is summarized and followed by a specific explication of how each phase was employed for this analysis.

*Phase 1: Sifting.* "The first phase screens out programs that are not instructional in design or use and that are not compatible" (p. 13).

"The task is simply to select ‘operationally ready’ courseware that is instructional" (p.15).

In the application of the first phase I sifted through a collected body of communication research, screening out incompatible scholarship. I selected communication scholarship relevant to empowerment. I sifted through the entire collection of the published works of Dr. William Glasser and screened out information that was not compatible with school applications.

*Phase 2: Description.* "In this phase we obtain brief descriptive information on the courseware that passes the first screening. This includes information about the required hardware and software, objectives, prerequisites, author, date, publisher, instructional technique, and available
documentation... to warrant the kind of evaluation proposed in Phase III" (p. 13). "Procedures were influenced through the inclusion of additional criteria and available documentation" (p. 15).

Based on results of phase one, I gathered additional research on empowerment. I performed literal readings of texts in order to identify additional criteria for exploration and description. Principles, elements, and component parts were identified and additional descriptive information was obtained.

Phase 3: Report (Consumer). "Phase III provides a data base for a consumer report to be summarized in a quarterly review... also during this phase, we obtain more description of the courseware's content and structure as well as of obstacles to its use, its strengths, and judgments on its content... the summary is put together" (p. 13-14).

"Phase III procedures were also influenced through the inclusion of additional... criteria: appropriateness of the courseware's content, its instructional quality, and its technical quality. In addition, there is a possibility that the procedures in Phase III will yield early portrayals of the structure" (p. 15).

During phase three I examined collected data through the writing process in order to distinguish the content and structure of additional criteria including emergent themes, paradigm features, instinctive concepts, and theoretical characteristics associated with each theory. I conducted
additional research to further describe deeper meanings associated with these extracted elements and component parts.

Phase 4: In-Depth Portrayal. "The final phase provides users, (primarily administrators and teachers, although this may also include students at the upper grade levels), developers and distributors with sharp, accurate, appreciative descriptions. Reports at this level are rare but are designed to help users... 'look again' at their courses or see them in a new, perhaps even disturbing, perspective" (p. 14).

During phase four I continued to utilize the writing process and generated an in-depth portrayal. I utilized interpretive reading to exact a sharpened, accurate, appreciative understanding and reasoned evaluation. The interpretive reading as reflexive and dialogical resulted in an appreciative description of underlying meanings for the purpose of synthesis and dissemination.

I chose this interpretivist method, in part, because Della-Piana’s (1982) four-phase process embodies underlying assumptions associated with critical hermeneutics and critical theory. Phase three reflects the philosophy of hermeneutics in that texts are analyzed for deeper meanings, contextualized by additional inquiry, and scrutinized from multiple perspectives. Analysis at phase four reflects a critical theory ideology by challenging others to “look again at their courses or see them in a new, perhaps even disturbing, perspective” (Della-Piana, 1982, p. 14).

Using the four-phase program evaluation method was appropriate for this analysis because it is applicable to a meticulous scrutiny of education related texts. Program
evaluation as a qualitative interpretive method enabled me to sift through two bodies of research, extract elements and component parts, define additional criteria for analysis, and examine, explicate, and generate an in-depth portrayal reflecting a reasoned synthesis for dissemination purposes. Chapter two, the literature review, represents phases one and two of the method. Phase three was conducted throughout the duration of the inquiry. The phases of my critical process were not conducted in a sequential order. Over a two-year period the phases overlapped, morphed, and entwined as the analytical process unfolded. Phases were re-visited time and again as deeper veins of research were explored and content was contextualized.

Summary

My method echoes Denzin's (1994) notion of interpretation, by a bricoleur researcher, as the art of translating "what has been learned into a body of textual work that communicates these understandings to the reader" (p. 500). The framework for this analysis is a bricolage in that it stems from both critical and philosophical theoretical traditions. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) the researcher, as bricoleur, uses a "close knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation" (p. 2). This notion is directly relevant to this thesis. My aim is to clarify the Choice theory model as a specific strategy for student retention, in order to address the current circumstances in public education. Schwandt (2001) cites that solutions from bricoleur research emerge as products of a collage-like methodology drawn from "interpretive paradigms" (p. 20). As bricoleur, I utilize a critical theory ideological standpoint and interpretivist lens to employ critical hermeneutics as a theory-driven philosophical
framework for the application of a program evaluation method. Chapter four is phase-
four. It is my in-depth portrayal of the synthesis of Choice and empowerment theories.
CHAPTER 4

IN-DEPTH PORTRAYAL

Introduction

Echoing Della-Piana (1982), the purpose of this chapter is to provide an in-depth portrayal designed to help educators “look again” and see their roles “in a new, perhaps even disturbing, perspective” (p. 14). This in-depth portrayal synthesizes the Choice theory quality school model with the notion of empowerment, as defined by Thomas and Velthousen (1990) and measured by Frymier, Shulman, and Houser (1996). It is a reasoned evaluation based on interpretive reading and appreciative understanding of a collective body of texts from communication and psychology fields of inquiry. Analysis of the texts reveals intrinsic synthesis of bodies of scholarship from divergent disciplines. This in-depth portrayal is the outcome of my interpretive reading, as reflexive and dialogical. It synthesizes the four dimensions of empowerment as they are produced and reinforced within the Choice theory model. It illuminates language as the vehicle for producing school environments, organizational processes, and schools as structural systems. The in-depth portrayal functions to challenge school’s roles in perpetuating injustices currently proliferated by conventional academic practices. It seeks to elicit a transformational shift in perception for all who read its content.
This interpretive analysis assumes a definition of empowerment based on the work of Thomas and Velthouse (1990). They define empowerment based on the notion of “intrinsic task motivation” (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 668). Intrinsic task motivation is “positively valued experiences that individuals derive directly from a task” resulting in satisfaction (p. 668). The definition of “task” is essential to their explanation. Tasks are chosen or assigned “activities directed toward a purpose” (p. 668). This analysis also assumes that the existence of empowerment can be quantified. Based on their definition, Frymier, Shulman, and Houser (1996) developed an empowerment measure designed to quantify empowerment in school settings. Their learner empowerment measure substantiates student perceptions of empowerment. Student perceptions of empowerment are based on cognitive interpretations of classroom experiences.

Cognitive interpretation is the process of attaching meaning to perception. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) identify three cognitive processes for attaching meaning to task perceptions: evaluation, attribution, and envisioning. Evaluation is the process of attaching meaning based on “how well things are going” (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 669). Attributions are cognitions based on past experiences. Envisioning is cognitions of future tasks. Individual cognitive interpretations have direct effects on motivation. The sources of data for individual interpretations are environmental events. Environmental events provide information about outcomes relevant to conditions, ongoing performance, and future acts. Meanings are attached to these perceptions.

Interpretations through evaluation, attribution, and envisioning are personal and subjective. Personal styles of evaluation, attribution, and envisioning effect task assessment. Current task assessments reflect personal inductive generalizations based on...
past experiences. Known as “global assessments,” Thomas and Velthouse (1990) claim
“they represent an individual’s cumulative learning . . . formed over time” (p. 670).
Therefore, individual interpretations of task assessments are constituted by both past and
present experiences. Individual’s task assessments can be altered and over time global
assessments can be increased, having motivational effects. Empowerment is altering or
increasing assessments to have motivational effects. They have identified two strategies
for producing empowerment: “changing the environmental event on which the individual
bases his or her task assessments and [or] changing the individual’s style of interpreting
those events” (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 671). Both strategies involve the
manipulation of one or more of four variables: meaningfulness, competence, impact, and
choice. Increases in each of these four dimensions changes task assessments that directly
affect cognitive interpretations (which also accumulate over time) resulting in intrinsic
motivation. Meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice are four dimensions of
empowerment. Each has motivational properties.

Producing and reinforcing the four dimensions of empowerment is intrinsic to the
Choice theory quality school model. In the following section, meaningfulness,
competence, impact, and choice are descriptively analyzed. They are explicated and
interpreted as intrinsic to Choice theory and synthesized with key characteristics of
paradigm features within the model.

Meaningfulness

Meaningfulness is necessary for internal motivation and therefore, empowerment.
Thomas and Velthouse (1990) define it as a psychological factor. Its existence is
indicated by an internal cognition of significance. Significance, as it relates to task completion, suggests the cognition of the tasks worthiness or value to the participant. A participant’s cognitive assessment of a task must correlate with an internal personal belief in its value, worth, or significance. They claim, “the most important motivational aspect of charismatic/transformational leadership is the heightened intrinsic value of goal accomplishment produced by the articulation of a meaningful vision or mission” (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 668). Therefore, in order to produce the dimension of meaningfulness, individuals must cognitively interpret task completion with personal significance.

Glasser (1990) emphasizes the importance of meaningfulness. Teachers must influence students to perceive assigned tasks as useful or “they fail to make the connection between what they do and its value to them” (p. 207). He contends that teachers must attend to meaningfulness and teach in ways that help students to “easily make this connection” (Glasser, 1990, p. 207). Specific communicative acts help students make this connection. First, when assigning tasks teachers must “explain how what is being asked can benefit the person or people asked to do it” (p. 208). Thorough explanations of these benefits are provided to students prior to assigning the task, while the task is being conducted, and after the task is completed. Moreover, students are engaged to discuss how they view the work as beneficial. Teachers ask students questions about their perceptions of meaningfulness in order to facilitate cognitive interpretations of valuing.

Frymier, Shulman, and Houser (1996) measure the dimension of meaningfulness in learners using survey questions. They found that when students interpret tasks as
aligned with their personal value systems they report higher levels of meaningfulness. Analysis of their text reveals underlying inferences. When translated into specific classroom experiences, these implications produce meaningfulness.

1. The tasks required of me in this class are personally meaningful.
2. I look forward to going to this class.
3. This class is exiting.
4. This class is boring.
5. This class is interesting.
6. The tasks required of me in this class are valuable to me.
7. The information in this class is useful.
8. This course will help me achieve my future goals.
9. The tasks required of this course are a waste of my time.
10. This class is important to me.

Interpretation of the text illuminates the importance of meaningfulness when undertaking and assigning tasks. The questions concern value systems, goals, and intrinsic motivation of purpose. A high level of caring is implied. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) define meaningfulness psychoanalytically. They claim it “represents a kind of cathexis (or investment of psychic energy)” (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 673). When students lack psychic investment they exhibit low levels of meaningfulness. Low levels of meaningfulness are revealed by apathy, detachment, and disassociation. Teachers know if they are producing the dimension of meaningfulness because students exhibit “commitment, involvement, and concentration of energy” (p. 673). Over time, the dimension of meaningfulness can produce powerful effects on student’s psychological
investment in school and learning. Student's levels of psychological investment, as reflected in caring and commitment, continues to reinforce meaningfulness by perpetuating interpretations of tasks as aligned with personal values, ideals, and beliefs. According to Frymier et al. (1996), "The stronger a task fits into an individual's or group's value system, the more conviction will be brought to bear in accomplishing it" (p. 183). They claim, "if the work is not meaningful now or not deemed to be useful later, students will not be motivated" (Frymier et al., 1996, p. 183).

In schools implementing Glasser's (1990) model, the teachers are trained to connect tasks to students lives outside of school in order to make them meaningful. In addition, when students produce quality work they are asked to show their work to significant people in their lives and explain how their work is meaningful to them. Moreover, volunteer groups are designated in the school to "listen to them and explain that what they did was good" (Glasser, 1990, p. 209). Communication is the means by which vital connections between meaningfulness and task completion are produced.

Reflective questioning resulting in linguistic articulation of interpretations of events reinforces student's personal attachments to work through evaluation, attribution, and envisioning. Articulations of meaningfulness by evaluating its existence in current circumstances, attributing it to past experiences, and envisioning it as part of future events results in cognitive interpretations that directly affect intrinsic motivation. Student perceptions of meaningfulness provide motivational outcomes relevant to ongoing performance and future task completion. Based on communicative acts of students, as they are provided for in the model, the dimension of meaningfulness is manipulated to produce intrinsic motivation and learner empowerment.
Impact

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) define impact as the level at which a behavior is perceived as “making a difference” (p. 672). However, this perception must be correlated with a purpose. The intention of producing “effects in one’s task environment . . . is analogous to knowledge of results” (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 672). Important to this notion is locus of control. Students with high levels of impact or internal locus of control “usually have higher expectancies of impact on specific tasks” (p. 672). In contrast, students with low levels of impact are less proactive, less resilient to setbacks, and have lower measures of emotional adjustment. Impact, as an empowerment dimension, is critical to combating learned helplessness in students. Students who suffer from learned helplessness believe they have little, if any, control of over their environment. Consequently, promoting high levels of impact involves teaching students that task completion and behavior(s) have an impact on their environment.

Students who perceive high levels of impact are more motivated. Learner’s levels of impact are measured based on their perceptions of power. Glasser (1986) emphasizes the importance of cultivating student’s perceptions of personal power. He contends it is a fundamental human need. Personal power is particularly important in the higher grades “when students are beginning to experience the increased need for power which is part of the normal biology of adolescence” (Glasser, 1986, p. 63). Methods for promoting personal power are supported by questions used to quantify the existence of impact. Using a self report survey, Frymier et al. (1996) measure whether students make a difference in class, participate and contribute to class success, contribute to others, and perceive having influence over teachers. They also measure whether students perceive
teachers as using alternative teaching methods. Interpretive analysis of their survey questions reveals student perceptions of personal power (impact) are created, supported, and reinforced using the quality school alternative learning team model. Inherent in the learning team model are key features of impact as defined by Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and substantiated by Frymier et al. (1996). Moreover, interpretive analysis of Glasser's (1986) text reveals traditional teaching methods inhibit student perceptions of impact (personal power). The following text outlines the conditions for the quality school learning team model. Italicized words identify traditional teaching methods that inhibit impact.

1. Students can gain a sense of belonging by working together in learning teams of two to five students. The teams should be selected by the teacher so that they are made up of a range of low, middle and high achievers. 
   
   *Students work as individuals.*

2. Belonging provides the initial motivation for students to work, and as they achieve academic success, students who had not worked previously begin to sense that knowledge is power and they want to work harder. 
   
   *Unless they succeed as individuals there is no motivation to work and no ability to gain the sense that knowledge is power.*

3. The stronger students find it need fulfilling to help the weaker ones because they want the power and friendship that go along with a high-performing team. 
   
   *Stronger students hardly even know the weaker ones.*

4. The weaker students find it is need fulfilling to contribute as much as
they can to the team effort because now whatever they can contribute helps. When they worked alone, a little effort got them nowhere.

*Weaker students contribute little to the class initially and less as they go along.*

5. Students need not depend only on the teacher. They can (and are urged to) depend a great deal on themselves, their own creativity and other members of their team. All this frees them from dependence on the teacher and, in doing so, gives them both power and freedom.

*Almost all students, except for a few very capable ones, depend completely on the teacher. They almost never depend on each other and there is little incentive to help each other. Helping each other is now called cheating.*

6. Learning-teams can provide the structure that will help students to get past the superficiality that plagues our schools today. Without this structure, there is little chance for any but a few students to learn enough in depth to make the vital knowledge-is-power connection.

*The students' complaints that they are bored are valid. Bored students will not work.*

7. The teams are free to figure out how to convince the teacher and other students (and parents) that they have learned the material. Teachers will encourage teams to offer evidence (other than tests) that the material has been learned.

*The teacher (or the school system) decides how the students are to be evaluated and they are rarely encouraged to do any more than to study for*
the teacher-designed tests.

8. Teams will be changed by the teacher on a regular basis so that all students will have a chance to be on a high-scoring team. On some assignments but not all, each student on the team will get the team score. High achieving students who might complain that their grade suffered when they took a team score will still tend consistently to be on high-scoring teams so as individuals they will not suffer in the long run. This will also create incentive regardless of the strength of any team. *Students compete only as individuals, and who wins and who looses is apparent in most classes, except some honors classes, after only a few weeks of school.* (p. 76-78).

Analysis of the learning team model and the learner empowerment instrument reveals intrinsic similarities. The intrinsic similarities substantiate the learning team model as a viable method for manipulating the impact dimension. The following questions are used by Frymier et al. (1996) to measure impact as a dimension of learner empowerment:

I have the power to make a difference in how things are done in my class.

My participation is important to the success of the class.

I can make an impact on the way things are run in my class.

I have the opportunity to contribute to the learning of others in this class.

I have the power to create a supportive learning environment in this class.

I make a difference in the learning that goes on in this class.

I can influence the instructor.
I feel appreciated in this class. (p. 192)

Results of Frymier et al’s (1996) research reveals higher levels of impact in students who self-report a perception of personal power. The dimension of impact is manipulated when students believe they have the power to make a difference. The more impact they perceive they have, the more motivation they feel. The dimension of impact is correlated with purpose. Purposeful task completion provides students with a sense of control and combats learned helplessness. The learning team model diminishes learned helplessness because students have an impact on their environment. The learning team environment fosters participation, contribution to others, and grants students the knowledge that they make a difference.

Competence

As a psychological variable, competence reflects an individual’s perception of skill level. Also known as self-efficacy and personal mastery, competence is the result of self-confidence. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) explain that self-esteem has often been operationalized as competence. They define competence as “a generalized sense of a person’s ability to perform adequately” (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 674). Individuals generalize competence when they transfer a sense of self-efficacy to related tasks. High levels of competence are correlated with “initiating behaviors, high effort, and persistence in the face of obstacles” (p. 672). Competence is confidence in the ability to capably achieve a desired goal. Following are questions used on Frymier et al’s. (1996) self-report measure to quantify competence levels in students:
1. I feel competent that I can adequately perform my duties.
2. I feel intimidated by what is required of me in this class.
3. I possess the necessary skills to perform successfully in class.
4. I feel unable to do the work in this class.
5. I believe that I am capable of achieving my goals in this class.
6. I have faith in my ability to do well in this class.
7. I have the qualifications to succeed in this class.
8. I lack confidence in my ability to perform the tasks in this class.
9. I feel very competent in this class. (p. 192)

Learner empowerment is impaired when students feel intimidated and lack confidence in their skills. When students suffer from low competence levels they exhibit avoidance behaviors. These avoidance behaviors perpetuate debilitating emotions. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) claim they prevent students “from confronting fears, building competencies, and improving perceived competence” (p. 672). Glasser (1993) contends that student’s competence levels are seriously affected by traditional testing methods. He argues that formal testing does not accurately assess student knowledge, ranks students, dissuades students from working hard, and most importantly discourages learners. These consequences result in low performing students who have lost the motivation to continue making an effort to learn.

The quality school model contains an alternative evaluation method that fosters the competence dimension. This method promotes the dimension of competence by cultivating learner confidence. Glasser’s (1993) evaluation method is taught to students using the acronym SESIR.
Show someone who is interested, such as a teacher what we are doing. Do it carefully and completely so that this person can easily see that this is what we did.

If it is not obvious or if there are questions, explain to that person how we achieved what we are showing him or her.

After we do this, we evaluate (self-evaluate) what we did to see if it could be improved.

Most of the time it is obvious that we could improve what we are doing, so we continue working to try to improve it.

We repeat the evaluation and improvement process, with or without help, until we believe that further attempts at improvement are not worth the effort. At this time, we believe we have done what deserves to be called quality. (p. 105-06)

The dimension of competence is cultivated by SESIR because each student moves at his or her own pace. Students do not move forward in the curriculum until they have mastered current material. Mastery of material requires a grade of a B or better. Student's perceptions of competence are continually re-enforced because they are required to show what they have learned and then explain what they have learned. Students are never required to show and explain until they express they are ready. Readiness reflects a student’s perception of competence.

The communicative act of explaining what has been learned facilitates the three cognitive processes of attaching meaning to task perceptions: evaluation, attribution, and envisioning. Students evaluate their work in current circumstances. Positive attributions
are accumulated because past experiences of competence are replicated. Envisioning is enhanced because students gain competence in their skills and feel capable of mastering future tasks. The cognitive interpretations have direct effect on intrinsic motivation. Therefore, the empowerment dimension of competence is manipulated by the alternative assessment method and learner empowerment is cultivated.

Choice

No matter what situation human beings find themselves in they behave in order to satisfy the strongest need detected in any particular moment. Glasser’s (1981) Choice theory is rooted in this premise. In schools, the cause of all behavior comes from inside the students. Regardless of any and all efforts on the part of teachers and administrators, students who do not choose to work are doing so because it does not satisfy their needs to do so. The Choice theory explanation of behavior is that human beings always choose to do what is most needs satisfying in any given moment. Choice, the fourth empowerment dimension as defined by Thomas and Velthouse (1990), is the cornerstone of the Choice theory quality school model.

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) define choice as the “causal responsibility for a person’s actions” (p. 673). According to Frymier et al. (1996), choice is the level that people self-determine goals, tasks, and methods for accomplishment. Glasser (1986) contends causal responsibility is five human needs: survival, love, power, freedom, and fun. Thomas and Velthouse’s (1990) explain, “locus of causality involves the issue of whether a person’s behavior is perceived as self-determined” (p. 673). Citing DeCharms (1968), they argue that “perceiving oneself as the locus of causality for one’s behavior (as
Glasser (1986) argues that when students understand needs satisfaction as the cause of their behavior they are motivated to change misbehavior. His behavior plan involves reflective questioning in an attempt to help students determine the cause of misbehavior. Moreover, students are asked to choose a better course of action to meet their needs. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) argue that when human beings perceive themselves as controlled by external events, the result is negative debilitating emotions and low self-esteem. Glasser (1986) concurs and furthers the notion by suggesting all misbehavior is the attempt to control for needs satisfaction and traditional approaches to classroom management exacerbates problems. When students misbehave the traditional stimulus-response approach is often employed. Teachers attempt to control misbehavior through punishment, coercion, or threats. Glasser (1986) contends:

the only person whose behavior each of us can control is ourself. All we can give and receive from others is information. But information itself can't make us do anything. Each of us—even in the face of a severe threat, if we are willing to suffer the consequences—can choose what we do. And no matter how we are threatened, no one can make us think the way they want (p. ix).

Threats of punishment denies the underlying reality that students are misbehaving in an attempt to satisfy a need. Instead, he posits the use of reflective questioning in order to determine which of the five needs the student is attempting to satisfy. Identifying the
specific need of causality results in a needs satisfying solution that produces internal motivation to change.

All behavior issues in schools adopting the Glasser (1993) model are addressed using the same series of reflective questioning: What is the behavior the student chose? What need or needs were they trying to satisfy with this behavior? What was the picture they were trying to satisfy when they chose to start the behavior? What need did that picture come from? What better behaviors might they have chosen? What suggestions for improvement can be made for next time? These questions are posed to students in the same order every time a behavioral incident occurs, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant the infraction. All teachers, administrators, and school personnel participate in reflective questioning. Student's fundamental human right for need satisfaction is respected because no punishments are administered in a quality school. The behavior plan assures intrinsic motivation in students is not compromised.

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) support the notion that rewards and punishment do not produce intrinsic motivation. They claim “effort is not dependent upon the supervision of others nor upon rewards mediated by others” (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 673). Rather, intrinsic motivation is fostered by a perception of choice. Promoting high levels of choice results in independent students who “demonstrate flexibility in controlling their own task accomplishment” (p. 673). Choice is also correlated with “resiliency to obstacles, [and] sustaining motivation in the face of problems or ambiguity” (p. 673). Over time, the dimension of choice aggregates. Students generalize feelings of autonomy. Therefore, teachers must augment student’s cognitive interpretations of higher levels of self-determination, independence, and self-sufficiency.
This rarely occurs in traditional schools.

Frymier et al. (1996) cite the difficulty with quantifying the choice dimension of empowerment in traditional school settings. They claim, students "are rarely, if ever, given the opportunity to exercise choice in classes" (Frymier et al., 1996, p. 196).

Methods for cultivating choice are evident in the questions they use to measure choice as a dimension of learner empowerment:

- I have a choice in the methods I can use to perform my work.
- I have freedom to choose among options in this class.
- Alternative approaches to learning are encouraged in this class.
- I have the opportunity to make important decisions in this class.
- I can determine how tasks can be performed.
- I have no freedom to choose in this class. (p. 192)

Analysis of the text reveals the choice dimension is cultivated through alternative methods for task completion, learning, decision-making, and independence. However, their research indicates choice "may not be applicable to the classroom context" (p. 190).

Glasser (1986) echoes this notion. He claims the traditional stimulus-response "survival schools" communicate "[h]ere is the education we know you need—take it or leave it" (p. 66).

Glasser (1999) posits the use of language to cultivate choice. He encourages caring communicative acts in opposition to choice inhibiting language of control. His contention is that controlling language may help you "win a few battles but you always loose the war" (p. xi). Language of choice places power back in the hands of students. It communicates needs satisfaction and cultivates the choice dimension by offering students
the freedom to make decisions for themselves, direct their own behavior, and choose among options without fear of punishment. He provides teachers with examples of controlling language followed by a choice-producing alternative.

External control:

Any student who is caught smoking on school property will be automatically suspended for three days and given an F in all his or her classes for those three days. (p. 74)

Choice theory alternative:

Instead of suspension, any student who is caught smoking the first time will be given an opportunity to tell the counselor what he or she does or wants to do for fun. Our job will be to try and figure out how students can have more fun in school safely. If students can have more safe fun, we think they will choose to smoke less. This is a school problem. If you want to start meeting to figure out a solution, we’ll work with all who are interested. (p. 75).

External control:

If you get any further behind, you’re going to flunk. (p. 76)

Choice theory alternative:

You’re way behind. Let’s forget about what you’ve failed so far and try to get you going on what you’ll need to do for promotion to high school. Simply do the work, show me you know it, and you’ll make it to high school. We’ve still got three months; you have time. I’m on your side, so use my help. (p. 77)
The quality school model employs two empowerment strategies for manipulating the choice dimension. The language of choice employs the empowerment strategy of changing environmental events to manipulate cognitive interpretations. As stated, cognitive interpretations are perceptual assessments that, in turn, have motivational effects if increased. An increase in the choice dimension is produced when teachers utilize the language of choice. Choice language puts the locus of causality for student behavior back on the student. It alters the environmental event as a source of data for current conditions by communicating personal choice as the source of events. It supports student perceptions of self-determination. It also communicates student needs satisfaction, rather than behavior, as the focus of attention.

The quality school behavioral plan recognizes that students misbehave in order to satisfy a need. Reflective questioning employs the empowerment strategy of manipulating the student's style of interpreting behavioral events. Manipulation of the choice dimension occurs during the process of reflective questioning. Students are asked to determine which of the five needs they were attempting to satisfy with their behavior. Focusing attention on needs satisfaction reinforces internal locus of control. It communicates the notion that students are responsible for fulfilling their needs, teachers are not going to do it for them. They must make the choice for themselves. Choice, the cornerstone of the quality school model, resonates Thomas and Velthouse (1990) definition of the choice dimension as the “causal responsibility for a person’s actions” (p. 673).
Structural Environment

Environment is a key feature of empowerment. According to Frymier et al., (1996) empowerment is a state rather than trait construct, indicating empowerment is “influenced largely by the environment” (p. 190). Thomas and Velthouse (1990) explain that strategies for manipulating the four dimensions of empowerment are “shaped in part by ‘objective’ variables in the individual’s environment” (p. 676). As such, “the conventional approach to empowerment has involved interventions that target such variables” (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 676). This notion reflects the traditional stimulus-response approach whereby “isolated effects” of stimulus such as “charismatic appeals” result in temporary motivation on the part of the recipient (p. 679). A more effective approach is through “the alignment of organizational processes and structures to consistently enhance individuals task assessment” (p. 679). This approach results in long-term generalized intrinsic motivation. If students are to be expected to exhibit high levels of intrinsic task motivation then the school and classroom environments must be conducive to the manipulation of task assessments. Implementation of the quality school model is contingent upon specific environmental conditions.

Glasser (1993) contends that six conditions are critical to the environment in order to successfully implement the quality school model. For reinforcement, he suggests they be posted in each classroom and the school office:

1. *There must be a warm, supportive classroom environment.* Quality schoolwork (and the quality life that results from it) can only be achieved in a warm, supportive classroom environment. It cannot exist if there is an adversarial relationship between those who teach and those who are asked.
to learn. Not only need there be a strong, friendly feeling between teacher and students, this same feeling is necessary among the students, teachers, and administrators. Above all, there must be trust: They must all believe that the others have their welfare in mind. Without this trust, neither students nor teachers will make the effort needed to do quality work.

Because the ability to talk to others who listen is the foundation of warmth and trust, the students must be encouraged to talk honestly and easily to their teacher and he or she to them. Under no circumstances should anyone in a Quality School attempt to coerce another person.

2. **Students should be asked to do only useful work.** Quality work is always useful work; no student should be asked to do anything that does not make sense, such as to memorize material that will soon be forgotten because there is no use for it except in school. The Quality School teacher accepts that it is his or her professional responsibility to explain what is useful about everything he or she asks students to learn. . . . If the real world requires that they learn useless material, such as much that is necessary to pass machine-scored, state assessment tests or college entrance tests, it should be explained to students that this has to be done so that their school can get state support or to help them to get into college. This is real-world nonsense: Nevertheless, Quality School teachers need to help them learn this material.

3. **Students are always asked to do the best they can do.** Quality work requires time and effort, which means that in a Quality School students are
given the time to make the necessary effort. They are told by their teacher that what is wanted in this class is always the best they can do at the time. As this is in sharp contrast to the experience of almost all students, it will take great patience on your part to get the process started. You are dealing with students most of whom have never thought of trying to do the best they can in an academic class. They are used to covering ground, not learning, and have never expended the effort to do quality work.

4. *Students are asked to evaluate their own work and improve it*. . . . As Deming says, quality can almost always be improved. The Quality School teacher will make the effort to teach students how to evaluate their own work and then ask them to do this almost all of the time . . . Even if the initial work was judged as quality, students should be encouraged to see if a little additional effort would result in improvement . . . quality takes precedence over quantity. A large volume of low-quality work has nothing to do with education or, for that matter, anything of value.

5. *Quality work always feels good*. . . . there is no better human feeling than that which comes from the satisfaction of doing something useful that you believe is the very best you can do and finding that others agree. It is this good feeling (from need-satisfaction) that is the physiologic incentive to pursue the quality that is the goal of the quality school.

6. *Quality work is never destructive*. Quality is never achieved through doing anything destructive. Therefore, it is not quality to achieve good feelings through the use of addictive drugs or to harm people, most living
creatures, property, nor the environment, which belongs to all of us.

(Glasser, 1993, p. 22-25)

Text analysis of the six conditions reveals the strength of the environment in supporting manipulation of the four dimensions of empowerment. The organizational processes and school and classroom structures enhance student task assessments. Task assessments of meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice are intrinsic to the environment.

Alignment of organizational processes to enhance manipulation of the meaningfulness dimension is inherent in the second, fourth, and fifth condition. In the second condition, students are asked only to do useful work. Useful implies meaningful. If students are asked to do useless work it is justified by a meaningfulness component, to attain entrance into college. Students are also provided an impact component, to aid the school in attaining funding. Moreover, students are told that each task required of them will be accompanied by an explanation of its usefulness. The fourth condition reveals meaningfulness by attaching quality work with value. The organizational structure facilitates cognitive interpretations of valuing to enhance meaningfulness task assessments, by attaching meaning to quality at the onset. Cognitive interpretations of meaningfulness are further supported in the fifth condition. Students are told they will gain personal satisfaction in completing quality work. Personal satisfaction parallels personal meaningfulness. The manipulations of meaningfulness task assessments are intrinsic to the conditions.

The dimension of competence is evident in the third and fourth conditions. Both conditions are written in reference to SESIR, the self-evaluation assessment model. In the third condition, students are told they will be expected to perform at their best and in the
fourth condition are told they will self-assess. These conditions lay the foundation for an environment conducive to competence-centered task assessments. They communicate that the student is fully capable of grading themselves and determining which areas they need to improve upon. The third condition also communicates that a student’s best work is proficient.

A quality school model environment augments empowerment through impact. Impact dimension task assessments are inherent in the first and sixth conditions. Students are aligned with their personal power to impact others in the first condition through a supportive school structure based on mutual respect, trust, friendliness, and honest reciprocal communication. An explicit expectation that students will be contributing members to the climate supports impact task assessments. In the sixth condition impact assessments are aligned with an environment that belongs to everyone. Additionally, students are told they have the power to directly impact the environment, property, others, and themselves. Choice, as the cornerstone of the model, is implicit in each of the six conditions. Quality school organizational processes and structures are aligned with transforming cognitive interpretations that augment student empowerment.

Cultivating an environment conducive to transforming cognitive interpretations is evident in additional language employed by teachers using the quality school model. According to Glasser (1993), asking students to work, expecting hard work and then getting it is dependant on two things: how well the students know the teacher and how much they like what they know. He contends that teachers must answer six vital questions for students: Who are you? What do you stand for? What will you ask students to do? What you will not ask them to do? What you will do for them? What will you not
do for them? When answering these questions, teachers are establishing the necessary rapport to enhance manipulation of empowerment dimensions.

When teachers describe who they are and what they stand for they are satisfying their student’s curiosity. Students are interested in knowing who their teachers are and part of trust gaining involves expressing and modeling for students what is important to their teachers as both people and educators. Students also need to know what teachers are willing to do for them. Glasser (1993) suggests saying, “as long as they come to class, you will help them in any way you can... with their help and cooperation, you are open to anything that you believe will lead to quality work” (p. 40). It is also important for students to know “there are no threats, punishments, or busywork in a quality school and that you will not ask them to learn anything that is not useful” (Glasser, 1993, p. 38).

Intrinsic in these texts are dimensions of meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice. As communicative acts they function to linguistically construct organizational processes and structures. Situational analysis suggests they function to construct a need-satisfying environment that, in turn, supports transformational shifts in cognitive interpretations. Transformational shifts result in long term generalized intrinsic motivation. This following text written by Glasser (1993) is deconstructed to reveal the synthesis of the language of the quality school model, as a vehicle for constructing the organizational and structural system, with the four dimensions of empowerment:

Tell them that you are going to ask them to work with you [Impact] to solve any problem that arises, no matter how small. You will ask them to do this as individuals, in small groups, or as a whole class [Impact]. You are much more interested in them solving their own problems [Choice thru
locus of control] than in you doing it for them. You also should tell your students that the purpose of school is to teach them how to use what they have learned [Meaningfulness] and that you will expect them to be able to show you they are able to do this [Competence] . . . . You will not do their work or figure out their problems for them [Choice thru responsibility]. You will not tell them what to do if you believe it is something that they could figure out for themselves [Competence]. You will spend a lot of time teaching them how to evaluate their own work. Once they know how to do this, [Competence] you will expect them to do it [Choice thru responsibility] and to defend their evaluation of their work against you or anyone else [Meaningfulness]. Almost all your students will have come from an educational environment where they always turned to the teacher to tell them how they were doing [No personal power]: This is what you want to change [Empowerment]. (p. 37-41)

Empowerment Strategies In Choice Theory

The four dimensions of empowerment affect behaviors and succeeding outcomes. As perpetuating and cumulative they instigate cycles based on internal cognitive interpretations of external experiences. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) explain, negative “assessments may initiate debilitating cycles of inactivity, low initiative, and so on . . . high situational assessments may lead to self enhancing cycles that strengthen and confirm those assessments” (p. 673). An individual’s personal belief system regarding each of the four assessment dimensions is summative. Summative beliefs are generalized
to similar situations over time. "They represent cumulative learning from past task assessments" and are reinforced when individuals replicate them in assessing new situations (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990, p. 673). However, assessments can be altered and increased. Altering or increasing assessments results in increased motivation, and therefore, empowerment.

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) have identified two strategies for producing empowerment. Both strategies involve the manipulation of one or more of four variables: meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice. Increases in each of these four dimensions changes task assessments that directly affect cognitive interpretations (which also accumulate over time) resulting in intrinsic motivation. Both strategies for altering and increasing task assessments to cultivate intrinsic motivation exist in the quality school model. Intrinsic motivation is a byproduct of the dimension manipulation inherent in the methods employed. The first strategy, manipulating dimensions by changing environmental events is used when manipulating competence, impact, and choice. The second strategy, changing student’s style of interpreting events, is evident in methods to manipulate meaningfulness and choice. Environmental and style strategies produce learner empowerment by altering or increasing student’s task assessments.

Environmental Strategy

Teachers who use the SESIR method for task assessment employ an environmental strategy to manipulate the dimension of competence. They change the environmental events surrounding task assessments in order to increase and alter student’s perceptions. Competence is a psychological variable. It reflects student’s
perceptions of personal skill level. Student success is guaranteed by the SESIR paradigm: students never earn less than a B, they move through the curriculum at their own pace, and they determine when they are competent enough to show and explain what they have learned. Moreover, their task assessments of competence are cumulative and generalize across tasks and over time. The environmental events intrinsic to SESIR increase student’s evaluations, attributions, and envisioning of competence.

Impact is an inherent feature of the learning team paradigm. Teachers who employ the use of team learning implement an empowerment strategy by changing the environmental events surrounding student’s task assessments. In synthesis with Thomas and Velthouse’s (1990) definition of impact and Frymier et al.’s (1996) learner empowerment measure, the learning team model is an environmental structure that inherently manipulates the dimension of impact. Students task assessments are increased and altered because they make a difference in class, participate and contribute to class success, contribute to others, and perceive themselves as having influence. The learning team environment creates, supports, and re-enforces cognitive interpretations of impact.

Communicative acts are the vehicle for manipulating the choice dimension. The strategy of changing environmental events is employed by these communicative acts. The language of choice alters environments and increases student’s choice assessments. Choice assessments are intrinsic to choice language. Choice language puts the onus of choice, responsibility, and power on the student. It communicates to students that they are responsible for directing their own behavior and choosing among available options. These features are fundamental to the choice dimension. As stated, cognitive interpretations are perceptual assessments that have motivational effects if increased.
Intrinsic motivation is increased when teachers use choice language to put the locus of causality on students by altering their communication environment. The choice dimension is also manipulated by a style strategy in the quality school model.

**Style Strategy**

The quality school behavioral model utilizes the empowerment strategy of changing student's styles of cognitive interpretation of events. By altering and increasing student's assessments of choice, the behavioral model produces empowerment through the use of reflective questioning. Reflective questioning manipulates the choice dimension by increasing and altering student perceptions of control over their behavior. An internal locus of control is substantiated and re-enforced each time a student is asked to identify their behavior and associate it with an attempt for needs satisfaction.

Manipulation of the choice dimension is intrinsic to the process, and language is the vehicle for manipulation. Choice, defined by locus of causality, is manipulated through language that reinforces student perceptions that their behavior is self-determined.

Changing student styles of cognitive interpretation is the strategy employed for manipulating the dimension of meaningfulness. Interpretations are altered through evaluation, attribution, and envisioning. Evaluations, attributions, and envisioning are constructed cognitively through the use of language. Student-teacher dialogue is the vehicle for vital connections between meaningfulness and task completion. Teachers dialogue with students regarding the value of each task assigned in order to produce vital connections in the student's mind that the task is useful and valuable. Ongoing dialogue and reflective questioning to support students in naming the value and significance of...
task completion follow thorough explanations. Student perceptions of meaningfulness are discussed and re-enforced. Students evaluate the significance of task completion in current circumstances. They attribute meaningfulness to past experiences, and envision meaning as part of future tasks. The result is cognitive interpretations that directly affect intrinsic motivation. Language is the vehicle for manipulating the dimension of meaningfulness, as a style strategy for producing learner empowerment.

Summary

Choice theory is the cornerstone of the quality school model. The foundation of Choice theory as defined by Glasser (1965) and choice as a dimension of empowerment are synonymous. Glasser defines choice as rooted in responsibility. He posits responsibility is “the ability to fulfill one’s needs” (Glasser, 1965, p. 13). Thomas and Velthouse (1990) define choice as the “causal responsibility for a person’s actions” (p. 673). Glasser (1986) contends causal responsibility is five human needs: survival, love, power, freedom, and fun. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) argue, “perceiving oneself as the locus of causality for one’s behavior (as origin rather than pawn) is the fundamental requirement for intrinsic motivation” (p.673). Motivation is a byproduct of the Choice theory of human behavior. Glasser (1969) claims students are not motivated unless they “understand that they are responsible for fulfilling their needs . . . No one can do it for them” (p. 16). Causal responsibility is personal need fulfillment. Implementation of the quality school model requires that each student be educated on need satisfaction. Students are taught that the five human needs are the cause of their behavioral choices.
Manipulations of each of the four dimensions of empowerment are byproducts of the methods of the quality school model. The manipulations change student task assessments directly affecting cognitive interpretations. Task assessments affecting interpretations accumulate over time, resulting in immediate as well as subsequent intrinsic motivation. Each of the four dimensions has motivational properties. Frymier et al. (1996) report they are also interdependent. Therefore, students do not have to experience all of the dimensions “to experience some level of empowerment” (Frymier et al., 1996, p. 197). However, the manipulation of empowerment dimensions requires a structural environment conducive to the transformation of cognitive interpretations.

The structural environment of the quality school supports transforming cognitive interpretations of meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice. Each of the four dimensions is inherent in the six conditions of the environment. The language employed to construct the organizational processes and structures is aligned with transforming the cognitive interpretations of students. As recipients of these communicative acts, students experience task assessments that shape their attachments of meaning to perceptions. This facilitates the manipulation of global task assessments. Therefore, students who attend schools that have adapted the quality school model experience intrinsic motivation. They are empowered.

Synthesizing each of the four dimensions with key characteristics and paradigm features of the quality school model reveals meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice is intrinsic to Choice theory. The interpretive analysis illuminates language is the vehicle for producing school environments, organizational processes, and power structures, as well as cognitive interpretations. It emphasizes that the quality school
environment is structured in alignment with altering and increasing task assessments of each of the four dimensions of empowerment. Both strategies for producing empowerment are employed in the quality school model. Environmental and style strategies are intrinsic to key features. Therefore, it is my contention that students who attend Choice theory quality schools are more empowered than students who attend traditional schools.

This in-depth portrayal is a reasoned evaluation based on my interpretive reading of communication and psychology scholarship. As reflexive and dialogical, my synthesis of the two bodies of literature reveals intrinsic similarities. My hope is that it will elicit a transformational shift in perception for those who read its content. Echoing Della-Piana (1982) this chapter was designed to encourage educators to “look again” (p. 14).
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Summary

National education statistics substantiate the crisis conditions in America’s public schools. The crisis conditions result in negative experiences for students. Negative experiences are cited as the primary factor in student’s decisions to drop out of school. The current education system reflects the culture. As three tiered it represents class structures that privileges some over others. Academic practices are perpetuating class structures and a cycle of despair. Student populations continue to be subjugated. Therefore, the system must be challenged through empowerment of the oppressed.

Traditional teaching methods inhibit student empowerment. They have led us to where we are today. Currently, unmotivated at-risk students populate our schools because students perceive themselves as controlled. The result is low self-esteem and negative debilitating emotions that result in learned helplessness. Students suffering from learned helplessness feel powerless and therefore lack motivation to continue learning. Governmental reforms are exacerbating the problems by requiring more standardized testing measures. This nonsense requires that students continue to learn useless material in order to adequately perform. Standardized testing does not accurately assess student learning and seriously affects student’s confidence levels. Students are ranked, deterred
from working hard, and discouraged. Teachers who understand the ineffectiveness of standardized tests are still forced to administer them. These teachers are placed in the impossible situation of choosing between their jobs and their personal honor codes. The global consequences are low performing students who have lost the motivation to continue making efforts to learn.

Learner empowerment through the quality school model creates positive experiences for students. It is a sharp contrast to the traditional stimulus-response methodology employed in conventional survival schools. Rewards and punishments do not produce intrinsic motivation. However, many teachers still employ these stimulus-response methods. As a result, they ultimately must resort to coercion and threats in order to manipulate students into submission. The results of these disconfirming messages are damaging. Students loose the motivation to make necessary psychic investments in schoolwork. They exhibit apathy, detachment, and disassociation. This creates a domino effect in which teachers continue to send disconfirming messages and ultimately become the source of the problem in student’s minds. When the student fails, it is the teacher’s fault.

The dominant pedagogy is not built on collaborative environments of mutual caring and respect. Choosing to teach based on an alternative philosophy challenges the established pedagogy. A teaching philosophy based on empowerment recognizes that in order to facilitate learning, students must have meaningfulness, competence, impact, and choice. Students must be free to express thoughts and feelings without fear of consequences. Moreover, if students are to be expected to exhibit high levels of intrinsic task motivation then the school and classroom environments must be conducive to the
manipulation of task assessments. Altering and increasing student’s task assessments result in empowerment if the organizational structure is both supportive and encouraging.

Empowering teachers understand they promote impact by teaching students that their learning has an effect on themselves, others, and the environment. They create meaning for students by communicating the value of what is being taught. Teachers who encourage competence use alternative assessment strategies that provide students a sense of proficiency. Teachers who empower employ the language of choice and teach students they are responsible for meeting their own needs; no one is going to do it for them. Teachers who are committed to empowering methodologies reduce powerlessness in students by seeking to eliminate environmental elements that facilitate helplessness, inactivity, incompetence, and ineffectiveness. They understand students behave in order to satisfy the strongest need detected in any particular moment. They cultivate classroom climates conducive to learning by supporting survival, love, power, freedom, and fun for all.

Language is a vehicle for cultivating learner empowerment and constructing the environmental conditions necessary for its existence. Through self-reflection, teachers are able to evaluate messages they are sending and identify ones which need to be changed. Teachers who employ task assessment supportive language realize learner empowerment is positively correlated with teacher communication. They know empowerment is an outcome variable that stems from communication with students. On a macro level, empowering educators understand language produces schools as power structures and therefore language is the vehicle for eradicating the social injustices produced by schools.
Ongoing scholarship in fields of communication and psychology contribute to solutions for the current circumstances in education. Illuminating the intrinsic synthesis of the scholarship expands consciousness and facilitates transformation. It contributes to the ongoing conversation regarding No Child Left Behind legislation that supports schools implementing effective student retention policies, such as the quality school model. It is my hope that schools can become social structures where young people are educated for the purpose of empowerment, students are taught to make quality choices about their lives, and teachers are reminded to look again.

Suggestions For Future Research

In order to further contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation regarding learner empowerment, I make the following suggestions for future research. First, research to quantify higher levels of learner empowerment in students attending schools adopting the Choice theory model should be conducted. Comparative analysis of empowerment levels of students attending Choice schools and students not attending Choice schools would substantiate the content of this interpretive analysis. The research would verify if learners who attend Choice theory schools are more empowered than learners who do not attend those schools. On a macro level, district, state and national studies would further substantiate the quality school model as correlated with learner-empowerment. Retention rates of schools adopting the model compared to those not adopting the model should also be advanced in order to further substantiate the model's effectiveness.
As separate components, each dimension should be measured to determine their existence in traditional schools. Each dimension might then be correlated with student retention rates in order to analyze the existence of emergent patterns. Comparative analysis of the existence of each of the four dimensions, with retention rates, may determine levels of significance for each of the four dimensions as influencing student retention. For example, high empowerment levels of impact may exist in schools with high dropout rates; yet those same schools might measure low in choice levels. As such, research could be conducted to determine a dominance of one dimension in supporting student retention.

Comparative measures of each of the four dimensions should be conducted at the district level to determine which dimensions exist within each school. Methods to foster non-existent dimensions could then be implemented.

Choice measures in traditional schools are important for continued research. The choice dimension may be found evident in traditional classroom contexts. On a macro level, measurements of choice would further the cause for district and statewide implementation of the quality school model. Macro level choice measures, compared with district, state, and national retention rates may substantiate choice as the key dimension of empowerment.
REFERENCES


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Thesis Title: Communication in the Classroom: An Interpretive Analysis of Empowerment and Choice Theory

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