

Practicing Academic, Civic, and Social Responsibility in an Inclusive  
School-Within-School Career Academy Class

by

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Research indicates that schools are growing in size (Cotton, 1996; Oxley, 1994; Darling-Hammond, Aness & Orr, 2002). Cotton claims that between 1940 and 1990, the total number of elementary and secondary public schools declined 69 percent despite a 70 percent increase in the nation's population. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the average high school has 753 students. In New York State, where the site for this study is located, that number is inflated to 1004 students (NCES, 2002).

Meier (1995) asserts that large high schools are seriously under-educating students with some impacted more than others. In 2004, minorities, as defined by the National Center for Educational Statistics, made up 42% of the public pre-kindergarten through secondary school enrollment. While the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reading score gap between white students and students of color has been gradually decreasing, in 2004 a gap of 26 points and 29 points respectively remained between white and black and between white and Hispanic 17 year-olds (KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007). Orfield (2004) argues that disadvantaged and minority students have paid the highest price for the failings of our current comprehensive secondary schools. The resulting marginalization of many students (Klonsky, 1996) has contributed to poor student performance, low attendance rates (Springston, 2002), an inability to respond effectively to the needs of all students (Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Orr, 2002), and unacceptably high drop out rates.<sup>i</sup> *Cultural deprivation*, a concept popularized during the 1960s, re-emerged in the 1990s in the form of beliefs about *at-risk* students (Richardson, 1990). Banks (1997) states that while these two concepts are not identical, they are similar in important ways. Most important, both are labels that blame the victim for their particular situations and both tend to stigmatize their signified groups. This has been particularly acute among seniors or students in their final year of high school – a time when

many students confront their final opportunities to prepare themselves for responsible citizenship in a pluralistic world community as well as multiple local and national communities.

In 2001, reiterating the feelings of many college leaders, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley called the high school senior year a “wasteland.” In 2005, based on the national High School Survey of Student Engagement, researchers Martha McCarthy and George Kuh (2005) concluded that the majority of seniors were not academically challenged. While teachers in upper track classes may not always feel the frustrations inherent in seniors’ lack of social, academic, and civic responsibility, those in middle and lower track classes can well attest to them. Therefore it is not always easy to foster a sense of purposeful engagement, responsibility, and community among high school seniors. Yet it is vital for all students and especially students who face academic challenges. One way in which school districts have attempted to address these challenges is by creating smaller learning environments within large secondary high schools.

In the fall of 2006, we undertook an inquiry into the impact of a newly created smaller learning environment’s structures and practices on 12<sup>th</sup> grade students’ sense of engagement in learning and their developing sense of responsibility for social, academic, and political citizenship. We wanted to explore ethnographically ways in which one large high school’s school-within-school (SWS) restructuring efforts influenced teachers’ intent to develop an inclusive English Language Arts learning environment. More specifically, we focused on the impact of SWS structures of blocking, looping, teaming and Individual Educational Plans (IEP) clustering<sup>ii</sup> on teaching practices, student and teacher interaction, and student engagement in learning. For the purposes of this article, we have focused more closely on students’ social, academic, and civic engagement – their classroom citizenship – and ways in which that

citizenship was shaped by policy choices within the school-within-school concept. Our inquiry in this paper is guided by three inter-related questions: 1) How does the SWS approach influence student learning; 2) How does the SWS approach influence student-student and student-teacher interactions and how do students experience these interactions; 3) How do SWS structures and recommended pedagogy impact students' preparation for citizenship. We conclude that while a tracking structure that grouped classified students together into one career academy persisted in creating obstacles to the equitable inclusion of all students in career academies of their choice, the SWS structures of blocking, looping, and collaborative teaching enhanced students' sense of academic, social, and civic responsibility. Furthermore, the interactions between accommodations for classified students as well as their presence in the classroom may have contributed to a heightened sense of academic, social, and civic responsibility.

### **Context of the Study**

Orchard School District,<sup>iii</sup> the school district in which we conducted this study, is one of the largest districts in New York State (NYS). It serves approximately 14,000 students across 20 schools. It's four high schools, grades 9-12, enrolled nearly 4,500 students. Typical of larger high schools in New York State, West Side High School (WSHS) enrolled approximately 1400 students including the largest number of students with disabilities and students with free and reduced lunches, and the lowest graduation rate of the district's four high schools.

WSHS's student body included 84.9 percent White, 4.9 percent Hispanic, 7 percent Black, and 2.5 percent "other." Students who were economically disadvantaged made up approximately 25 percent and students with disabilities comprised 11.5 percent of the student enrollment. Nearly 18 percent of the students were eligible for free lunches, and 9.5 percent

received lunches at a reduced rate. With a graduation rate of 74 percent, WSHS's dropout rate increased by 22 percent over the three years prior to our study, the number of students opting for a Graduate Equivalence Diploma (GED) increased by 48 percent, and the attendance rate was 93 percent. In 2004-2005, only 83 percent of graduating students received a Regents diploma. The rest received a "school diploma," a diploma reserved for those who were unable to accomplish the academic rigor and accompanying Regents Examination performance required for the more widely accepted Regents diploma (New York State School Report, 2006).

Because of its low student achievement, particularly by students with disabilities, minority students, and students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, in 2003, the district was awarded a grant of \$1.4 million from the United States Department of Education Smaller Learning Communities Program. SWS restructuring created Lower (grades 9 & 10) and Upper (grades 11 & 12) Houses in all of Orchard Central School District's high schools (see Table 1). The Lower Houses provided an opportunity for students to loop with teachers from grade 9 to grade 10 in English Language Arts and Social Studies. In grade 10 the students identified an area of personal interest in the Skills for Life class. Based on the information that students learned about themselves in this class, they enrolled for one of the clusters: Business and Information Systems; Arts and Humanities; Math, Science, and Technology; and Health and Human Services. Students in grades 11 and 12 enrolled in a career academy within their career cluster and moved together with their academy through three classes: their academy elective, English Language Arts, and Social Studies classes (See Table 1).

Table 1: Smaller Learning Environment/Schools-within-Schools Career Academy Framework

Lower House (Grades 9-10)		Upper House Grades 11-12)
9 <sup>th</sup> Grade Academy	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Academy	Career Clusters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heterogeneous Humanities and Math teams “loop” to 10<sup>th</sup> grade</li> <li>• Develop career plan in ELA</li> <li>• Advisement Periods</li> <li>• Ten Steps to Success</li> <li>• Freshman Mentor Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heterogeneous Humanities and Math teams “loop” from 9<sup>th</sup> grade</li> <li>• Develop career plan in ELA</li> <li>• Advisement Periods</li> <li>• Skills for Life Course</li> <li>• Select Career Academy affiliation for 11<sup>th</sup> grade</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business &amp; Information Systems (Business, Technology, Finance, Information Technology, Marketing &amp; Business Administration Academies)</li> <li>• Arts &amp; Humanities (Creative and Performing Arts, Communications Academies)</li> <li>• Health &amp; Human Services (Criminal Justice &amp; Law, Education, Health &amp; Wellness Academies)</li> <li>• Math, Science, &amp; Technology (Communications, Manufacturing Systems, Transportation Systems, Information Technology, Pre-Engineering Academies)</li> </ul>

(Source: [Orchard] Central School District, 2003)

This study examines the nature and perceptions of learning experiences in a WSHS collaboratively taught Health and Human Services Cluster, Education Career Academy class that includes eight students whose Individual Educational Programs (IEP) call for team-taught classes and 13 heterogeneously grouped, unclassified students. The Education Career Academy included between 20 and 25 students (See Table 2 in the Appendix A), and the Health and Human Services Cluster 275 students.

**Interpretive Perspective: Contexts and Learning Environments**

Multiple, often interconnected theoretical assumptions dominate the field of school reform. Notably these include but are not limited to: *effectiveness theories* which depict schools as products of leadership and management; *organization theories* that posit schools as dynamic

entities that foster student engagement; *sociocultural theories* that assume that what takes place in schools is part of a broader set of cultural practices and emphasizes the interaction between life in and out of schools; *community theories* which display schools as models of relationships and promote the idea that schools and classrooms should be constituted within an environment of mutual care, interdependence and collective responsibility, and *critical theories* which envision schools as reflective democratic communities (see Lavié, 2006). Because we are interested in ways that district-wide SWS structures and practices play out in a language arts, Education Career Academy class that includes a cluster of students with IEPs, as an interpretive perspective, we bring together sociocultural, community, and critical theories as they relate to the development of democratic, inclusive and reflective learning structures. We refer to this framework as an inclusive democratic framework.<sup>iv</sup> Below we discuss the aspects of these theories that constitute the lens through which we have viewed the data collected during this study.

### *Sociocultural Theories*

Four basic theories comprise sociocultural thinking about teaching, and learning. The first is epistemological in nature: all knowledge is socially and culturally constructed. The second is informed by the field of anthropology: teaching and learning are cultural practices. The third states all learning is “situated” within its social, historical, and cultural milieu; and the fourth has emerged within the field of psychology: children learn best when they are working on authentic problems guided by knowledgeable others. Each of these should be taken into account when restructuring schools, reforming teaching practices, and designing student learning opportunities.

To teach within a sociocultural framework is to elevate and elaborate the role of culture and social context in student learning. Sociocultural practices take place within learning environments that include students and teachers who reflect differences in culture, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic class, aspirations, and abilities (Beane & Apple, 1995). Vygotsky (1978) argued that all mental activity takes into account learners' social and cultural milieus. To this Wertsh (1991) added that learning is impacted by learners' historical context and collective memory. Oakes and Lipton (1999) further blurred the distinction between social experiences, cultural practices and mental processes when they posited that sociocultural theorists and practitioners maintain and embrace the idea that society and culture are indistinguishable from learning and thinking. They explained that learning and mental activities *are* cultural in nature and that learners are at the center of what and how they learn. Because of his interest in student learning, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that learning and solving problems happen simultaneously when learners engage with each other. He claimed that learning occurs in interactions between learners and that all people need to be included in the learning environment in order to fulfill the potential of both students and society.

Some sociocultural practices support the idea of viewing the learner as a partner in a cognitive apprenticeship with more learned others (Oakes & Lipton, 1999; Rogoff, 1990). A cognitive apprenticeship guides a novice learner toward mastery of intellectual tools through social activity and relationships (Oakes & Lipton, 1999). Under the guidance of the more learned other, learners assist other learners and are challenged by increasingly sophisticated skills and responsibilities until the bridge between their cultural and achievement gap is narrowed (Oakes & Lipton, 1999). Allowing for relationships such as those formed in cognitive apprenticeships,

students transform egocentric social identities into social identities that include their roles as participants and active citizens in a democratic society (Dewey, 1916).

Dabbagh (2006) outlines the constructivist school of thought, which is to a large extent grounded in Vygotsky's learning theories, as characterized by four goals for instruction. First, instruction should support knowledge building rather than communicate knowledge; second, teachers should serve as guides rather than transfer knowledge to students who are "blank slates;" third, learning activities should be authentic and centered on learners' natural curiosity and their unfolding misconceptions; learning experiences should provide encouragement to students to reflect on their experiences, seek alternative viewpoints, and strengthen the credibility of their ideas. Guided social constructivism argues that students actively construct knowledge through interaction with their community. They share ideas with peers and through these interactions construct new knowledge (Edelson, Pea, & Gomez, 1996).

Theories of situated learning were particularly useful in understanding the experiences of students and teachers in our study. Situated learning theory emphasizes that all learning is embedded within and a function of its physical, institutional, social and cultural settings, i.e. it is situated (Lave & Wenger, 1990, 1991). Lave (1991) argues, "crafting identities is a social process, and becoming more knowledgeably skilled is an aspect of participating in social practice" (p.63). By such reasoning, who you are becoming shapes crucially and fundamentally what you "know."

In addition, Gutierrez (2000) suggests that our schools need to understand the particular sociocultural practices of our student population to fully appreciate **all** students' learning potential and therefore to embrace the construction of inclusive learning environments. Drawing primarily from cross-cultural studies of learning (comparing how people think and solve

problems in different societies), sociocultural practices blur the borders between life in and out of school by fusing learning, intelligence, and culture into a single entity (Oakes & Lipton, 1999).

Representing a paradigm shift in the way we teach, sociocultural learning environments harness the diversity of social and cultural capital that students bring to the learning situation (Williams, 2003). John Dewey described this as a shift from “the complete domination of instruction by rehearsing second-hand information, by memorizing for the sake of producing correct replies at the proper time” (Dewey, 1916, p.338) to an environment where student learning becomes “essentially problem solving . . . and cooperation with others in planning and doing projects” (Oakes & Lipton, 1999, p. 69).

For educational researchers who are interested in understanding the interplay among diverse interests, freedom in interaction, participation and social relationships (Beane & Apple, 1995), sociocultural theory offers a useful interpretive lens. This framework provides the researcher with a way to see how social activity and cultural practices are important sources of thinking and learning (Moll, 1990). That is, by viewing students within a conceptual construct that accounts for all students’ social and cultural resources (Moll, 1990), we are able to see how students construct and transform meanings (learn) as members of particular cultures (Bruner, 1990).

### *Theories of Community*

According to Lavié (2006), theories of community are ubiquitous and polysemous while Kirkpatrick (1986) cautions that community is also an enormously flexible term that is used in a multitude of ambiguous and sometimes contradictory ways. Like Beck (1999), we realize that

community is used in metaphorical ways that need unpacking to fulfill their explanatory purposes. It is our belief that communities of learners are constantly evolving as students share in the power and agency of creating a classroom environment that reflects mutual care, trust responsibility, and belongingness.

Classroom communities, the immediate context for teaching and learning, exist within progressively wider and wider spheres that influence the lives of their participants, the negotiation of their culture, and the nature of their interactions in a variety of ways. Schools, home communities of students and teachers, professional communities of faculty and administrators, and district, state and federal policies are only a few of the interconnected contexts within which classroom communities are shaped. Dewey promotes the idea that schools should be microcosms of the communities they serve as well as miniature communities that belong to all learners (Beane & Apple, 1995; Dewey, 1916). Quality education, Dewey (1938) argued, “is realized in the degree in which individuals form a group” (p. 58) to work through problems in equitable ways (Dewey, 1916). Further, as Dewey envisioned it, teachers and students share membership in this community, and it is through this collaboration that **all** students learn (Osterman, 2000). Gutierrez (2000) argues that the Deweyan ideal for education allows for a rich, diverse and contextualized learning environment for **all** learners – an environment where students share power, co-construct curriculum, and practice skills of civic responsibility in a pluralistic society. Further, as stated by Dewey (1916), the influence of this social context of belongingness for students is so subtle and pervasive that it affects every fiber of character and mind.

Care theory has made significant contributions to our understanding of how teachers and students build equitable and socially active learning environments. Sergiovanni characterized

community as a social network based on “shared values, commitments, and ideals” within a context of “sustained relationships” (Sergiovanni, 1993, p. 17-18). Bellah (as cited in Noddings, 1996, p. 247), a communitarian, emphasized the interdependent nature of those who participate in a community. Participants engage in discussions, decision-making, and other practices that define the community and are strengthened by it. In such communities, a sense of belonging is constituted and members feel responsible to one another as well as to the group. Buber emphasized the dialogical nature of community and believed that community building needs to start in relatedness (as cited in Noddings, 1996, p. 261). Noddings claims that the primary trait of a community is responsibility – responsibility to and deep caring for the other. Caring as a quality of community requires that students and teachers share agency as well as vulnerability (Noddings, 1996). She argues that we need to be aware of the undesirable aspects of community while still trying to establish some of the desirable features: “a sense of belonging, of collective concern for each individual, of individual responsibility for the collective good, and of appreciation for the rituals and celebrations of the group” (p. 266-267).

All of this is not to undermine the importance of diversity in community building. Dewey stresses that classrooms are a part of life, not merely preparation for it, and to make society more democratic, all students must participate in classrooms that are, themselves, societies that embrace diversity and difference among all participants (Dewey, 1916). Mutual respect and empathy should characterize relationships between students and these should extend to the whole person, not just to their academic selves. Santora (2003) argues that to prepare students to participate in larger communities of diversity, teachers need to harness difference as a way to promote a climate of mutual caring, a sense of social justice, and a belief in the power of unity.

The complexity of this is heightened by the unequal distribution of power that privileges some groups over others. Kohli (1991) writes that “if we are to create classrooms that are democratic, non-coercive spaces welcoming multicultural diversity – differences – we must . . . be willing to endure conflict and anger, tears and pain, unpredictable directions” (p. 45). Thus students have to understand conflict and issues of power in order to enter into a shared sense of unity. To use one of the subgroups in a class as the center of curriculum and pedagogy is to risk selective participation in the community. Instead each child shares in the power of a dynamic, ever-changing community of learners. Thus learning communities need to foster emotional and physical safety, mutual trust and responsibility, the ability to engage in controversial issues, and personal and collective agency.

#### *Critical Theory as It Relates to Inclusive Education*

While sociocultural and learning community practices are concerned with connecting to and building on student diversity to form learning environments where all students are engaged and participate, critical perspectives expand that lens to include critiques of existing practices. Specifically, a critical view involves looking at current educational practices insofar as they have created for students their own orders of power, status, and expectations for competence (Cohen & Lotan, 1997). Critical inquiry explores power and status differences within classrooms as major sources of inequities among students (p. 7). It explores how the dominant culture has silenced the voices of cultural and socioeconomic outsiders, particularly people of color, the poor, women, and those of different abilities (Beane & Apple, 1995). We have chosen to focus on two aspects of critical theory: a “pedagogy of hope” and “inclusive education.” These can help us understand ideal relationships among teachers and classified and unclassified students

within what this district calls a “heterogeneously grouped class” with its cluster of students with IEPs that call for placement in a team-taught class.

Anne Barry at Jungman Elementary School refers to her students as students of-promise instead of students at-risk (cited in Oyler, 1996). Barry reflects how a change in discourses can impact the ways in which students are positioned and provide a living, breathing example of how Freire’s (1992/2004) *pedagogy of hope* might be applied, particularly in a blended class in a restructured high school. Hope, for Freire, was not a choice but an “existential concrete imperative” (p. 2). He believed that one of the primary tasks of freedom was to affirm our solidarity with humanity and our humanity in solidarity (McLaren, 1989). He urged teachers to embrace a dynamic transformation of the structures, relationships, and practices within schools and society that produce marginalization and suffering. In his utopia of hope, educators and students have faith in each other, learn through each other, have a deep personal commitment to each other, are willing to enter into relationships of solidarity or unity with each other, and possess a deep collective commitment to social justice and socioeconomic democracy (Darder, 2002). Giroux (1997) reminds us that critical pedagogy needs to focus on themes of democracy and democracy in learning (Fletcher, Caron, & Williams cited in Giroux, p. 108) so that students learn about power and how it works as well as analyze practices of racism, sexism, and class exploitation that “structure and mediate the encounters of everyday life” (p.108) In addition, he challenges educators to actively involve students in democratic processes that they might connect with the possibility for a more equitable and just world (Giroux, 2007).

With concern for the marginalization of students with different learning abilities, Sapon-Shevin (1999) identifies a democratic learning environment as learning to be a citizen within a system that requires learning to be part of a community, taking responsibility for one’s own

behavior as well as being responsible to others, and learning to communicate, problem-solve, and negotiate across conflicting differences (p. 31). She defines inclusion as meaning that “we **all** belong; it means not having to fight for a chance to be part of a classroom or school community” (p.4). Oyler (2006) states that “to teach children with disabilities alongside their typical peers requires teachers to acknowledge the learner’s differences, and do so in a way that preserves the dignity and worth of each classroom member” (p. 1). Inclusion assumes that learning together is a better way that benefits everyone, not just children who are labeled as having a difference (Villa & Thousand,1995). Giangreco and Baumgart (1995) state that inclusive education is an “access, equity, and quality issue; it is not a disability issue” (p. 273) .

This study is deeply grounded in our commitment to a broad version of inclusion that does not ask teachers to be blind to difference but rather to take up children’s racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic and academic identities as an important part of the curriculum. It calls upon teachers to not only embrace students with cognitive differences but also to embrace students’ different cultural perspectives, knowledge, and learning styles (Irvine, 2003; Oyler, 2006). In doing so, teachers recognize that learning and teaching are cultural practices that influence how people live their lives, and social, civic and academic responsibility are important curriculum performance expectations. According to Darling-Hammond (1997), this vision of schooling provides opportunities for “mending the torn fabric” (p. 89) of civic responsibility that exists in society as well as in schools.

### **Literature Review**

Our review of the literature on schools-within-schools (SWS) reveals that little of it directly addresses the qualitative questions of concern to this research. Ready, Lee, and Wellner

(2004) tell us that neither a broad nor a sound research base supports the money that flows into restructuring large schools. “The reform seems to be somewhat in front of the research” (p. 1995). They add that there is also little agreement or understanding about the mechanisms through which size or structure might shape student and teacher outcomes. In spite of this, however, it seems appropriate to summarize the existing research in order to situate this study within it.

### *Background*

The optimal size for high schools has been debated for years. At the risk of oversimplifying these arguments, the choices that school districts make shape the outcomes they can expect. For example, on the one hand, larger schools tend to offer more curriculum choices and opportunities for student specialization, yet students feel they are part of a depersonalized system. In smaller schools, education tends to be more personalized, and students feel more connected to the school and more engaged in learning but perhaps at the sacrifice of an array of educational opportunities. Lee and Smith (1997) suggest that the “ideal size” high school would have a student enrollment of from 600 to 900 students. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (1996) recommends a limit of 600 students.

To avoid the depersonalization of mega-schooling districts have invented many ways to maintain large school facilities while structuring curriculum and student placement/choice for small school benefits. Most designs involve granting some autonomy to houses or academies within the larger school. Currently, many large districts are establishing smaller schools within a large facility – schools-within-a-school (SWS).

When students in SWS models or physically smaller schools are compared with students who attend large unstructured high schools, theorists, researchers, and administrators have noted the benefits of smaller size in the areas of student academic achievement (Burke, 1987; Boloz & Blessing, 1994; Eichenstein, 1994; Levine & Sherk, 1990; Robinson-Lewis, 1991; Way, 1985; Cotton, 1996), student belonging (Cotton, 1996; Osterman, 2000; Noddings, 2003), and student engagement (Conley, 1999; Cotton, 1996; Dewees, 1999; Oxley, 1994). In addition, a strong connection exists between small schools and lower incidences of negative social behavior, such as student truancy, classroom disruption, and aggressive behavior (Burke, 1987; Fouts, 1994; Goldberg, 1982 cited in Leh, 2006; Way, 1985; Welch & McKenna, 1988). The research further suggests that students who move from large to small schools show an improvement in attendance (Cotton, 1996; Fowler & Walberg, 1991 as cited in Leh, 2006; Smith & DeYoung, 1988). Finally, smaller school models show higher student graduation rates when compared to larger schools (Cotton, 1996; Jewell, 1989; Toenjas, 1989). For the purposes of this study we focus our review on academic outcomes, student connectedness, and civic responsibility.

### *Academic Outcomes*

In her well known case study of graduates of Central Park East Secondary School (CPES) in East Harlem, a school of approximately 450 largely Latino and African American students, Meier (1995) found that graduates achieved higher rates of school success in comparison to students in larger public schools with comparable socioeconomic contexts. Fewer than 5 percent of the students who began in CPES dropped out of school. Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) and hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), Lee and Smith

(1994) showed that students in secondary schools restructured into smaller learning communities had higher academic achievement and engagement than those in unrestructured large high schools. Three years after Wyandotte High School, Kansas City, Kansas, restructured itself into career academies, researchers found a strong positive correlation between academy participation and improvement in student outcomes, such as attendance, academic achievement, and graduation rates, especially for at-risk and marginalized students (Nathan, 2002).

In addition the performance gaps between students from different cultural and racial backgrounds were smaller in the restructured schools. As with Lee and Smith's study (1994), Raywid (1995), in her review of evaluation studies, found that while socioeconomic background was a major determinant of students' academic success, the next most important determinant was the size of the school learning environment, particularly for African-American students (Summers & Wolfe, 1975 cited in Raywid, 1995). Others also reported a positive effect on student promotion, drop-out rates, course-passing rates, and attendance (Bradley, 1994 cited in Raywid, 1995; Gladden, 1998).

Using organizational theory and multiple regression analysis, Hon and Shorr (1997) found that restructuring Hollywood High School in Los Angeles, where ethnically diverse students made up 98 percent of the student population, resulted in an improvement in student dropout rates, attendance and overall achievement. Moreover 83 percent of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade students graduated as compared to an average of 58 percent graduating three years prior to restructuring. Some received scholarships to two and four-year colleges and universities.

*Social/Interpersonal Outcomes*

Darling-Hammond (1999) has argued that one of the major strengths of small schools is that they can personalize education by supporting the development of meaningful, sustained relationships among teachers and students. In addition, Resnick and her colleagues (1997) have suggested that participation in smaller learning communities strengthens students' self-esteem and fosters a greater sense of connectedness to the school. Both qualitative and quantitative studies confirm that small schools have a greater capacity to foster personalized strategies that support relationships enhancing students' "sense of belonging" and reduced sense of alienation (Cotton, 1996). Closely related to this is the higher quality of interpersonal relations found in small schools (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Rutter, 1988). Rutter reported increases in social bonding, self-esteem, and academic self-concept when students participate in smaller learning environments. Wasley (2000), in his study of small schools, found that it was easier to maintain a sense of community when students attend small schools. At Wyandotte, formerly a troubled, underperforming high school, researchers found a strong positive correlation between academy participation and the personalization of education (Nathan, 2002).

In a qualitative study examining school climate as perceived by two math, science and technology teachers in a small, ethnically diverse school district, Scott (2005) identified a conceptual framework that was democratic and capable of creating a genuine community within the learning environment. In Scott's view this was facilitated by the teachers' ability to foster interdependence and build a learning community where people worked together and had a common mission and vision. This practical democracy provided students with time to build relationships and develop a greater sense of belonging. One of the themes that emerged from this study was that all students had more "voice" and greater "access to activities and

opportunities that used to be the sole possession of the honors and the more privileged students,” and they used this to exercise greater accountability for learning (p. 9).

As much as we would like to believe that small schools offer only good outcomes, we are cautioned by a comparative qualitative study of rural, urban, and suburban large and small schools in a midwest state. Lee et al. (2000) found that although without exception small schools were seen as more personal, this was not always a benefit. Students reported that reputations followed them through the grades and negative behaviors were held against them in ensuing years. Students also reported that their older brothers’ and sisters’ reputations carried over and created expectations for their own behavior. The problem was compounded by the fact that students could not change teachers when conflicts were perceived. While this problem may be diluted in a SWS setting, it is worth noting.

Classroom climate is not only affected by school size, but it is also the product of interacting factors such as community beliefs, school organization, teacher beliefs and strategies, class composition, and the way in which student work is structured. Little in the existing research literature ferrets out the relationship among these factors.

### *Democratic Attitudes*

Torney-Purta and her colleagues argue that a democratic environment in schools and classrooms contributes to the development of children’s attitudes of responsibility and participation and promotes the internalization of democratic values among children. As was found in their study of 14-year olds in twenty-eight countries, educational practices play an important role in preparing students for school and community citizenship (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald & Schulz, 2001).

Meir (1995) described graduates of CPES as successful well-rounded participants in society. She attributed their success to the school's developing and maintaining environments that explicitly embraced students' cultures, abilities, and interpersonal relationships. She further characterized democracy in education as students having a voice not only in their own individual work, but in the work of others.

Wasley (2000) and Klonsky (1995) found that it was easier to facilitate a strong democratic sense within a small school. Meanwhile Raywid (1995), who incorporated civic education as a framework in her study of small schools, argued that a smaller educational learning environment made possible a communal organization in lieu of the formality and rigidities of a bureaucratic organization. Embedding a sense of community "increased student investment and led to an emergence of civic thinking and civic commitment that moved beyond the learning community and beyond the walls of the school" (Greenleaf, 1995, p. 46 as cited in Raywid, 1995, p. 25). Trybus and Ranfen (1998) claimed that "schools need to restructure to meet the challenges of the new century and the ever increasing needs of our teenagers who will be thrust into a rapidly changing society" (p. 3) by preparing students to be useful and responsible citizens.

According to Allodi ((2002) the treatment of children who receive special support services in the classroom could be an important indicator of human and societal values as they affect classroom climate. Studies of classrooms that included children with disabilities indicate that inclusion does not harm the academic development of non-disabled students and has the added benefit of providing opportunities for exercising social and civic responsibility on the part of both teachers and students (Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman , 1993; Giangreco & Baumgart, 1995). These potential benefits, however, require that teachers are pro-

active in promoting these values. Such findings are of particular importance to this study since we are concerned about the full inclusion of all students, including those who are classified for special education services.

Quantitative research with a structural focus demonstrates positive learning outcomes and interpersonal relations in smaller school models (e.g., Hon & Shorr, 1997; Lee & Smith, 1994; Oxley, 1994; Trybus & Renfen, 1998); however, few studies have qualitatively examined curriculum and instruction as these relate to citizenship, responsibility and inclusive practices inside SWS career academy classrooms. Such a study is especially appropriate at this time because many schools have received large grants to create smaller learning communities and large, depersonalized schools apparently have a deleterious effect on student learning, sense of belonging, and sense of self. In particular, this study was needed to better understand, in practice, the experiences and relationships of teachers and students who are involved in inclusive restructured learning environments.

### **Methods**

During our review of the existing literature related to SWS, we found virtually no evidence of classroom studies that examined instructional practices related to inclusion inside SWS career academies. Such research is difficult to do and even more difficult to connect to school policy. Lindfors (1999) who claims that research in classrooms is extraordinarily difficult because of the limitless and exceedingly complex characteristics that comprise these environments, offers two views of classroom environments: the surround view and the weaving view. In the surround view, classrooms are settings in which events and interactions occur. The weaving view considers classroom environments as something created by participants in the

class, i.e. threads that they weave together as interactions develop. Guided by Raider Roth's (2005a, 2005b) beliefs that researchers should focus their attention on the relational aspects in classroom research, we espouse Lindfors's weaving view.

### *Theoretical and Methodological Framework*

While we have situated our data analysis within an epistemological framework of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), for data collection we rely on case study methods (Merriam, 1988) and participant observation (Spradley, 1980). Using a case study approach helped us to see classroom interaction holistically and in relationship to school and district policy while symbolic interactionism moved us to focus on the details of those interactions. Thus we have also placed great importance on the common symbols and understandings that arise out of and give meaning to classroom event. At times, we used discourse analysis (Gee, 1999) to untangle the meaning behind highly significant conversations within the classroom as well as with students, teachers and between ourselves.

We wanted to uncover what students were experiencing, how they interpreted their experiences, and how they used those experiences to structure their social and academic worlds (Psathas, 1973). To do that, Hoeft participated in classes alongside the participants recognizing the tacit rules of behavior and unraveling the culture of the classroom hidden from the subjects themselves, (Hall, 1959).

### *Participants and Participant Observers*

Hoeft was in a unique position in that she was a district level special education administrator within the district in which we conducted this study; Santora brought the perspective of the content area classroom teacher as well as university professor and classroom

researcher to the study. Thus, from its initiation, we brought different skills, networks, and perspectives to our inquiry. In addition to the choice of the lowest performing school in the district, we also wanted to situate this study in an English Language Arts class that included a number of classified students with IEPs. We preferred the English Language Arts content area because a plethora of research identified reading and writing as foundational to all student learning. Since Hoeft was particularly interested in special education students included in regular classroom settings, we sought a team of teachers who had had success in teaching in inclusive settings. Because of her broad knowledge of teachers in the district and as a result of her SWS taskforce membership, Hoeft identified a team of teachers, one special education teacher certified in English and an English teacher, who were among the “best” and the most sought-out teachers in the school as well as the district. The class was unique because it was designed to address the IEPs of students who needed the support of both a content area teacher and a special education teacher. Because of this, the class included a cluster of 8 students with IEPs along with 13 students who were otherwise heterogeneously grouped (See Table 2 in Appendix a). Our conversations throughout the study were dialogues between theory and practice, administrator and researcher, and insider and outsider.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Over a five-month period, Hoeft<sup>vi</sup> collected and triangulated data from the following sources: expanded fieldnotes intended to capture the essence of classroom interaction; three in-depth, audiotaped interviews of each of the two teachers; in-depth interviews of all 21 students; a focus group interview that included five students, an open-ended student questionnaire seeking

students' perceptions of their roles and experiences in the academy; student writing and other teacher and student created documents; and district and school publications.

Using data analysis software, we subjected unitized data to the constant comparative method, connecting major themes and concepts through open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Through this iterative process, the following webs of significance (Geertz, 1973) emerged as pertinent to this paper: student engagement in learning; students engagement with each other; development of caring relationships; deepening sense of student belonging; emergence of student voices; emergence of a pluralistic democratic community of learners, and co-construction of a rigorous curriculum grounded in students' ability to think critically about and discuss controversial issues. From these we extrapolated themes of academic, social, and civic responsibility. Based on these analyses, we built assertions that related to the ways in which teachers and students negotiated understandings of what it meant to actively participate in an inclusive democratic learning community within the principles and structures of a SWS career academy.

### **Academic, Social and Civic Responsibility within a Flawed SWS Structure**

As we moved through this study, we were struck with the sense of responsibility students exercised when it came to their interactions with classmates and their teachers, their academic work, and their ability to develop the civic skills and attitudes needed for citizenship in a pluralistic society. The teachers and the students were consistent in attributing some of this to SWS structures of block scheduling, looping, and the IEP mandate for collaborative teaching. The students, on the other hand, were quick to mention that much of their responsible behavior was because they truly liked these teachers, not only as teachers but also as friends and "family,"

and the teachers made the class interesting and fun. In spite of this, two structural flaws challenged both the teachers and the students. A tracking structure that grouped classified students together into one career academy created obstacles to the equitable inclusion of all students in career academies of their choice, and the school's failure to provide a common planning and professional development time for the teachers limited their ability to plan thoroughly for activities that involved students in the social re/construction of knowledge through sociocultural, collaborative project-based strategies. We were impressed to see how well team teachers, whose beliefs that each and every student was special and that students needed to play an active, collaborative role in learning, used SWS structures to build a classroom community in which students consistently demonstrated their ability to be academically, socially, and civilly responsible citizens.

### *Academic Responsibility*

Academic responsibility took on varied meanings throughout the course of this study. It meant attending class, participating in individual and group academic work, performing well on academic tasks, and achieving on high stakes tests. All of the students were on "track" to graduate with either a local or Regents diploma at the end of the year. In fact, all of the English-Language Arts students who had also been with Beech and Moore during their junior year had passed the New York State Regents examination, a feat that neither the teachers nor we anticipated or, perhaps, even believed possible. Because of their success with this group of students, Beech and Moore had been granted special permission to team-teach for the second year in the same SWSCA and with the same students.<sup>vii</sup> Otherwise, looping from 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade was an exception to established practices.

Attendance is often a major issue with seniors who have not connected with learning in traditional environments. This might have been exacerbated since this class met at the end of the day, every other day, for 80 minutes. However all of the students in this career academy were present in this class 88 percent of the time during the 20-week semester that constituted the fieldwork for this study. An African American male student who often skipped school but came at the end of the day just for this class commented, “I feel they know me.... They talk to me on a personal level. They know I like Rap, so they offer opportunities for me to show my abilities through music. I like this class. I typically look forward to this class. It is not really uh-h-h English. It’s a fun way to end the day” (SI #14, 43-46).

Beech put forth a personal effort to encourage each student to attend school as exemplified by the following incident recalled by one of the students. “You know the reason I come to this class and not any others is because you told me if I did not come you’d make me live with you, and I would have to do dishes every night and morning, and I would have to make my bed. So I decided I better come to this class every day” (FN, 9/15/06).

Students also encouraged their peers’ attendance. “Dave you better come to class on Wednesday, we have the project due for Beech, and we need you to do the Rap project (FN, 10/26/06). Beech and Moore also thought that looping affected their high student attendance rate because it helped to strengthen student-teacher relationships; it provided teachers with additional time to connect and form personal relationships with students (FN, 1/26/07).

One of the principal reasons students cited for their sense of academic responsibility was that class was truly fun. “It Rocks!” We are able to explore our learning by doing more than taking notes” (SI #2, 10). For Theresa, the ELA class was a “fun way to end the day ... I look forward to going to class.... It doesn’t seem like English how I have always been taught; we are

always involved and doing things” (SI #1, 6-8). This was “the best of all their classes” (SI #7, 24). But, the expectation went well beyond having fun. Beech, the ELA teacher, had a reputation for finding the “key” for all students. Her pedagogy was effective and her peers respected her for that. According to her co-teacher, Moore,

[Beech] not only knows the material and the curriculum very well, she knows the students. I know she is the type of person that will take these students “home” with her. She has heart for these students.... [She] does not “leave” them, she never leaves the students. That is why they want to come back. That is why they never want to miss her class. She makes learning fun and they succeed (TI #2, 66-71).

According to Beech, she wanted students “not just to do well in our class, but to do well in life” (TI #1, 78).

Team teaching, an accommodation for students whose IEPs, called for team taught classes, was a major factor in motivating all students to learn, not just those with IEPs. Beech summarized one of its benefits nicely when she said:

There is so much you can do when you team-teach that you can't do when you are the only teacher in the room . Yesterday, we ... split the class ....[W]e kept half in the room...Students who needed to hear the next chapter in the book stayed .... The other half of the students...[went] over to another classroom, and we talked about theme and other literacy aspects of the book. By dividing them, you can stop and talk to them and give the kids assistance that are struggling with reading. It's a nice way to differentiate instruction...In the end, they all knew about themes now because when the kids came back they taught them [other students] about theme. (TI #2, 45-57).

Vincent, explained it differently: “Having two teachers gives you more attention, like for the book we are reading, *Kite Runner*, or on any topic. If I do not understand it, they help me understand it...Instead of having one teacher, we have two. Yes, it is because of them teaching together I do so well” (SI#22, 35-50).

SWS monies were used to support professional development that promoted progressive, sociocultural teaching strategies that included the use of collaborative groups, social construction

of knowledge, inquiry learning, and project-based activities. One of the objectives of the SWS professional development initiative was to personalize learning and make it more relevant to students' lives and interests. Beech and Moore did not need to be coached in doing this. It came quite naturally. "We constantly try to weave their lives and the world around them into the work we do in class. We continuously ask ourselves 'How can we make this relevant to each student and how can we convey the caring into each lesson?'" (TI#3 10-15). Moore said:

Because our students have so much going on in their lives we are always trying to relate the curriculum to the world, society, and what is going on around them... For example, when we talked about *The Kite Runner* and the culture of Afghanistan, Beech and I tried to have them find meaning of the text through the various themes, such as strength of character, discrimination, and class structure and how it relates to their lives and society. (TI #2, 167-199)

To break the ice each day, the teachers began with the word-of-the-day. For October 16, 2006, it was Rashid's word-of-the-day; the word was *banal*. The sentence that they used to illustrate the word's meaning was "The love Erica has for Corey is anything but banal: It is a fiery inferno waiting to be tapped. [Both Erica and Corey are students in the class].

A variety of learning strategies excited students. "Every day is different" (SI #16, 48-49).

Another student spoke to the way he experienced this variety:

I'd say right now ELA is one of my favorite classes. The reason I say that...is...as soon as you step in the class, It's like a mystery; you don't know what you are going to do. They do things differently so you remember and learn. They always have something up their sleeve, so we remember....They really help us to graduate. (SI #6, 45-51)

Tom, a student with a Section 504 plan,<sup>viii</sup> talks about how lessons were designed to address his strengths.

I have major strengths in English class, especially speaking. So they always have a presentation as part of the projects. For example, when we had the whole class participate in a Socratic seminar on the readings from *Beowulf*. I was able to tell them what I know instead of just writing a paper about the theme of goodness over evil and the minor theme of loyalty and how it relates to real-life situations. (SI #6, 34-40)

Beech and Moore’s use of multiple instructional strategies supported student learning and gave students different entry points from which to learn. Moore reflected on this when she discussed their multi-genre research project:

[The students] were able to choose from a variety of genres such as art, media, expository writing, drama, poetry, and a narrative. The students busily connected to this project and although this was an individual project, there was much discussion throughout the decision-making process of identifying their song writer, themes of the writer, how their backgrounds were similar...and what type of text they will create to display their findings. (TI #2, 31-40)

It’s clear that this is a class in which collaboration works in favor of both curriculum development and students’ academic achievement. The classroom was arranged for groupwork and the students took advantage (in a good sense) of this arrangement as evidenced by one student’s comments, “I like sitting at tables with someone else because if I do not understand something, I can ask who I am sitting next to and they can help me” (SI #5, 22-24). One of the neatest ways in which these teachers engaged students in collaborative knowledge construction was assigning them to write a “Two Voice Poem” using two characters from *The Kite Runner*, a coming of age story that takes place during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Afghanistan and later in the United States. In the “two-voice poem” each student assumed the role of one of the characters in the book, and they wrote lines in dialogue with each other. The “two-voice poem” excerpted here is entitled the “*Kite Runner Rap*.”

Baba

Runnin runnin runnin outa Kabul

The **Russian** Soldia wants to have sex with that girl

Suck it up son, we’re almost there

Amir

I’m about to puke, I feel like a fool

Uh-oh, not again, I’m about to hurl

We’re stayin in a basement? That doesn’t seem fair

...		...
Sittin in this tank is like bein in a gas chamba		Cravin for some air like a pimp craves flava
Kamal peaced out cuz he couldn't breathe		His father shot himself becuz he's CRAY- Z
...		

(SW, 5/13/06)

Beech and Moore believed that having an 80-minute block of time allowed for “mini” collaborative projects such as the “two-voice poem” to succeed with the students. “Block scheduling is great for implementing rigorous project-based learning activities” (TI #2, 61-63).

According to one of the students, “The easiest metaphor that I would compare groupwork in Beech’s and Moore’s class would be like a well oiled machine. We work in groups a lot. It’s always been real easy going. Everyone contributes; nobody is off by themselves and not willing to contribute. Everybody’s pretty enthusiastic about it” (SI #9, 45-51). Groupwork went beyond the kind of self-teaching that often characterizes unstructured groupwork; it was highly structured through activity guides that provided substantial scaffolding, and it was accompanied by active teacher coaching and assistance (FN, 12/18/06). In addition, groups were given open-ended tasks that required different kinds of skills and abilities and relied on roles that drew upon students’ different perspectives, abilities, and attitudes (FN, 11.20/06).

Beech said, however, “I think it is interesting that ‘we need to do groupwork’ just because it is one of the features of the school-within-school, career academy initiative. I have used groupwork as a practice prior to the implementation of the school-within-school career academy” (TI #1, 56-60). The practices these teachers used were not being used just because they were part of the SWS professional development initiative; they were, instead, the product of

beliefs about how students best learn. The fact was, however, that they were encouraged to augment their use of these strategies because block scheduling provided them with longer class periods in which to complete groupwork activities.

In spite of all of the advantages of an 80-minute class, block scheduling was not a not “bed of roses.” The students did not meet every day, and the lack of continuity created some “completing homework” issues (FN, 11/14/06). Moore suggested:

Many of the students struggle with organizational skills. When we meet with the students every other day I find we need to call home with reminders or keep them after school to ensure their homework is complete for the next class time. It seems that for the special education students, who many of them respond to continuity, that meeting every other day has become a disadvantage for completing homework. (TI #2, 72-81)

Beech also noted that Moore and she did not feel supported by the school and the district in their team teaching efforts due to the way in which the school structured teachers’ planning time and professional development.

Although we have one period [of planning time] separate from each other . . . both Beech and I need additional planning time TOGETHER, so we find time during our lunch after and before school. We really could benefit from more team planning due to all of the school-within-school career academy curriculum requirements, specifically project-based learning experiences. Sometimes it gets crazy when you team-teach without enough co-planning time. (TI #1, 15.20)

This particular ELA Career Academy class benefited academically from team teaching, looping, block scheduling, and progressive strategies promoted by the SWS initiative. However, it seems most important that such benefits were greatly enhanced by these teachers’ beliefs that all students can learn, that it is a matter of providing different ways in which they can construct knowledge and demonstrate learning, and that education must be personalized to provide different entry points for individual students. Because of the SWS structures and policies and the infrastructure provided by the teachers’ ability to create a community of learners, students

learned to exercise an enormous amount of academic responsibility as evidenced by their performance in statewide examinations, the fact that all of them graduated at the end of the year, and their ability to meet the rigorous expectations of day-to-day life in this ELA class.

### *Social Responsibility*

For the students and teachers in this class, acting socially responsible meant demonstrating care, trust, and respect for others regardless of their race, class, gender, or ability. It also meant working with others in dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981; Holquist, 1990/2002; Wertsch, 1991) and communal (see Noddings, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1993) ways. Students' positive perceptions of their interactions with their teachers and peers provided a foundation for their developing sense of responsibility for each other and their shared sense of responsibility for the classroom community. These teachers and students were keen observers of classroom relationships, and in classrooms set up for student interaction in the re/construction of knowledge, classroom relationships can impact students' perceptions of the knowledge they exchange in interaction with peers (see Santora, 2005).

Care was a major factor underlying students' sense of social responsibility. Before students can demonstrate a sense of social responsibility, they must have adult models of care, trust, and respect in their lives. In this context, teachers were students' role models. An African American male shared the following thoughts on how caring had affected him while attending this class:

[I]f someone is seeking help because they are having a friendship or a relationship problem they care enough to help and listen. I feel that many students could talk to them if they have a personal issue going on that has nothing to do with school. Beech and Moore make no judgments. Many times personal things interfere with us learning and succeeding in school. Having someone like Beech and Moore to help me sort through

things, allows me to concentrate on school and want to come to school. I feel that they believe in me (SI #16, 47-58).

Moore expressed her thoughts about how she helped students develop a disposition of caring and responsibility:

Yes, we want them to be able to pass the Regents and to write well, understand literacy elements and techniques, and cover all the content of the English Curriculum but we are trying to teach character education such as developing a deep regard for themselves and others.... [L]earning is not just about that [academics], we want them to leave as a caring adult which means someone like Ben doesn't leave these four walls and go to some jail. Because it is amazing how he acts with us (TI #2, 175-199).

Beech expressed a belief that the caring principle, a prescribed feature of the SWS approach, needed to extend beyond the classroom to developing a trusting relationship with the students, one that encouraged them to exercise social responsibility:

Caring does not stop in the classroom; it goes beyond sometimes the school day. I call home, write letters to the parents, make visits at home, and attend the student's extracurricular activities. When I do all – some -- of these things, it shows the students I care about them, and the students develop this connection with me. When they come to the class, we continue the connection. The students will continue to work for us, knowing that we truly care and have their best interests as a priority (TI #1, 34-56).

An African American student shared her feelings about the teachers' "care" outside of the classroom, linking it to the SWS looping initiative. "[Moore] is so easy to talk to, she understands and cares, she connected with me out of class and called home to talk to my parents and me. ....and I am going to graduate, I want to ask Moore to my graduation. I have been in Moore's class for two years in this career academy; I am going to miss her" (SI #12, 56-62).

A student with an IEP stated, "It is a good environment. People respect you and they care. It is like our own family, the students love the teachers. It makes it a good environment to learn" (SI #8, 43-47).

Building a learning community in this class, practically speaking, meant seeing the class as a family. Members had to exercise responsibility for each other as they would in a family. Students linked the metaphor of family to the types of relationships they developed with the teachers.

Having Beech and Moore teaching together is more like a family. If anyone gets hurt or whatever, they care, I consider that a family....Basically they really help us seniors.; they are helping us pass English 12. So for them to be in this class teaching together, it's good for all for us. I know one of them could not possibly give us the attention if they were by themselves.... They tell us the same things parents tell you" (SI #11, 65-71).

In their interview, other students used phrases like "we are family" (SI #1, 54); "it's more like a family than a class" (SI #5, 35).

Moore expressed her thoughts regarding the connection between caring for each individual student and the development of a "family" environment.

I think we do our homework (to create a sense of belonging). We learn what the kid in front of us is like, what his strengths are, what his weaknesses are. Outside of school what does he or she like? What does he or she care about? I think we do the homework that it takes to get to know the students. They are not just a number. They are not just another student. They are all number ones. I put just as much stock in Justin as I do Kyle, Lucy, Patrick. We really try to create a family learning environment where everyone feels like they belong and they want to come to class. We try and live the motto of the television show *Cheers*, 'come on in, everybody wants to know your name.' That sounds so corny but that is our philosophy.... We have found that the students want to attend, learn and are motivated when they feel a sense of connectedness, belongingness, with their learning environment (TI #1, 81-97).

During an informal conversation after a class, Beech and Moore commented that the features of team teaching and looping within the structure of this SWSCA have allowed for more personalized relationships between the students and teachers. Moore commented, "It is almost like we use parenting skills each day with this class" (INT #2, 117-125). They both felt that the SWSCA structure allowed for creating a family-like situation, and they believed that this "family" had helped with the students wanting to attend class, participate and show respect for

each other (FN, 3/6/07). One of the things that we immediately noted in the fieldnotes of each day's class was that students in the class addressed each other by name, a practice that seemed unique, based on our experience observing and researching in secondary classes and one that appeared to contribute to student's heightened sense of social responsibility.

Social responsibility was also fostered through curriculum content made relevant to students' lives. The class's treatment of *The Canterbury Tales* and *Beowulf* both provide excellent examples of this. In one lesson on December 19, Beech created a "mini" project on relationships. For this "mini" project, Beech asked each group of students to design a poster by drawing and writing text depicting a major theme epitomized by the pilgrims in the *Canterbury Tales*. The 'mini' project was to include the following components: 1) Describe the main character and major theme related to one of the tales that you read, 2) How does Chaucer use satire or sincerity when describing the pilgrim's relationships? and 3) Find one quote that captures a pilgrim's human qualities related to attitude, character, and behavior and explain it (FN, 12/20/06). This project encouraged dialogue between the student groups as they connected their personal thoughts and experiences to each pilgrim characterization. They learned about social responsibility as they formed their own ideas about honor, truth, and chivalry. This "mini" project was an example of how relevant content and block scheduling coupled with an emphasis on classroom community encouraged students to give voice to their own experiences.

During their study of *The Color Purple*, student groups researched the concept of empathy, understanding "the other." Beech and Moore had the students study within that text how literature explores the mindset of "the other" and the importance of empathy with specific emphasis on how we develop empathy through our relationships with others (FN, 10/30/06). One group of students gave a soulful rendition of a poem they had written to show how people can

“hurt” inside and how we need to recognize that feeling and help them. They captured empathy in the text and compared it to some of their own personal experiences. It was emotional and well received by the other students in the class (CO, 11/14/06).

Groupwork, a strategy strongly encouraged by SWS principles, offered a context through which students exercised social responsibility. In this study students worked together in pair learning, peer tutoring and small group collaborations. These activities were scaffolded with activity guides, and teachers provided coaching and assistance. While groupwork was already discussed in the section on academic responsibility, there is more to be said about how the students interacted with each other and how this was different than in their other classes we have visited. In groups, students were responsible for structuring their work, controlling their participation so everyone participated, fulfilling teacher-assigned roles, and being accountable to each other. Beech and Moore added that they had worked to refine the groupwork process over the past three year (TI #2, 45-50). In talking to Beech, it was clear that she used groupwork to support the beliefs that students should become engaged and active members of a community (FN, 1/5/07). “Groupwork creates a learning environment that encourages engagement, cooperation, and builds relationships between all groups of learners” (TI #2, 81-85).

An African American male summarized her experiences with groupwork when she said, “Groupwork in this class just runs so perfectly. It is like water. Let’s put it that way. It just runs so well. We all get along. We all know each other. We all share thoughts and opinions. Sometimes being black I feel uncomfortable, [but] not in here. People understand how I think” (SI #9, 71-73).

Ian, a student with an IEP, related groupwork to structural elements of the SWS approach:

I think in other groups it is a little harder to work together because you are working with kids that you see every other day and like in this class, we have been together for two years. So, it is easy, like very easy, to open up and say what you have to do. You have a connection and you want each of your group members to do well because it is our project, it is not just my project. Whereas in other classes, you have to get to know people before you can start working together with them (SI #22, 23-29).

Like all high school students, these students also seemed to be struggling with multiple voices internalized from peers, gangs, media, school, family, and other sources. They were faced with the huge challenge of constructing their own voice amidst this polyvocality (see Bakhtin, 1981). Schools are one place where students can practice sharing their individual voices. One student described how comfortable he felt voicing his feelings in this class.

You know my dad was killed the last time he broke out of prison. And me, I am in a gang, and I have done some pretty nasty stuff, but now with Beech and Moore, you know, they are okay. They have talked to me about my life, and they really think I have a lot to offer. They want me to show my Rap poem to the other English classes (smiling). I feel I can say my feelings to them, and they will still think I am okay. (SI #20, 68-78).

Mark affirmed this when he said, “I feel comfortable expressing my own self, expressing my feelings and everything, the happenings in my past. The class is somewhere I just can speak out and say my thoughts. For example, the book *Color Purple* we read, and I could express myself – I could speak my mind” (SI#14, 61-71).

A student who was going to attend a nearby college and pursue certification as a teacher commented, “I like to participate in this class [more] than my other classes because I feel like I can stay stuff and people won’t think that what I said is stupid or wrong (SQ, 12/13/06). ).

Aligning with the SWS approach of small class size and the structure of looping, a student who had an IEP discussed her thoughts about her emerging voice. “I think I talk more in this class than in others ... because I feel more comfortable and we have been together for two years ” (SI #13, 29-33).

To expand further on the connection between looping and voicing in this SWSCA, another student stated, “I think this is the only class where everybody gets along with everybody and talks with each other. We have known each other for two years. Every other class of mine, there are classes where people do not like each other. You get in a group and they say that [your] idea is stupid, not in here, they like my ideas. Even the teachers like my ideas” (SI #19, 42-45).

Students comfort with each other and with their teachers was formed over the year and a half in which they had been together. Experiencing the growth of one’s unique voice comes with time and practice. Yet it is something without which students cannot develop a true sense of social responsibility. Developing sustained relationships accomplished with looping, team teaching, and block scheduling is essential to this process. Beech said, “You can create a smaller learning community in your classroom if you have a partner and the belief that a student learning from another student is a powerful tool. Giving each student a voice and respecting that voice or opinion is very important when trying to connect with students. I have always tried to build a community of learners where all of the students feel comfortable talking (TI #1, 112-116).

“Part of the philosophy of the Career Academy within a SWS approach is to create a personalized and supportive learning environment for students, and I think the more positive and caring type of information the students see will help create this philosophy” (TI#2, 45-51).

### *Civic Responsibility*

Civic responsibility, while not a term used by the students or the teacher, was evidenced in much of the students’ talk and work. Civic responsibility was exercised as students worked to develop the habits of mind needed to make valuable contributions to the communities in which they lived. In addition to setting goals for their future careers, we also noted their active

participation in the classroom community, their increasing ability to think in critical ways about society and their growing sense of personal agency. In large group discussions of controversial issues, they willingly shared their perspectives in hopes that they would help their group to examine assumptions and collectively construct and re-construct knowledge, understanding, beliefs, and values.

These students were bound together by common career goals directly and indirectly related to the Health and Human Services focus of their cluster. Teachers were expected to use the theme of their clusters and academies in designing lessons. It was clear that these students had talked about what drew them to this academy and how their anticipated careers were tied together by the theme of caring for and helping others. Service to others was a theme that persisted throughout the interviews. “I want to be a massage therapist – go to Onondaga School for Therapeutic Beauty Message” (SI #1, 50-55); “I want to become a court stenographer, that way I can help people to receive correct information” (SI#17, 30-37). Some students however, were scheduled into this academy because of where and when their special education teacher taught or according to when their Advanced Placement was offered and not according to their career choices. “Take for example Jerry, he signed up for the Science and Technology Career Academy and Mark who mentioned, “I happen to be in this class due to my schedule...[M]y goal is to become [sic] ambulance assistance [sic]. So I guess that fits in with the Health and Human Services Cluster” (SI # 2, 34-37). “It does not matter [that] he signed up for [that] career academy, he has to be in our academy because he has an IEP that recommends team-taught” (TI #2, 56-59). Moore referred to theirs as the “mixed academy.”

When you have a blended class (students with IEPs included with other students), it is not really a pure career academy. Because some of the students might have selected different academies but because they need special education services recommended on their IEP,

they are in our class....Most of them are not really in the health cluster. They're just here because they happen to travel with us (TI#1, 78-85).

Yet , Beech and Moore tried to work with the health and human services and career academy themes. They asked students to read Beverly Dipo's "No Rainbow, No Roses," a memoir of a student nurse, write a college admissions essays, engage in mock interviews, and write resumés and cover letters applying for positions of their choice. They also helped each student to understand how his or her career goals related to their common interest in serving others. These are important positive activities that encourage civil responsibility and that may never have taken place had students not been in a high school restructured to include SWS Career Academies.

In addition, the teachers modeled civic responsibility by taking a proactive stance with the administration about the placement of students in academies other than the ones they chose. "I have talked to the principal, and she is going to work on it; however, she mentioned that the systemic structure of the District needs to be revisited if we are to fully implement the SWS Career Academy approach" (TI #2, 63-67). De-facto tracking existed not only in this class, but, as these students traveled together from team taught class to team-taught class, it existed throughout this particular academy. While this practice clearly implicates the school in de-facto tracking, a significant breech in the SWS principles, the teachers have made the best of it by encouraging students to think about the cluster theme as one of helping and caring for others. Most of the students could then justify their placement in what was supposed to be the Education Academy.

These teachers valued the input of their students in class decision making, and as a result, students gained essential practice in taking on civic responsibility. Nowhere is this better seen than in the family meetings they had when a decision needed to be made regarding their learning.

On January 10, 2007, the teachers devoted 45 minutes to a family meeting. They felt it was necessary to discuss their concern that students were not studying and completing homework assignments.

Moore and I have created a community, including all of you, over the past two-three years, that we love. However, despite [that] we love you, we basically have tried to analyze your work ethic, and between last year and this year, we have seen a decrease in effort. We have been together for two years, and some of you I have been with for three years. I feel we have a community and a strong community, a strong small learning community. However, there are specific expectations and requirements for ELA 12 that you must accomplish before you graduate, and we must work together to accomplish these requirements because Moore and I want all of you to graduate in June. Many of the requirements in the SWSCA are project-based and that takes time and planning. We work to plan all of these learning experiences for you, yet we feel you are not giving us “all you have” to accomplish these learning experiences. Moore and I are working harder than you are to have you learn this material and pass, and that is not right. We both need to work as hard! If we were in charge of New York State maybe we wouldn’t have all these requirements; however, we are not, so let’s. together, talk about a plan to make it happen for all of us. If we are going to call us a family or a unit [smaller learning community], we need to support each other. (FN, 1/4/07, 41-91)

They consulted with the students regarding their options emphasizing that they all had to commit to whatever they chose. They emphasized that they would assist them in completing their work regardless of their choices. At the end of 45 minutes, the students created a contract that would support future learning. When teachers foster the growth of democratic communities of learning, and those communities are strengthened by SWS structures of looping and block scheduling, they provide students with substantive opportunities for students to exercise civic responsibility in the interests of their common good.

The students also learned to give voice to controversial issues such as prejudice, conformity, cultural and political imperialism, and cultural assimilation through literature and media. Over the summer students read *The Color Purple*, a novel about the trials of African American women in the early 1900s, and during class they viewed the movie. An important part

of their exploration of this novel was a critical examination of equal rights, gender roles, and the American Dream as themes in both the book and their own lives. One of the tasks the teachers assigned was to write a poem that would be presented to a jury in an effort to claim your innocence playing the role of one of the characters from *The Color Purple*. Many of the students were able to explore deeply issues of abuse and take a personal stand based on empathy with their chosen character. Through this assignment, students learned to think critically about gender and racial issues prevalent in their own lives and the lives of those around them, particularly the issue of sexual and emotional abuse. (Refer to Appendix B for two of the poems written by students in response to this assignment.)

One student commented about his voice and his developing sense of personal agency, “I am black and when we were reading, *The Color Purple*, I felt I was able to basically express myself, I can speak my mind in this class” (SI # 9, 61); Another said, “I’m black and when we were analyzing the reading and meaning from, *The Color Purple*, I felt I was able to basically express myself within my group and no one thought I was different just because of my background (SI, 11/8/06, 51-29). Through their study of *The Color Purple*, students learned to use their own voices to comment on issues that are timeless in our society.

Reading *The Kite Runner*, a coming of age novel about an Afghanistan youth (2003), alongside the poem “The Cold Within” and viewing a documentary about the Taliban and its impact on people’s lives in Afghanistan and Pakistan gave students an opportunity to consider issues that have dominated the news for the past several years and were consistent with the district’s SWS initiative to make learning more relevant to students’ lives. In addition their study of issues related to the Middle East may have an added benefit for those who enter the military in the near future.

For their final project, Beech and Moore asked the students to describe the connections between the political settings of *The Kite Runner*, and a Frontline documentary “*The Forbidden Zone, Return of the Taliban*” (2006) in a poster. According to Beech, an 80-minute block of time afforded students an opportunity to listen to each other’s thoughts as each of them presented their posters. Following this assignment, posters displaying computer generated illustrations and student artwork peppered the walls, the teachers’ desks, and the back shelf of the classroom. In a related activity, students explored the nature of prejudice as seen in both the poem, “The Cold Within,” a poem about racial, religious, and class prejudice, and *The Kite Runner*. Students also examined the idea of freedom in contrast to the oppressive activities of the Taliban. Throughout their treatment of *The Kite Runner*, students were exposed to ideas like national identity, imperialism, cultural conflict, assimilation, oppression, and freedom, and they were given opportunities to voice their ideas. Students expressed themselves in a variety of media tailored to their special abilities, and they participated in forums that challenged them and provided opportunities for them to engage in the civic process of informed summation and deliberation.

Supported by the career academy structure, students learned to exercise civic responsibility by understanding of how they might serve society through their chosen careers, developing of a sense of personal agency, and learning to promote themselves as they applied to college and/or searched for jobs. They participated in community/family meetings and engaged in informal decision-making. Facilitated by the SWS structures of looping and block scheduling, team teaching, and teachers’ commitment to follow the prescribed curriculum while preparing students for life outside the classroom, students gained vital practice in expressing themselves as members of a society that is rife with social and political issues that affect the choices they will make in life. Yet all of this was not without the specter of de facto tracking posed by the nature

of the Career Academy structure and its interaction with IEP accommodations that included team taught classes.

### **Discussion**

Recognizing that the classroom is a complex entity, relationships are dynamic, our themes are both fluid and porous, and there is no easy or static way of describing this complexity we hoped to determine how the SWS approach<sup>ix</sup> impacts students' learning and capacity to engage with each other and their teachers in ways that foster the development of attitudes and skills needed to be citizens in a pluralistic world. We were particularly interested in discovering the degree to which SWS practices influence the classroom environment, student and teacher interaction, and students' sense of responsibility to learning and to the learning community and how these practices shape students' conceptualizations of the learning process. In this section of our paper, we present an analytical account of the practices and students' experiences as these relate to the SWS structures and approaches in effect at West Side High School. In many ways the school structure worked in synergy with teacher beliefs regarding classroom environment, student interaction and preparation of students for lives as adults who are actively involved in their communities; however teachers noted key structural obstacles to fulfilling their own goals for building robust democratic learning communities.

Responsibility emerged as one of the overarching themes in our research alongside teacher beliefs, community and SWS structures. In our discussion of the findings we weave these themes together and attempt to describe their dynamic interrelationships. Clearly this was an ideal case study, and we recognize that it is not typical, neither of classes at this school or of classes in other restructured high school. Sense of community, mutual trust and responsibility,

and reciprocal learning were not only goals but they were instantiated in classroom practices -- they were palpable in both our observations and student and teacher interviews. It is our hope that those who read this paper will be able to generalize some of its findings to their own situations with regard to their particular circumstances.

*How does the SWS approach influence student learning?*

Our study concluded that specific SWS structures of career orientation, team-teaching, looping and block scheduling largely worked in synergy with teacher beliefs to support a classroom environment that allowed the teachers to capitalize on differences and to actively engage students in socially re/constructing knowledge and understandings. Block scheduling provided extensive classroom time for implementing sociocultural and progressive teaching methods. Looping also supported teachers in their efforts to know their students more deeply. That meant knowing their students' families, learning styles, interests, activities and relationships both inside and outside of school. The strong connections between students and teachers meant that students had a high rate of attendance, with at least one student saying that he only came to school at the end of the day for this class.

Interestingly, one of the district's accommodation to the requirements that special education students be placed in the least restrictive environments and that IEP mandates be addressed, in part, by placing students in team taught classes, also contributed to creating more personalized learning support as well as opportunities for all students to benefit from differentiated learning activities. The teachers who collaborated to teach this ELA class shared beliefs about active, personalized learning and the construction of learning communities in which students were comfortable sharing their knowledge and perspectives.

Teachers' beliefs played a crucial role in constructing a viable learning community in which students were valued as individuals, content was relevant to students' lives outside of school, and learning was "fun. More important, however, because the teachers always tried to make literature, vocabulary, and writing relevant to students' lives and differentiated activities so all students had an opportunity to demonstrate learning in comfortable ways, students enthusiastically engaged in individual and group tasks, often working in reciprocal ways with both teachers and other students to construct the best possible responses to assigned tasks. Both the teachers and the students attributed some of their success to extended class periods and the closer ties they had established as a result of looping, but they also realized that it was the teachers' beliefs and actions that were the most important – beliefs and actions that supported individual responsibility, reciprocal learning, differentiated learning, and relevant content.

*How does the SWS approach influence student-student and student-teacher interactions and how do students experience these interactions?*

The SWS approaches of block scheduling and looping within this ELA classroom, in part, fostered the development of meaningful relationships between students and teachers. Fulfilling the SWS pedagogical principal for more personalized education, the teachers in this study gave a great deal of individual personal time to the students both in and out of class. For example, during a classroom observation on November 13, 2006, one of the students commented to Hoeft, "They understand you and really want to know you; it is like they believe in you, and you feel you can do it" (SI #8, 34-35). At the heart of this personalized approach were teacher beliefs that they needed to make personal connections to each of the students, their ability to use the metaphor of "family" to construct a tangible community of learners, and their talent for

teaching in a collaborative way. Again, ironically part of this was the need to accommodate students with IEPs in which team teaching and differentiation were mandates.

Groupwork strategies were, in no small part, important in strengthening students' connections with each other, their sense of belonging, their voice and their mutual sense of social responsibility. One of the students summarized his growing sense of academic and social responsibility when he said:

Everyone is real open with each other. If they [the students] do not like something said or something asked, they will tell people so. They are comfortable with it. We switch what we are supposed to do if we need to -- you work what I am supposed to do and I will work what you are supposed to do. We will get it done. We help each other out. Everyone works together to reach a common goal (SI #13, 31-40).

We observed teachers and students in this study using small groupwork practices to bring out the “untapped possibilities that diversity can bring to group processes and their outcomes” (Santora, 1997, p.14). In addition, using groupwork as a student learning encouraged a sense of shared rights and responsibilities in the creation of a democratic learning environment (Dewey, 1938).

We suspect, but have not confirmed, that robust student interaction and substantive connections to each other were heightened because there was a cluster of students classified for special education services in this class and because this class was more diverse than many other classes in the same building. For everyone to succeed and to be members of the “family,” everyone needed to be respected and trusted, and each member of the class and their groups had to interact freely and comfortably with the others for that to happen.

Thus teacher beliefs worked alongside special education accommodations (team teaching and differentiated learning activities) and SWS structures of looping and block scheduling to galvanize the personal as well as academic relationships and interactions between students and teachers as well as between and among the students. Such positive interactions ultimately

enhanced the cohesion of this community of learners and its students' sense of social responsibility.

*How do SWS structures and recommended curriculum and pedagogy impact students' preparation as active participants in the communities in which they live?*

Due to the SWS focus on Career Academies, the students in this classroom shared a similar orientation to service work as a career field. Through the completion of career focused assignments they understood the values and responsibilities implicit in their selected vocations. Furthermore, because teachers had taken advantage of block scheduling to use strategies that encouraged students to share their voices and to learn from each other and engaged them in informed deliberation -- strategies like the socratic seminar, groupwork, and "family meetings," - students were willing to take risks. When students offered their opinions and ideas for consideration, they were preparing themselves to take part in the social and political communities in which they lived and to exercise their civic responsibility in the name of the common good.

While Beech and Moore would probably still have organized their classes around key ideas related to character formation, career considerations, and community spirit and deliberation, they were supported by SWS structures of block scheduling which gave them longer class periods that allowed for activities such as the socratic seminar and groupwork that included the informed deliberation of relevant contemporary issues.

### *Concerns and Implications*

As we consider the implications of our research we have identified five areas of concern that are paramount: 1) the de facto tracking of students into Career Academies; 2) team teachers'

lack of a common planning time; 3) the narrow conception of SWS professional development; 4) linking team teaching to special education accommodation instead of linking it to all high school's ELA classes, regardless of students' special needs; and 5) limiting the use of looping to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades instead of expanding its scope to include at least one core class at all levels.

A concern with the implementation of academies arose as data revealed inevitable tracking of students due to the complications of scheduling. Beech and Moore found tracking students into career academies frustrating and addressed their apprehension with Principal Smith:

I think in theory the SWSCA is a good idea. The problem is, it tracks students and what ends up happening is [that] you have certain academies that end up being homogeneous, for example, the technology academy is all boys, and that is known in the school as the lower track *career academy*. It is known as the *lower track career academy* because, according to the students, it does all hands-on activities and many of the students attending that career academy are recommended to take the Regents Competency Test (RCT) instead of a [more difficult] Regents examination. I cannot stand the way it tracks students. Then, we walk around and say we do not have tracking at West Side High School. Yeah we do, we really do. The students with IEPs know that they are in here because they have IEPs. However, once they are in the class with Moore and me they seem to be fine. They are successful and feel equal to everyone else, I hope. I have addressed all of these concerns with Principal Smith, [and] she mentioned that she would continue to address these concerns at the District level (TI, 12/20/06, 46-61).

Beech and Moore's response indicates that the SWS structure is a problem in that it has created a venue for the perpetuation of inequalities, marginalization and their accompanying power struggles within the school and the classroom. Although it is not the intention of the SWS approach (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002) to create "a sort and rank" system for students, we wonder if the current SWS structure has created a type of 21<sup>st</sup> century "sorting machine" (Spring, 1970, p.53). This was indeed ironic considering that school was using this career academy as the "least restrictive environment" for students with special learning needs.

When block scheduling was placed in the context of required accommodations for students with IEPs that mandated the support of collaborating teachers, it presented major obstacles to the SWSCA success with respect to student learning. The structures and tools in place for providing large blocks of time to teachers and students so that they could engage in groupwork and project-based learning failed to account for collaborating teachers' need to have a common planning time. However, that is not to underplay the fact that these teachers' ability and agency to advocate for themselves and their students allowed them to build a community of learners in which all the students were valued

Professional development may be an under-used key to the success of using SWS models. SWS structures can be put into place but if instruction doesn't change, then nothing is gained. Professional development such as those that grant some agency to the teachers themselves – peer coaching models, collegial learning circles, etc. can further the instructional goals of SWS restructuring. We believe that professional development, like this, should foster expanded views of SWS restructuring and such expansions might include discussions around and strategies for building deep personal and academic connections between teachers and students and among students, building rigorous empathic learning communities, and fostering a sense of academic, social and civic responsibility across the curriculum. Moore expressed the importance of appreciating each student's background and experiences and thought that prior to implementation of the SWS program, professional development needed to address the importance of and vehicles for teachers to develop deep relationships with students – relationships that went beyond the classroom environment (FN, 11/15/06). From that simple suggestion, we hypothesize that professional development, curriculum initiatives and teacher evaluations should also focus on personalizing education, building learning communities where

students have a sense of belonging and connection to each other and the school, and fostering a sense of academic, social and civic responsibility across the curriculum. Instead, at the time of this study, teachers were confronted with professional development related to inclusion, special education, and the restructuring of schools particularly into SWS career academies.

One of the underlying problems with the SWS approach at WSHS was that special education students were clustered in groups and placed in inclusive classes that the school had identified for special accommodations such as team teaching. We have already discussed how this resulted in de facto tracking. In this study, however, this practice also highlighted the academic and social value of collaborative or team teaching for *all students*. While there is little research either affirming or disconfirming the value of collaborative teaching, we can only say that the relationship between collaborating teachers is difficult, complex, and requires significantly more effort and commitment than solo teaching. However, we have witnessed its value in this classroom and Santora has experienced its value first hand as a collaborating middle school social studies teacher in an inclusive class with 8 special education students scheduled together with 25 heterogeneously grouped students. We know from experience that teachers who are assigned to work together must want to work together for collaborative teaching to have a positive impact on student learning and interaction. We also recognize the need for teachers in such teams to have common planning time and to share in common professional development experiences. Given those conditions, we believe it is reasonable for restructured schools, and for that matter all schools, to designate one or more of its core academic classes across all grade levels and for all students as collaboratively taught classes. Where collaborating teachers plan and work in synergy with each other to enhance the personalization of learning and interaction

for all of their students, students see role models for cooperation that will remain with them throughout their lives.

Throughout this study the teachers and the students connected enhanced academic and social responsibility to their having been together for more than the traditional one year. Beech and Moore had made a special request of the administration to be assigned together with the same students for the students' senior year. While such looping was part of the SWS approach for the ninth and tenth grade, it was not part of the scheduled approaches for the eleventh and twelfth grades. These students felt an enhanced sense of responsibility to their ELA teachers as well as to their peers because *together* they had *all* met the academic challenges of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade NYS English Regents exams as well as the many challenges posed by the conditions of their individual lives. The senior year is often a very tumultuous year for students – both for those who are preparing for college and those who must begin to support themselves and perhaps even their families. Often academics are the furthest from their mind. Yet when confronted by their teachers about their apathy for academic tasks, these students pulled together to reach their academic goals during classtime so they would not have to worry about homework. As a result of this “experiment,” it seems that looping may offer promise as a way of averting the dangers represented in Richard Riley’s characterization of the senior year as an academic “wasteland” (Riley, 2001) while also providing additional support to students with special academic needs. While it is probably not feasible for students to loop with their teachers in all classes, we feel that it is reasonable to target one or two core academic classes for looping from the junior to the senior year.

## Conclusion

Across the nation, a growing consensus exists that schools must change in fundamental ways if they are to accomplish the goal of student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). A number of educators and policymakers believe that smaller restructured schools are better designed to support students' sense of belonging and engagement in learning. WSHS is one of the restructured schools that embraced the SWS approach to student learning. The findings of this study demonstrate a synergy between SWS approaches and teacher practices that resulted in students practicing civic responsibility and engaging in learning within a progressive and inclusive environment. The findings also caution us about shortcomings that impact student choices and downplay the value of heterogeneity and equal access to career academies of choice and to services such as team teaching. At the same time, however, these same findings also suggest ways in which SWS restructuring might be supported by professional development, team teaching, de-tracking efforts that maintain the value of career academies, and the extension of looping to the junior and senior years.

Although, quantitative studies continue to explore the effectiveness of restructuring high schools into smaller learning environments (Ready, Lee, & Welner, 2004), none of these has explored the potential of SWS approaches to provide opportunities to practice civic and social responsibility in a class that includes all students and especially those with special needs. Thus, as a qualitative study, this study adds to the knowledge base of other qualitative studies of SWSCA classrooms (e.g., Kemple & Snipes, 2000; Maxwell & Rubin, 2001; Nathan, 2002; Scott, 2005) by demonstrating the potential of SWS approaches for the inclusion of ALL students. It also suggests the need to explore further smaller learning environments and their influence on students' development of academic, civil, and social responsibility as well as to

“create classroom learning environments where students are provoked to develop their democratic capacities: to question, to challenge, to make real decisions, and to collectively solve problems” (“Rethinking Schools,” 2007, p. 11).

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Across the country only 75 percent of those who enter ninth grade graduate from high school (NCES, 2004).

<sup>ii</sup> Looping requires teachers and students to stay together for two years, in this case their junior and senior years of high school. Block scheduling (blocking), in this school, means that classes meet on alternate days for 80 minutes. Team teaching is provided in selected classes to accommodate students classified in special education whose Individual Educational Programs (IEP) specify the need for team taught classes. A team-taught class is a class in which an academic specialist and a special education teacher co-teach. Students with an IEP that specifies team-taught classes are grouped together and all placed together in a class that also includes heterogeneously grouped students -- thus the use of the term “clustering.”

<sup>iii</sup> To ensure as much confidentiality as possible, pseudonyms replace actual names of the district, school, teachers and students throughout this paper.

<sup>iv</sup> While you will see some remnants of SWS research grounded in on effectiveness and organization theories within this paper, we did not ground our work in those theories because the research that relies on those theories has been largely quantitative and not sociocultural or critical in nature. Our research is ethnographic and looks primarily at the culture within a SWS classroom.

<sup>v</sup> A blended class is a heterogeneously grouped class that includes a cluster of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). These classes are generally designed to accommodate the students IEPs. For example in this class, all of the classified students had IEPs that called for a team-taught, English-Language Arts class. To meet national standards for “least restrictive” environment, the class is then filled with a full-range of students without IEPs.

<sup>vi</sup> It seems appropriate to identify the roles of each of the researchers involved in preparing this paper. The paper is adapted from a dissertation prepared by Hoeft and advised by Santora. Thus all of the data for this paper was collected and analyzed by Hoeft. Santora suggested that both take another look at the data in response to the theme for this year’s American Educational Research Association Conference. Thus was the inception of this paper. While there is still work to be done. we have collaborated to articulate the arguments posed herein.

<sup>vii</sup> Normally looping is only done in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades.

<sup>viii</sup> A student is eligible for services and protection against discrimination based on disability under Section 504, if they are determined, as a result of an evaluation, to have a “physical or mental impairment” that “substantially limits one or more major life activities.” (Federal Regulations 29 U.S.C. 706(8)(B)).

<sup>ix</sup> School-within-School Approach is an attempt to create supportive and personalized learning environments through a smaller learning environment.

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Appendix A

Table 2

*West Side High School, Education Academy Enrollment, 2006-2007 School Year*

<b>Name</b>	<b>DOB</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Out of School Suspensions</b>	<b>Anticipated Diploma</b>	<b>Classified, 504 or General Education Students</b>	<b>Dis/ability</b>
Student 1	10/16/88	White	F		Local	General	NA
Student 2	1/25/89	White	M		Local	IEP	LD
Student 3	6/25/89	White	M		Regents	General	NA
Student 4	5/20/89	Latino	M		Local	IEP	LD
Student 5	9/7/89	Afr. Am.	F	3 days/100	Local	IEP	LD
Student 6	6/14/89	White	M	5 days/100	Local	504	NA
Student 7	7/25/89	Latino	F		Regents	General	NA
Student 8	2/18/88	Afr. Am.	M		Local	IEP	LD
Student 9	11/5/88	Afr. Am.	M	15 days/100	Regents	General	NA
Student 10*	3/15/88	White	F		Regents	General	NA
Student 11	10/16/88	White	M		Regents	General	NA
Student 12	10/14/89	Afr. Am.	F		Local	IEP	LD
Student 13*	3/29/89	White	F		Regents	IEP	LD
Student 14	7/17/89	Afr. Am.	M		Local	General	NA
Student 15	8/12/89	White	F		Regents	General	NA
Student 16**	5/28/89	Afr. Am.	M		Regents	IEP	LD
Student 17	2/7/89	White	F		Regents	IEP	OHI
Student 18	11/30/88	White	M		Adv. Regents	General	NA
Student 19	5/4/88	White	F		Regents	General	NA
Student 20*	8/10/89	Afr. Am.	F	8 days/100	Local	IEP	LD
Student 21	10/14/88	White	F		Local	General	NA
Student 22	1/5/89	White	M		Local	IEP	ED
Student 23	7/25/89	White	M		Regents	General	NA
Student 24**	6/23/89	White	M		Local	IEP	LD
Student 25	9/10/89	White	F		Local	IEP	ED

\*Dropped

\*\*Moved

Appendix BCelie Not Standing Up For Herself

My final plea, you need to listen to this.  
For when I'm done, you'll see I'm innocent.  
Through this case, I've been charged with a crime.  
False accusations that are way out of line.  
I may not have always said what I should.  
But I promise to you my reasons are good.  
When my mother was around  
She was always sick.  
And my Father was not a man to be with.  
He was like a disease.  
Instead of making it better he only made it worst [sic].  
He raped me several time.  
Because of him I wasn't pure.  
After my mother passed, he sent me away.  
With a random guy,  
I didn't even know his name.  
My mother never stood up to my dad;  
It was a habit that I learned.  
Being respected by man wasn't something I thought I deserved.  
I was beat by Albert several times.  
But I never spoke what was on my mind.  
I didn't have the authority,  
So I kept my mouth shut.  
I swallowed my pain with every physical punch.  
Before you point your finger,  
Take a walk in my shoes.  
And think to yourself what you would do.  
Control was something that I never possessed.  
I lived my life with no purpose day by day.  
Being a slave to my husband without a name.  
I never knew what I was capable to be.  
Until I met a woman known as Shug Avory.  
She showed me the light at what women are worth.  
Shug was the cure to my sickness, the break to my curse.  
I've given you reason so answer me this.  
Do you believe in my innocence?

## Character – Celie

Listen up, open your eyes  
    I've lost my confidence  
And its no big surprise.  
For I Celie have been  
defeated. How would you  
feel to be placed in my shoes?  
To be raped by your father  
    And left fearful, frantic to  
        Cry the blues.

Look look right into my  
Eyes and what do you see  
    A young girl with her  
    Childhood ripped away.  
Guilty that I am, for what?  
    For the harsh reality  
    In front of me and  
    I realizing I must not  
    Be worthy of confidence.  
        I wish you could  
    Hear the screaming within  
    Me. The shrieking would  
        Shatter al glass  
Leave you to see  
    I am just the girl  
Who used to have  
Such hopeful eyes  
    And now left to  
    Wonder where why?  
    In conclusion

I want you question  
If you were me would  
You be a girl of  
Confidence of beauty  
Or a girl with bruises  
So deep a girl who doesn't understand  
Her purpose her[e] there  
Or anywhere?