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Becoming Unionized in a Charter School: How Charter School Teachers Navigate the Culture of Choice

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

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by

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Becoming Unionized in a Charter School:

How Charter School Teachers Navigate the Culture of Choice

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This dissertation written by Elizabeth Montaño, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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ABSTRACT

Becoming Unionized in a Charter School:

How Charter School Teachers Navigate the Culture of Choice

By

Elizabeth Montaño

Charter schools have become a widely accepted and rapidly growing option for educational reform especially for low-income, inner-city students. In Los Angeles, the charter movement has promised teachers greater autonomy and collaboration than in the traditional public schools, yet the working conditions of teachers in charter schools have weakened the conditions for this movement to truly reform public education.

By using a neoliberal theoretical framework and a qualitative case study design, this study captured the voices of charter school teachers and documented their beliefs and experiences in an environment shaped by a culture of choice. This study uncovered a) the culture and environment that led teachers to seek unionization, b) the relationships between teachers and management, and c) their model of unionism.

The participants' voices detailed a collaborative culture that lured teachers to escape the negative environment in the local district schools. Still, teachers faced an exhaustive workload and they chose to leave the charter school environment. Teachers valued their autonomy while not realizing that the true choice existed only for the

management of the school that had the ultimate power over their working conditions. When teachers decided to unionize they faced antagonism from their school leaders, and a backlash for their involvement in the unionization. Teachers fell prey to the intimidation of the public's perception on tenure and gave up this fundamental protection. They also moved away from the traditional model and were left without a clear understanding of what being a union meant.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction

My first teaching experience was in a small charter school with only nine teachers that was founded by parents of an East Oakland, California community. In my first year, I taught 3 different courses, and I served on the school site council and on the school's leadership team. I was only there one year and in that one year the school faced a governing board coup d'états, high teacher turnover, and an increased pressure to raise test scores. They hired a school leader with an MBA and no education background. I was getting paid $10,000 less than teachers in the Oakland Unified School District, but I was 23 years old and single so it was not a problem for me to live on that salary. In fact, I respected the work of the charter school teachers who worked relentlessly with less pay and without the support and resources of a large district.

The next fall I returned to Los Angeles looking for a school with the same collaborative culture among teachers and a similar grassroots founding. I came across Hope Charter School (a pseudonym), a small charter school near downtown Los Angeles with three small campuses. It was located in an area of Los Angeles where I had grown up. I connected to the mission of nurturing students who were critical thinkers and agents of social change. I had not been able to pass a credentialing exam, therefore I was considered to be an emergency credential hire. The school was in need of substitute teachers so when I contacted them I began working within two weeks.

In that same year, the principal resigned a week before the fall semester started. The staff and leadership shuffled around in order to accommodate the unexpected change. Two coordinators became co-principals, two teachers became coordinators, and several teaching assistants, who were just out of college, were offered full-time teaching positions. Four days into my term as a substitute teacher, two teachers left the school. There were rumors that their credentials had lapsed, or that they had been pushed out. There were no clear answers from the administration. What became clear to me was that much of what existed in the mission was still "in the works." Most teachers, students, and parents were highly invested in creating a college going environment focused on social justice, yet there were new teachers, new leaders and the stress of starting a new school that created a chaotic environment.

Even though the administration at Hope Charter School (HCS) knew that the teachers were not returning that school year, they kept me as a day-to-day substitute teacher. For two months, I was getting paid a daily rate with no benefits. After the winter break, I was offered a full-time teaching contract. It was a great opportunity to work in a tight knit community. Teachers at the various campuses had professional development together and yearly staff retreats to create and mold the vision of the schools. It was a fulfilling experience yet I did not know how much longer I would be able to sustain working at HCS.

Within my school, I was a leader but I felt overworked and undervalued. I worked a 210-day calendar (compared to 182 days in the Los Angeles Unified School District), and followed job descriptions written in three different documents: a work

contract, the schools' charter and an employee handbook. None of the documents provided a clear definition of the responsibilities. Still, I refused to work in the Los Angeles Unified School District, where my friends and family complained about the bureaucracy and the inefficiencies of the large district. I preferred the lesser of the two evils so I stayed. In the following years, the campuses faced teacher and leadership turnover and there was no clear way of knowing who would be staying and who would not be offered another contract. In May, teachers received letters in their boxes offering them jobs. Every year, there were teachers who did not receive job offers, and many times they were shocked. Every year, I had a different principal.

In 2005, in order to address the poor working conditions, teachers met and deliberated whether unionization was the right answer for us. I was one of the strongest pro-union voices, being that it was only due to my father's union that I had medical and dental benefits growing up. Also, as a student in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), I experienced a teachers' strike in 1989 and felt a strong sense of solidarity with all of my teachers. Other teachers were not so convinced. They had been part of larger districts and felt disconnected from the larger district unions. They came to charter schools escaping the negativity of LAUSD to work for students and families and they did not want to support the bureaucracy and ineffectiveness of unions. After a few months of dialogue and deliberation, we voted and formed an independent association through the California Teachers Association (CTA), a National Education Association (NEA) affiliate.

My experiences as a product of public education, a charter school teacher, and a union founder brought me to the core of this research study. My study focused on the experiences of teachers in a Los Angeles charter school and documented their beliefs and experiences in an environment shaped by the culture of choice. This study shed light on how charter school teachers work within a charter school governance model that inherently opposes employee empowerment. Due to the complex and conflicted history between charter schools and teacher unions, it was relevant and timely to understand the experiences of teachers who chose to work in charter schools and to understand what they did to improve working conditions and create sustainability for the profession.

HCS after Unionization

When California legislators passed the California Charter School Act of 1992, it allowed charter schools exemptions from state education codes and from collective bargaining rights for teachers. The formation of a union signaled a defeat for the HCS management and tested the strength of the charter school organization in the eyes of the charter movement in Los Angeles. Teachers and school leaders were suddenly on different teams, and the governing board, mostly appointed businessmen and women, questioned their ability to operate a charter school while having to negotiate with a "third party," the teachers' union. Still, with just over 50% of the teacher vote, the union was formed and began negotiating their first collective bargaining agreement in the fall of 2006. When the first contract was ratified, 18-months later, many of the union leaders had moved on to other schools and other jobs.

Hope Charter School and the teachers' union maintained a relatively quiet relationship out of the spotlight of Los Angeles educational politics until 2010 when HCS placed a bid on a new district school site through the LAUSD Public School Choice (PSC) Motion. This initiative created by the LAUSD school board, allowed outside operators such as charter schools, non-profit organizations, and universities to bid for management of schools within buildings constructed by the LAUSD. Hope Charter School placed a bid for a K-5 school within a 3-mile radius of the other HCS sites. In order to win the bid, HCS ran a campaign against a local LAUSD elementary school that was supported by United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), the powerful teachers' union representing the teachers in LAUSD. HCS teachers, staff, parents, and students rallied together, joining HCS management in a campaign to win the bid from the community. The HCS community withstood attacks from local LAUSD schools charging that HCS was taking away union jobs from the community. Immediately, the HCS management sought the help of the Hope Charter School Teachers' Association (HCSTA) in publicizing that HCS teachers were indeed bound by a collective bargaining agreement. In return, the HCS teachers' union asked HCS to post the collective bargaining agreement on the school website. In addition, as the union president I sent a message to the UTLA governing board announcing that HCS teachers had formed and established a union in 2005.

This event tested the strength of HCS in a similar fashion to the unionization efforts of 2005. This was the first time that the management of HCS had publicly acknowledged that HCS teachers had unionized yet it was done as a defense mechanism

against the attacks of UTLA. Although HCS won the bid and began managing the K-5 school in the fall of 2010, it was not an easy transition. The UTLA leaders contested the win in court and began a campaign to take over HCSTA.

Statement of the Problem

Charter schools have become a widely-accepted and rapidly growing option for educational reform especially for low-income, inner-city students (Newton, Rivero, Fuller, & Dauter, 2012). Although charter schools pride themselves in providing choice and creating a competitive environment where teachers have greater autonomy than in the traditional public schools, the true choice lies in the hands of the charter school management. Furthermore, the literature on charter schools points to undesirable teacher working conditions many times leading to high levels of teacher attrition. In Los Angeles, charter schools experienced higher levels of teacher turnover than traditional public schools (Newton et al., 2012). Even though the charter movement promises to deliver results to the neediest students, the working conditions of teachers in charter schools and the high level of teacher turnover may not create the conditions for this movement to realize its true potential. In addition, the business model governance of charter schools has diminished the value of teachers' work and limited the voices of teachers. Therefore, there existed a need to explore the environment of a charter school and how the mediation of a teachers' union impacted the working conditions of charter school teachers.

Charter school legislation across the country has left teachers at the mercy of the management. The charter laws created a de facto policy allowing charter school

operators the flexibility to operate outside of the collective bargaining laws that have been set up to protect the teaching profession since the 1970s. Therefore, many charter schools hire and fire as they desire and are managed by a typically conservative, business-oriented, non-educational, and non-elected governing board (Gyurko, 2008). The governing boards are wary of teacher unionization seeing it as an external third-party entity (Gyurko, 2008). Yet, some teachers in charter schools have chosen to unionize and to create a space for collective bargaining that exists out of the traditional district and union relations. Often the movement to unionize has resulted in a backlash response from the charter school operators. In spite of charter laws that have diminished the power of the collective bargaining agreement, there are possibilities for collaboration between charter schools and teacher unions that could elevate the level of professionalism and provide a space for charter school teachers to have a voice in their working conditions.

Purpose of the Study

This study captured the voices of teachers and documented their beliefs and experiences as charter school teachers in an environment mediated by a teachers' union. This study uncovered a) the culture and environment of a unionized charter school, b) the relationships between the teachers and management, and c) their vision for a model of unionism and what it has accomplished. This study shed light on the work of teachers within a charter school movement that inherently opposed their unionization. Due to the complex and conflicted history between charter schools and teacher unions, it was relevant and timely to understand the experiences of teachers who chose to be part of

charter schools and to understand how they utilized the union to create teacher professionalism and sustainability for the profession.

Significance of the Study

The Reagan administration's publication of *A Nation at Risk* launched an attack aimed at public education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This publication blamed public schools for the demise of the society and helped to revitalize the neoliberal ideologies aimed at privatizing education in this country. Since then, public schools have faced an increased pressure to be accountable through standardized measures particularly in low-income urban centers. Large cities such as Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, and New York began reform efforts to reconstitute large public schools characterized as "failing" and opened deregulated schools such as charter schools. Furthermore, states such as Wisconsin and New Jersey have attacked collective bargaining rights for their public employees including teachers.

In Los Angeles reconstitution efforts led the LAUSD to convert some schools to charter schools, authorize new charter schools, and reconstitute failing schools. The reconstitution efforts characteristic of large cities have propelled the charter movement to expand, therefore creating more deregulated schools with a teaching force that is often non-unionized. With public perception blaming teacher unions and demanding increased accountability, teachers entering these deregulated spaces have often not sought the protections that the teaching force has earned in the last 40 years of collective bargaining rights.

This study provided a first-hand account of the culture and environment within one charter school that became a charter management organization (CMO) and the conditions that led teachers to seek unionization. By documenting the experiences of teachers, this study provided insight into the culture of charter schools not subject to the same regulations as district schools. Although this study focused on a group of teachers within one CMO, their experiences provided the voices of teachers that other studies have left out. In addition, because charter schools are part of a national movement to deregulate public education, the experiences of these teachers will resonate with teachers in other deregulated environments. Through a neoliberal framework, this study looked into the experiences of teachers who navigated the culture of choice and the policies responsible for the deregulation of public schools.

Theoretical Framework

The founding principles of democracy and capitalism established the ideals of public education. Yet these two principles have incompatible values that have plagued the institution of schools. Due to a reliance on a capitalist economic system, throughout United States history economic theories have dictated the role of the government in people's lives. The shift from classical liberalism to neoliberalism influenced the current practices in schools that focus on market-like competition and the ideals of school choice. Neoliberalism as an economic theory took shape in the early 1970s and shifted the value of the welfare state to a higher emphasis on the free-market. Neoliberals and their supporters focused on attacking the public school system as well as the institution of teachers' unions. Thus, the theoretical framework of neoliberalism articulated in this

section provided a lens into examining the current state of public education with the addition of charter schools and the contentious role of teacher unions.

Liberalism

In order to understand neoliberalism, it was vital to trace the roots of economic theories since classical liberalism. The ideology of liberalism was born as a result of the economists who advocated for a free and de-regulated market. In the *Wealth of Nations* (1776), free-market economist Adam Smith argued that the government would best serve the people if it allowed the market to operate by its own laws with the least government intervention (Smith, 1776). He further professed that laissez-faire ideals would best support a growing economic market (Symcox, 2009). The government would then become "invisible hands" that would support the people without interfering in their lives (Smith, 1776). In the early 20th century, economists observed that the institutions of government could aid in the regulation of the market. In the article "The End of Laissez-Faire" (1926) economist John Keynes critiqued classic liberalism and argued that individuals needed to act together rather than in their own self-interests (as cited in Olssen, 2010). He believed that the market did not always operate in the public's interest and therefore valued the role of institutions in ensuring the future of the society (Olssen, 2010). Keynesian economics played an important role in developing the welfare state in the 20th century.

As Keynesian economic theory took hold of the government ideals, progressive thinker John Dewey led the creation of social liberalism against the abuses of the industrialization on workers (Baltodano, 2009). In his writing, Dewey opposed the free

market ideologies of competition, freedom, and the deregulation of the industrial sector. Instead, he argued that the government had an obligation to protect civil liberties, defend basic social needs like education, and provide opportunities for everyone (Baltodano, 2009). This progressive period provided the first protections for workers by placing some restrictions on the rise of industrial monopolies. The ideals of both economic liberalism and social liberalism balanced out to maintain a productive economy while still protecting the welfare state.

Towards the end of the 20th century, the ideals of classical liberalism regained popularity. In *Capitalism and Freedom* (1926), Milton Friedman justified a laissez-faire approach by stating that the elimination of the obstacles to the free market would eventually trickle down profits for the overall good of the public (as cited in Symcox, 2009). Frederich von Hayek wrote against socialist theories and believed that the proper functions of the market were incompatible with government intervention (Olssen, 2010). Both Friedman and von Hayek became proponents of a free-market and a diminished role for government. A return to classical liberalism allowed for big businesses to re-gain the upper hand and control workers' wages and conditions in order to give the market decision-making power over the government (Davies & Bansel, 2007). These ideas became a foundation for the rise of neoliberalism in the early 1970s.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism arose in response to an economic crisis, resulting from Keynesian economics, characterized by increased inflation, prolonged unemployment, unbalanced international budgets, and a crisis in the supply and price of oil (Olssen, 2010). Davies

and Bansel (2007) characterized neoliberalism as "the transformation of the administrative state, one previously responsible for human well-being, as well as for the economy, into a state that gives power to global corporations and installs apparatuses and knowledge through which people are reconfigured as productive economic entrepreneurs in their own lives" (p. 248). The neoliberal belief that the market should operate on its own in order to minimize the role of government, led to policies and procedures that focused less on workers and people and more on profits and competition (Symcox, 2009).

As a result of neoliberalist economic ideologies, the United States reversed the progress made in the earlier decades. The prevailing ideologies of neoliberalism took control of the American political consciousness that ultimately affected both the governments' and the publics' view of public education (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). Public schools, one of the many institutions previously protected by the welfare state, felt the worst effects of neoliberal ideologies. Davies and Bansel (2007) stated that due to neoliberalism "economic productivity is seen to come not from government investment in education, but from transforming education into a product that can be bought and sold" (p. 254). Therefore schools, like other public services, which were once essential to the collective well-being of the country, were now managed like any other product.

Another effect of neoliberalism on education was an emphasis on competition and increased accountability (Davies & Bansel, 2007). In 1983, the Reagan administration launched the now infamous report titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* that blamed public schools for the economic decline of the United

States (Symcox, 2009). This report further declared war on the failure of public schools and organized a movement of reform that would change the accountability and organization of public schools in the next decades (Symcox, 2009). The movement that began in the 1980s, not only placed economic competition on the political agenda, but it used a business model to replace the democratic purpose of schooling (Symcox, 2009).

Neoliberalism prompted the decline of the welfare state, and the quality of life for the working class. It has also prompted the privatization of education through the ideals of school choice. The ideology of choice and competition have created educational reforms focused on alleviating costs for the government while providing parents and students with different opportunities for schooling through private schools, school vouchers, charter schools, and for-profit contract schools (Cibulka, 2000). Two major proponents of school choice were John Chubb and Terry Moe in their book *Politics, Markets and America's Schools* (1990). The authors blamed the poor performance of schools on the fact that the educational system is built on the democratic participation of the government (Chubb & Moe, 1990). By democratic participation, they blamed unions and policy makers that led schools to become large bureaucracies spending the government's money and pleasing teachers over students and parents (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The neoliberal agenda has infiltrated public education through the ideals of school choice, privatization through charter schools, and an attack on teachers' unions.

Conflicting Missions

The relationship between charter schools and teacher unions began through the vision of the late American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Albert Shanker

(Gyurko, 2008). As the leader of one of the largest teachers' union in the country, he held a vision for the chartering of public schools that gave more autonomy to teachers. Unfortunately, his vision was turned into a privatization effort that did not include the teachers' union as a partner (Gyurko, 2008).

Starting in 1985, in a series of speeches, Shanker introduced the concept of a charter school as a publicly funded school with high levels of teacher autonomy and accountability that would create a choice for parents (Gyurko, 2008). His vision was partly influenced by governmental pressures, specifically the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) relaying the failure of public education in the accountability of schools and teachers (Gyurko, 2008). In addition to governmental pressures was his disapproval of a bureaucratic, top-down approach to education representative of both school districts and unions. Shanker envisioned a charter school reform system centered on the role of the teachers' contract, which would "go beyond collective bargaining to the achievement of true teacher professionalism" (Gyurko, 2008, p. 6 as cited in Kahlenberg, 2006). Therefore, the profession would be marked by high collaboration with management and a focus on teachers' voices rather than on the issues in a typical union contract such as wages, benefits, and due process. The charter contract would focus on allowing teachers to be the true professionals and innovators of schools.

In Shanker's vision, charter schools would exist as self-governed and teacher-managed schools within the traditional public school system. He argued that schools valuing teachers' voices would achieve higher levels of success in the long run because

teachers' voices were a true marker of teacher professionalism. If teachers felt valued, then the workforce would be more attractive to capable and innovative educators (Gyurko, 2008). Shanker was confident that his vision for charter schools would achieve teacher professionalism and ultimately provide educational opportunities for the overwhelming majority of students in public schools (Gyurko, 2008).

In 1991 when Minnesota signed the first charter school law in the country, it did not fulfill Shanker's original vision. Instead of working within schools and teachers, charter school operators created structural changes that deregulated public education (Gyurko, 2008). Minnesota allowed charter schools exemptions from state education codes, other public school regulations, as well as pre-existing collective bargaining agreements with teacher unions (Gyurko, 2008). As charter schools began to gain momentum, they gained support from political conservatives and lost the support of the teachers' union, including Shanker, the original proponent of charter schools. Political conservatives and business groups alike endorsed the competition between schools, and supported charter schools that led the privatization of public education.

By virtue of the Minnesota charter school legislation, teachers' rights were left out of the discussion in charter school reform. The establishment of charter schools set out to fulfill the publics' view that public schools should demonstrate high levels of autonomy and accountability. That accountability came in the form of rhetoric surrounding public education placing blame on teachers and teacher unions in the failure of public education particularly in large urban centers. Since charter schools were allowed to operate outside of a collective bargaining agreement, many charter supporters

joined conservative groups in pointing their finger at teacher unions. Therefore, the initial vision of charter schools as places of innovation and autonomy for teachers shifted to a vision diminishing the role of teacher unions.

The work of charter school teachers exists within two opposing ideologies. Charter school supporters believe in providing school choice for families therefore fueling a market-like competition between public schools. In addition, since many charter schools receive funding from conservative entities, they tend to oppose unionization. They profess a strong belief in always putting students' needs before adult needs. In their eyes, the teachers' union becomes a third party entity solely in response to adult needs and therefore in contrast to the needs of students (Gyurko, 2008). On the other hand, teacher unions claim that the profession needs to be prioritized, and that if teachers do not fight to maintain the rights gained in over 40 years of collective bargaining, they are devaluing the teaching profession. Teacher unions have established protections that have elevated the teachers as professionals, yet they have launched an attack on charter schools and often counter educational reforms that could diminish the power of the collective bargaining agreement. While the role of unions and charter schools continues to be polarized, the teachers who work within both movements attempt to exist and thrive within both movements. Through this research, I brought forth the experiences of unionized teachers who also navigate the culture of choice in charter schools.

Research Questions

In order to hear the voices of unionized teachers in the charter school movement, the following questions were the focus of this study:

1. Why did the teachers at Hope Charter School decide to unionize five years after the charter school was established?
2. How has the culture of choice shaped the relationship between the charter school management and the teachers' union at Hope Charter School?
3. What is the model of unionism at Hope Charter School and what has it accomplished?

Research Design and Methodology

Due to the complexity and richness in studying teachers' voices, I utilized a qualitative case study methodology. By using a qualitative methodology, the study focused on presenting a "slice of life" rather than on determining correlations or comparisons (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative researchers demonstrate concern in understanding behavior and experiences from the participants' own frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The main benefit of conducting a qualitative study rests in the credible results and theories based on experiences, an opportunity to improve practice, and an ability to collaborate with the participants rather than just study them (Maxwell, 1996). In addition, because this situation was so unique, a case study design was the most appropriate in capturing the experiences of teachers.

Case Study Design

As part of a qualitative methodology, this study employed a case study design. Case studies are detailed examinations of one setting or subject within a particular space (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Yin (2005) argued that rather than using statistics as a measure for educational inquiry, case studies provide a true understanding by bringing to life what goes on in schools. Merriam (1998) stated that a case study is a single unit of study that is defined and bounded. She argued that, "by concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). The case study design provided insights that could help structure future research in order to advance the field's knowledge base.

Because of the unique situation of having a teachers' union mediating in a charter school, a case study design was the most appropriate design for this study. The research on unionized teachers in charter schools had not been told from the perspective of teachers therefore offering a limited perspective. Because substantial research on teachers in charter schools has not existed, the case study design proved to be most useful in connecting the experiences of these teachers to other charter school teachers and to unionized teachers. This case study served to connect schools to the broader world that impacts them. It employed the voices of teachers in one teachers' union and described how this teachers' union came about, the current challenges, the perceived understanding of teacher professionalism, and the future they imagine for the teaching profession in charter schools.

Methods of Data Collection

In qualitative research, the data are mediated through the researcher who is the main vehicle for collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (1981) stated that because the researcher can process data at an instant, he or she could clarify and summarize the data in order to expand the understanding of the context. Since the researcher is a human instrument, he or she is responsive to the data, and can adapt techniques to the various circumstances. In this qualitative case study design, I utilized the following methods of data collection: analysis of documents, retrospective interviews, ethnographic field notes, and semi-structured focus groups. In order to understand the experiences of one group of teachers, this study focused on studying the naturalized settings.

Site and Participant Selection

Hope Charter School has been in existence since the year 2000 in a densely populated, section of Los Angeles. In 2001, it opened its third campus 3 miles west of the first location. In 2012, Hope Charter School has become a charter management organization (CMO) that educates over 2,500 students on five campuses. Ninety-eight percent of the student population in K-8 is Title 1 (economically disadvantaged) and 48% of students are classified as English Language Learners. In comparison to similar schools, all of the Hope Charter schools rank 10 out of 10 on the Academic Performance Index (API measures are an outcome of *California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999*).

This case study employed convenience and purposive sampling in order to ensure that teachers who held the most knowledge about unionization were part of the sample. Seven union leaders who founded the union were interviewed individually about the formation of the union. They were teachers who were no longer employed by the organization,[1] some remained in the profession, and others had moved on to other careers. Two participants were currently teaching in other districts; one was a school administrator in a charter school, one was a school administrator in a district school, another teacher was an instructional leader at a charter school, and the remaining two were pursuing careers in non-profit work. Out of the seven founding teachers who participated in interviews, five were women and two were men. All participants had at least 5 years of teaching experience when they began organizing the teachers' union.

In addition, four teachers, all women, currently employed at HCS participated in interviews regarding the current practices and beliefs of the teachers' union. The four teachers were selected to participate based on their history of union activity and participation. Therefore the selection technique was both convenience and purposive. Those four teachers were invited to take part in two focus groups, two in each group. Three out of the four teachers were able to join a focus group.

In the focus groups, participant selection was conducted through an open invitation therefore being convenience and purposive. The teachers were all current teachers in the organization that are active members of the teachers' union. Nine teachers

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[1] It is important to note that these teachers were not chosen because they had left the school but rather because of their involvement in the founding of the teachers' union.

from mixed grade levels and from all five different campuses participated in the focus groups. It is important to note that all 15 participants were either single or married without children when they were part of the teachers' union.

Data Analysis

After collecting data from interviews, I utilized an inductive analysis to extract the themes the participants brought up (Hatch, 2002). Hatch (2002) described an inductive analysis as a process that starts from gathering specific elements, then finding patterns and connections in order to make general statements about the phenomena being investigated. Instead of gathering data in order to test a hypothesis, in the inductive analysis model, the theory emerged from the context of the study. The steps outlined in Hatch (2002) are comprehensive yet they give the researcher flexibility to create domains and codes that emerge from the data collected rather than from the researcher. Hatch (2002) argued that although inductive analysis should not be used for all types of qualitative work, its strength lies in "its power to get meaning from complex data that have been gathered with a broad focus in mind" (p. 179). The inductive analysis approach allowed me to process large amounts of data while still assuring confidence that the themes emerging were representative of the overall data.

After coding the interview data, I used the emerging themes to create questions for the focus groups. Throughout the data collection process, I returned to the inductive analysis to ensure that the themes emerging from the interviews and focus groups were representative of the themes emerging in the document analysis and observation notes. In analyzing data from a case study, Merriam (1998) suggested following the process of

other qualitative studies but being particularly concerned with a holistic and bounded case study analysis. Merriam (1998) also argued that by seeing the case study as a bounded unit, the researcher is more likely to focus on managing the data together to find patterns and interpretations. Because I analyzed the data together, and coded it by hand, I was able to create a bounded case study.

Limitations and Delimitations

Maxwell (1996) claimed that limitations in studies arise through the implementation of the project as well as in the descriptions, interpretations, and theories that arise from the study. In this study, the limitations were evident in the specific demographics and location of the Hope Charter School. The school was in a densely populated inner-city section of Los Angeles. It was also part of a small charter management organization (CMO), which made it less applicable to larger CMO's. In addition, the student population was largely Latino/a and therefore may have reflected different demographics than other charter schools. Also, it may be difficult to generalize this study to other schools or even to other states that have different charter laws or that do not have collective bargaining agreement laws. Still, because California has one of the largest number of charter schools and because charter schools are serving a large number of Latino/a students, the limitations of the specific demographic and location of HCS were diminished.

In addition to the limitations inherent in the study, there were limitations set by the researcher that impacted the generalizability of the study. Since the study included teachers at one charter management organization, it may be difficult to apply the findings

to more schools or schools in different settings. In terms of the participants, it is important to acknowledge that teachers who chose to work at HCS may already come with a different mindset that may not apply to traditional public school teachers or teachers who chose to work at other charter schools. Furthermore, it is important to note that the participants in this study did not represent all of the demographics of teachers at HCS. In particular, while there are active union members who are also parents, none of the participants were parents when they participated in the union. Therefore, it is important to keep these issues in mind when considering generalizing the findings to other teachers and/or other school sites.

Criteria of Trustworthiness

In order to diminish the possibility of more limitations, it was important to ensure that the study met the criteria for trustworthiness. This qualitative case study was not an experiment in design; therefore the criteria for determining the validity and reliability of the study were different. Lincoln and Guba (1986) discussed these criteria as exploring the truth (internal validity), finding the applicability of the study (external validity), exploring the consistency (reliability or replicability), and ensuring its neutrality (objectivity). In order to create a trustworthy study, I explored the criteria of trustworthiness while studying the natural settings.

Credibility

The internal validity of this qualitative case study was determined by building the credibility. Merriam (1998) argued that the research study should match the reality in order to ensure its internal validity. In this study, I was able to build credibility by

studying an environment of which I was a community member. Merriam (1998) claimed that being close to the data is an advantage for the researcher in that it creates a stronger credibility than if an instrument had been used. Through observations of the natural setting and through interviews, I was able to interpret and construct the reality of the participants (Merriam, 1998).

Much of the literature on qualitative research points to criteria that can enhance the internal validity of a study (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 1998). The criteria include: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). In order to improve the credibility of this study, I conducted interviews, observations, focus groups, and document analyses over a sustained 6-month period of time. These four processes allowed me to triangulate the data and the sustained time created a period of prolonged engagement with my participants. Having three of the interview participants in the focus groups also helped with the data triangulation. In addition, I participated in member checks with my participants by emailing them transcripts and asking clarifying questions through email and in person. Finally, in the findings section of this study, I revealed data that contradicted the general themes found in the data. By following the criteria explored above, I enhanced the credibility of the study.

Transferability

Lincoln & Guba (1986) described the criteria for external validity as transferability or generalizability. External validity refers to the ability of the study to be applied to other situations. Merriam (1998) argued that in order to enhance the

possibility for generalizability in qualitative studies, the researcher can: provide rich, thick descriptions, describe the typicality of the case study, and use multiple sites to conduct the study. In this study, there were various factors that affected the generalizability. First, I studied only one teachers' union within a charter management organization (CMO). Second, because every state has a different charter law that may or may not allow collective bargaining, this study will be difficult to generalize to other schools in other states. Although the study seemed specific to the unique environment of unionized teachers in a charter school, the literature suggested that many teachers across the country might be facing challenges in regards to their working conditions and their ability to collectively bargain a contract. In addition, because neoliberal reform efforts such as charter schools and reconstitution models have increased the deregulation of schools, the experiences of teachers in this study could be applicable to other teachers. It is important to keep these issues in mind when considering generalizing the findings to other teachers and/or other school sites.

Dependability

Reliability assumes that there is "a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Because the term reliability in the traditional does not apply to qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1986) used the term dependability. Therefore, researchers can use several criteria to ensure dependability in their study. The first is to address the positionality of the researcher. In this study, I was the researcher as well as a current teacher at HCS, a former union leader, and founding member of the union. Guba and Lincoln (1981) discussed the benefits of qualitative

research in that the researcher is close to the data, yet there exists an increase in researcher bias. The biases can be diminished with the use of triangulation, the second criteria described by Lincoln and Guba (1986). In this study, I have ensured triangulation between data from different interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and observations as well as within the data. The third was an audit trail. I have ensured that I document all of the steps and processes that I took in order to keep accurate records that can be traced. Merriam (1998) argued that in order for the researcher to audit their process, they must describe in detail the steps and processes of their data collection, data analysis, and the decision-making that went into it. The steps described in this chapter can serve as an audit trail and have improved the dependability of this study.

Definition of Key Terms

Culture of choice. This study set out to define the culture of choice in a charter school. The term culture of choice referred to the environment created in public education with the integration of neoliberalist ideologies. Since the 1980s when the *Nation at Risk* report deemed the public education system a failure, economists and other thinkers used the term choice to allow for competition and privatization in public education. The term choice became a slogan for charter school proponents to use with parents, students, teachers, and with the public. The rhetoric of choice placed the responsibility on the families in choosing where they sent their child to school. Choice also referred to the ideology of charter school operators who operated with full flexibility and autonomy in institutions, which were once regarded as public and democratic spaces. Therefore, the culture of choice described the current environment where individualism

and choice have permeated the otherwise democratic role of schooling. The experiences of teachers in this study existed within the culture of choice.

Professionalism. This study set out to define teacher professionalism within a charter organization. Unions have traditionally defined teacher professionalism in reference to the following three core principles: fair compensation, fair treatment including due process, and decision-making power (Gyurko, 2008). Al Shanker, through his vision for charter schools, defined professionalism as teachers having a voice, control over the instruction of schools, and autonomy in schools (Gyurko, 2008). In this study, professionalism was defined as the attainment of both traditional characteristics defined by unions, and the vision that Shanker had for the chartering of public schools.

Organization of Dissertation

This study explored the beliefs and experiences of a unionized teaching force within a charter school. The descriptions in this case study provide a glimpse into how charter school reform affects the working conditions and working environment of teachers. Chapter 1 identified the problem and the relevance of this study. Chapter 2 provides a review of the pertinent literature ranging from a historical evaluation of neoliberalism and the ideals that formed charter schools, to the future possibilities of both charter schools and teacher unions. Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology and design interview protocols, focus group protocols and the document analysis utilized in this study. Chapter 4 includes the findings of the research and Chapter 5 is a discussion of the findings and the implications for charter schools and teacher unions.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The rhetoric in educational reform has described a failed system of public education, particularly in large urban centers, and placed blame on teachers and teacher unions for this failure. Since the 1980s and after the publication of *A Nation at Risk* detailing the failure of public schools, the public has expected less government involvement in ensuring public services. As a result, legislators and school boards have handed publicly funded schools over to private management firms in the form of charter schools. Charter schools, which receive public funding, have been exempt from education codes including collective bargaining rights for their employees. In turn, the expansion of charter schools has diminished the role of the teachers' union and the voices of teachers as public employees.

The school choice reform movement has been incited by the ideology and practices of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has diminished the role of the state from one that is responsible for peoples' well-being to a state that gives power to the market. Neoliberalism has created the perception that people have more freedoms to be entrepreneurs since they are no longer tied to the state. Along with these freedoms, come the rights to school choice. School choice ideology and competition have further fueled the antagonism between teacher unions and charter school operators. Even though there exists a move to reform education that serves underprivileged communities, the increase

in charter schools may not result in sustainable change if teachers' voices are kept out of the debate.

This study shared the voices of charter school teachers who worked in an environment mediated by a teachers' union. It explored the working conditions of these teachers and the experiences that led them to seek unionization. It documented the relationships between teachers and the management of Hope Charter School which was founded by teachers and leaders in the community but which was managed by a non-elected, business-like governing board. Teachers in this environment sought a new model of unionism, one that would create parity with the management but would allow them to focus on their professionalism. Their experiences guided the literature in this chapter, which begins with the economic theory of neoliberalism as the framework for this study. Following is a review of the literature on unionism, the history of charter schools, and the working conditions of charter school teachers. The chapter ends by examining the current educational reforms and the possible future of charter schools and teacher unions.

Theoretical Framework

The United States was founded on the principles of both democracy and capitalism. Yet these two principles often have incompatible values that have played out in the public arena through the debate on public education. A neoliberal economic ideology and practices created the current practices in schools that focus on market-like competition and the ideals of school choice. The ideology of choice prevailing in all areas of school reform has now created a culture focused on attacking the public school

system as well as the institution of teachers' unions. Thus, the theoretical framework of neoliberalism expressed in this section provides a lens into examining the current state of public education with the addition of charter schools and the contentious role of teacher unions.

Liberalism

The roots of neoliberalism lie in classic liberal economic theories. In the *Wealth of Nations,* free-market economist Adam Smith (1776) argued that the government would best serve the people if it allowed the market to operate by its own laws with the least government intervention (Symcox, 2009). He further professed that laissez-faire ideals would best support a growing economic market. The ideology of liberalism was born as a result of the economists who advocated for a free and de-regulated market. In the early 20th century, economists observed that the institutions of government could aid in the regulation of the market. In the article "The End of Laissez-Faire" (1926, as cited in Olssen, 2010) economist John Keynes critiqued classic liberalism and argued that individuals needed to act together rather than in their own self-interests. He believed that the market did not always operate in the public's interest and therefore valued the role of institutions in ensuring the future of a society. Keynesian economics played an important role in developing the welfare state in the 20th century.

In the early part of the 20th century, progressive thinker John Dewey led the creation of social liberalism against the abuses of the industrialization on workers, specifically newly arrived immigrants (Baltodano, 2009). In his writing, Dewey opposed the free market ideologies of competition, freedom, and the deregulation of the industrial

sector. Instead, he argued that government had an obligation to protect civil liberties, defend basic social needs like education, and provide opportunities for everyone (Baltodano, 2009). This progressive period that lasted from the 1820s to the 1920s provided the first protections for workers by placing some restrictions on the rise of industrial monopolies. Due to the ideals of institutional support provided by Keynes' economic theories, and the progressive ideology of Dewey, the country built a strong government infrastructure in the following decades.

After the market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression, the programs of the New Deal helped the country recover. President Franklin D. Roosevelt implemented the welfare state programs, declaring the governments' acceptance of necessary services for its citizens, as well as new regulations of the private sector (Baltodano, 2009). Ultimately, the programs of the New Deal recognized needed protections for the industrial worker by setting up economic policies of collective bargaining, minimum wage, and social security (Baltodano, 2009). Following the New Deal policies, the Civil Rights Movement and legislation such as the Higher Education Act, Bilingual Education Act, Immigration and Naturalization Act, and the Civil Rights Act created a time in history associated with social justice and the expansion of a welfare state (Baltodano, 2009). The ideals of both economic liberalism and social liberalism balanced out to maintain a productive economy while still protecting the welfare state.

Towards the end of the 20th century, classical liberal economists Milton Friedman and Friedrich A. von Hayek regained popularity. In *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), Friedman justified a laissez-faire approach by stating that the elimination of the obstacles

to the free market would eventually trickle down profits for the overall good of the public (Symcox, 2009). Von Hayek wrote against socialist theories and believed that the proper functions of the market were incompatible with government intervention (Olssen, 2010). Both Friedman and von Hayek became proponents of a free-market and a diminished role for government. Therefore, the return to classical liberalism allowed for big businesses to re-gain the upper hand and control workers' wages and conditions in order to give the market decision-making power over the government (Davies & Bansel, 2007). These ideas became a foundation for the neoliberalist ideologies of the early 1970s.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism arose in response to an economic crisis characterized by increased inflation, prolonged unemployment, unbalanced international budgets, and a crisis in the supply and price of oil (Olssen, 2010). It came as a response to Keynesian economics and extended to the capitalist countries participating in the global economy (Davies & Bansel, 2007). Davies and Bansel (2007) characterized neoliberalism as:

> The transformation of the administrative state, one previously responsible for human well-being, as well as for the economy, into a state that gives power to global corporations and installs apparatuses and knowledge through which people are reconfigured as productive economic entrepreneurs in their own lives, (p. 248)

Therefore neoliberals believed that the market should operate on its own in order to minimize the role of government. These beliefs led to policies and procedures that focused less on workers and people and more on profits and competition (Symcox, 2009).

During the 1980s, as a result of neoliberalism, the United States government reversed the progress it had made in the earlier decades. Influential political leaders, like Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of England and President Ronald Reagan of the United

States, prescribed to the ideologies of neoliberalism by cutting social services, privatizing them, and deregulating the remaining programs (Symcox, 2009). The prevailing ideologies of neoliberalism took control of the American political consciousness that ultimately affected both the governments' and the publics' view of public education (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). Public schools, one of the remaining institutions protected by the welfare state, felt the worst effects of neoliberal ideologies. In a neoliberal state, "economic productivity is seen to come not from government investment in education, but from transforming education into a product that can be bought and sold" (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 254). Therefore schools, like other public services, which were once essential to the collective well being of the country, were now managed within a business model.

Another consequence of neoliberalism on education was an emphasis on competition and increased accountability (Davies & Bansel, 2007). In 1983, the Reagan administration launched the now infamous report titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, which blamed public schools for the economic decline of the United States (Symcox, 2009). This report organized a movement of reform that would change the accountability and organization of public schools in the next decades (Symcox, 2009). The movement that began in the 1980s, not only placed economic competition on the political agenda, but it used a business model to replace the democratic purpose of schooling (Symcox, 2009).

The role of public schools, as a product of a democratic state, came under direct attack during this time period. Instead, "schools were increasingly viewed as production

facilities whose primary mission was providing industry with its required human capital" (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006, p. 2). The view of students as human capital transformed the earlier perspective of a quality education from that of a student as a political participant to a view of the student as an entrepreneur seeking to maximize his/her fiscal return on an investment (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). The ideology of neoliberalism controlled the political consciousness of Americans and convinced citizens that the individualism granted through neoliberalism would transfer to greater choices and freedoms (Davies & Bansel, 2007).

Davies and Bansel (2007) stated that "the so-called passive citizen of the welfare state becomes the autonomous active citizen with rights, duties, obligations and expectations—the citizen as active entrepreneur of the self; the citizen as morally superior" (p. 252). Therefore citizens were more willing to take responsibility over areas that were once considered the responsibility of the government (Davies & Bansel, 2007). In communities, parents concerned about the economic futures of their children in an economy that is increasingly characterized by low wages, connected to the neoliberal discourse (Apple, 2006). As a result, parents were led to believe that school choice would provide their children the opportunities that public schools had not provided in the last 30 years. Not only has neoliberalism prompted the decline of the welfare state, and the quality of life of the working class, it has also prompted the ideals of school choice and the privatization of education.

Ideology of Choice

One of the effects of a neoliberal economic theory is the focus on school choice. By definition, school choice is the arrangement, which grants parents the opportunity to choose a school for their child instead of having one school or school system assigned to them (Cibulka, 2000). The ideology of choice and competition created educational reforms focused on alleviating costs for the government while providing parents and students with different opportunities for schooling through private schools, school vouchers, charter schools, and for-profit contract schools (Cibulka, 2000). This section explores how the ideology of school choice transformed the public educational system in the United States.

In their groundbreaking book *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, Chubb and Moe (1990) outlined the factors that have contributed to the need for school choice. According to the authors, the root of the problem resided in an educational system that had not improved despite the aggressive government resources that had been available to schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The authors further blamed the poor performance of schools on the fact that the educational system was built on the democratic participation of lawmakers (Chubb & Moe, 1990). By democratic participation, they mainly blamed unions and the systems that have led schools to become large bureaucracies spending the government's money and pleasing teachers over students and parents (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The ideology created by school choice treated parents as customers and schools as firms competing in a free-market. The ideals of school choice were grounded in the economic benefits of providing choice and in the detriment of a democratic system that

included teachers' unions as participants. It is important to understand that this ideology led to the creation of charter schools and to the fueling of an anti-teacher union agenda.

Charter School Reform

The ideologies of school choice, fostered by a neoliberal economic theory, caused the publics' declining confidence in the public educational system. What followed was a "three-pronged" approach to privatize public education through vouchers, charter schools, and ultimately a war against teachers and their unions (Symcox, 2009). The media further influenced this perception by showcasing student violence, falling standards, illiteracy, and the concern over the changing American values creating further suspicion about the public school system (Apple, 2006). The neoliberalist ideologies that gave rise to charter schools ultimately created an anti-public, anti-government sentiment that blamed teachers and students for the failures of schools.

In 1991, Minnesota was the first state to pass a charter school law. The law called for a type of school exempt from the bureaucracies of the larger public school system that would allow for innovation in teaching therefore reaching the most underserved students (Wells, Slayton, & Scott, 2002). In addition, the Minnesota law viewed charter schools as a way to create competition between public schools. Charter schools opened under the principle of entrepreneurialism, valuing competition over collaboration. They offered the impression that the country could be held together by individual pursuits versus the purpose of providing a common good (Wells, et al., 2002). Because the public bought into the ideals of school choice propelled by a neoliberalist agenda, the charter movement

has expanded to over 40 states and Washington D.C., where 3 out of 10 students attend a charter school (Weil, 2009).

Although the charter movement flourished under the ideals of neoliberalism, there has been a wide range of political and philosophical representations of charter school advocates. They have ranged from "neoconservative members of the religious right to more leftist and progressive educators who seek autonomy from a state-run system to provide viable educational alternatives to students who have not succeeded in the traditional educational system" (Wells et al., 2002, p. 345). The fact that charter schools have various political beginnings has allowed charter schools to have a wide-ranging acceptance and bipartisan support throughout the country (Wells et al., 2002). Yet because charter schools were founded in a political climate focused on school choice and neoliberal economics, their existence has remained controversial to defenders of public education, primarily the teachers' unions.

Al Shanker's vision. It was the president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Albert Shanker, who first popularized the idea of charter schools in a 1988 speech given in Minnesota. The AFT is the largest and most actively involved of the two national teacher unions. He asked for "a new kind of school governance framework under which successful teachers would become 'empowered' to create innovative programs at existing schools—but only with the express approval of their union" (Malin & Kerchner, 2006, p. 889). By asking for an educational reform focused on local control, he placed blame on the failure of public education on the system rather than on teachers (Malin & Kerchner, 2006). His vision was partly influenced by

governmental pressures, specifically the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which focused on the failure of public education in the accountability of schools and teachers. In addition to governmental pressures was his disapproval of a bureaucratic, top-down approach to education representative of both districts and unions. He envisioned a new charter school reform system centered on the role of the teachers' contract, which would "go beyond collective bargaining to the achievement of true teacher professionalism" (Gyurko, 2008, p. 6 cited in Kahlenberg, 2007). Therefore, charter schools would exist as self-governed and teacher-managed public schools within the traditional public school system.

Shanker's vision was also inspired by his own desire to increase teacher professionalism (Gyurko, 2008). He argued that schools utilizing teachers' voices as tenets of teacher professionalism would do better in the long run. Overall he knew that having a more specialized emphasis on teaching would make the workforce more attractive to capable and innovative educators (Gyurko, 2008). He was confident that his vision for charter schools would deepen teacher professionalism and ultimately provide educational opportunities that would reach the overwhelming majority of students in public schools (Gyurko, 2008).

Three key events marked the evolution of Shanker's original charter school vision (Gyurko, 2008). First was the movement to privatize public education. Publications, such as Chubb and Moe's (1990) *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* and *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) along with Friedman's (1962) work, all influenced a complete restructuring of public education to include

vouchers and competition based on market principles (Gyurko, 2008). The second cause for the reversal of Shanker's vision was Minnesota's 1991 charter school law which allowed education corporations, independent from districts and free from pre-existing collective bargaining agreements, to open charter schools (Gyurko, 2008). The 1991 law opened the door for future chartering states to keep unions out of charter school reform. The third event was the nationwide launch of the Edison for-profit charter schools (Gyurko, 2008). Although the Edison schools did not become as widespread as they set out to be, they opened the door for charter schools to utilize money from private corporations to operate public schools. Shanker's original vision for a collaboration between innovative, autonomous, charter schools and teacher unions was turned into a plan to privatize public education leaving teachers' unions out of the equation. In order to assess the impact of the charter movement on teachers' unions, it was important to analyze the roots of unionization and the history of collective bargaining that have shaped working conditions for teachers in the last 40 years.

Unionism

History of Teacher Unionization

The two major teacher unions in the United States, the National Education Association (NEA), founded in 1857, and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), founded in 1916, long predate the start of collective bargaining (Kahlenberg, 2006). The NEA was originally founded as a professional organization of teachers and administrators, with administrators holding 90 percent of the leadership positions (Kahlenberg, 2006). Teachers did not view themselves as a union due to the

collaboration between teachers and administrators as well as the view of teaching as a white-collar profession (Kahlenberg, 2006). The AFT was originally founded as a charter of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), a collection of private sector unions. Initially the AFL was not interested in unionizing teachers, as teachers were primarily college-educated women (Murphy, 1990). After years of attempting to organize a teachers' union, Chicago teachers formed the AFT and used their influence to attend board meetings, ask for salary increases and to elect teacher representatives to the school board (Kahlenberg, 2006). What followed was a movement to give teachers, mainly a feminized profession, the right to sit at the table with the managers of public education.

Collective bargaining rights. By the mid-twentieth century, there existed many obstacles that pushed teachers towards collective bargaining. First, although teachers were college educated, their pay was about $400 less than the income for the average factory worker (Murphy, 1990). Second, teachers were frustrated with poor working conditions including no breaks due to extra student supervision, long staff meetings, and sexist rules banning pregnant teachers from the classroom (Kahlenberg, 2006). Without a collective bargaining agreement, teachers faced discrimination, unfair placements, and other abuses by their administrators (Murphy, 1990).

Between the 1930s and the 1950s few states had adopted collective bargaining rights for their teachers. In New York, teachers questioned whether having collective bargaining agreements would allow them to retain their status as professionals (Kahlenberg, 2006). After several strikes, walkouts, and organized demonstrations, New York teachers adopted collective bargaining rights in 1961. In the following year,

President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10988 allowing all federal employees to bargain collectively (Murphy, 1990). The work of teachers, as unionized public employees, championed the way for federal employees and workers rights nationwide.

Despite the long history of teachers' unions, their true impact in the education realm came with the adoption of collective bargaining in the 1960s (Kahlenberg, 2006). Some of the rights they gained included higher wages, reduced class size, tougher discipline policies for students, and an increased quality of professional development (Kahlenberg, 2006). Although teachers' unionized to improve working conditions, many feared that they had traded their professionalism and public trust in exchange for unionization (Cooper & Sureau, 2008). Because following a collective bargaining agreement would create more rules and regulations, teachers also feared losing the autonomy that identified teaching as a profession. In addition to the teachers' own concerns in unionization, there were many critics of teacher unions who saw unions as giving rise to mediocrity in public education.

Even in the early years, opponents of unions argued that the contracts reflected the self-interests of teachers rather than the needs of children (Kahlenberg, 2006). They pointed out that the frequency of teacher strikes and the strict provisions in firing incompetent teachers were detrimental to students. In addition, with the increased bureaucracy of school districts, teachers' unions became so highly regulated that many found it difficult to tailor unions' efforts to the needs of students, families, and the community (Kerchner & Koppich, 1993). Therefore both unions and school districts became a "maze of rules and hierarchies" that could not be reformed without the other

changing (Kerchner and Koppich, 1993, p. 2). Charter schools, and other reform efforts, propelled by a neoliberal agenda in education, have forced teacher unions to reexamine their role in the future of educational reform.

Models of Unionism

Industrial unionism. The history of collective bargaining in education narrates the fight for justice and the demand for teacher professionalism. Industrial unionism referred to as "bread-and-butter" unionism, focuses on improving wages, working conditions, and job security (Kerchner & Koppich, 1993). In a traditional labor-management relationship, the role of the worker is to obey the management and to negotiate agreements that protect them from the decisions made by management (Malin & Kerchner, 2006). Because schools are places where parents, students, and teachers work alongside the management, the industrial model does not always fit with the needs of schools.

Although it was necessary to fight for teachers' rights, many believed that the traditional model of unionism created during the 1960s and 1970s might not fit the needs of teaching in the 21st century. In a 1997 speech, then NEA President Bob Chase, spoke about reinventing teacher unions for a new era (Petersen, 1997). He argued that the NEA had to transform the traditional labor-management opposition, take community and parental concerns about public schools more seriously, and collaborate with school districts to promote educational reform (Petersen, 1997). He further claimed that it was time for "teacher unions to take responsibility for the quality of teachers and for the learning environment in schools" (Petersen, 1997, p. 1). After Chases' comments, many

teacher unions criticized his speech and argued that by critiquing current practices, Chase was helping destroy public education and the rights that teachers had earned in the previous decades (Petersen, 1997).

Others have argued that unions have overlooked professional matters, and instead have prioritized protections of wages, benefits, and seniority (Petersen, 1997). In addition, Malin and Kerchner (2006) believed that because industrial unionism does not allow teachers to take risks in the formation of organizations, they are not included as change agents in reform movements. On the other hand, Gyurko (2008) believed that criticism of the traditional industrial style unionism ultimately "ignores, the historical factors and working conditions that launched teacher unionism and underestimates the influence of scale when negotiations occur at the district level" (p. 29). Because the industrial model of unionism may not fit the needs of teachers in 21st century schools, other models have been proposed.

Professional unionism. In the last two decades, reformists, economists, educators, and researchers have attempted to discuss new models of unionism that were more tailored towards improving the profession with a focus on collaboration and student needs. In their description of Professional Unionism, Kerchner, and Koppich (1993) advocated for unions and management to learn to work differently, and to work on reform together. Because teacher unions have prioritized preventing problems in working conditions, they have not been able to create sustainable change within schools to affect the instruction in classrooms (Kerchner & Koppich, 1993). The authors believed in a need to move away from adversarial relationships and engage in

professional unionism, merging the notions of dignity and productiveness (Kerchner & Koppich, 1993). They further stated that, "the professionalization of teaching calls for moving educational decisions, including the allocation of resources, into the hands of the people who carry out the work" (p. 12). Although some educational reformers preferred this model, many criticized this model due to its lack of focus on looking at the disparities within public schools and the communities.

Social justice unionism. In his 1997 piece in *Rethinking Schools*, Bob Petersen argued for Social Justice Unionism, a model based on a statement issued by 29 American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Educational Association (NEA) activists attending a *Rethinking Our Unions* workshop. The organizers called for a new unionism focusing on the needs of the community and the role of unions in changing communities. For example, although Chase, former NEA President, gave a strong speech about changing unionism, he failed to mention racial disparities in schools particularly to the increasing white teaching force to an increasingly ethnic student population (Petersen, 1997). In addition, social justice unionism would create parent and community coalitions that would promote equality for all and not just focus on the unions' political gains through support of local elections (Petersen, 1997). The professional and social justice models provided alternatives for teachers' unions who did not find a fit within the industrial model. Yet neither model created the reform envisioned because the neoliberal ideologies that prompted charter schools completely kept teachers' unions out of the equation.

Working Conditions in Charter Schools

The California Charter Schools Act of 1992 called for schools that created new opportunities for teachers to develop as professionals and to be responsible for their learning within their school sites (Vasudeva & Grutzik, 2002). In the 20 years since the Act, it has been difficult to provide concrete effects of the charter movement on students, schools, and communities. Several studies have pointed to inconclusive achievement results of charter school students and other studies pointed to the implications of charter school policy and its effects on public education. Despite the burgeoning research on charter schools, few studies have looked at the working conditions in charter schools. Even fewer studies have looked at the sustainability of teachers in charter schools and how this movement may be affecting the role of teachers in public education.

Professionalism in Charter schools

In 1998, the UCLA Charter School Study reported various findings on the effects of the then recently born charter school movement on ten California school districts. The team conducted over 400 interviews of districts, charter school leaders, parents, and teachers to examine how the charter movement had affected the system of California public schools. The study found that teachers' professional identities were tied to traditional public education based institutions rather than in new high levels of reform expected from the Charter Schools Act (UCLA Charter School Study, 1998; Vasudeva & Grutzik, 2002). They found no distinction between teachers' working conditions in start up schools (schools starting as charters) and conversion schools (schools converted to charters from traditional district schools) except that the conversion charter schools

remained under the teachers' union and most startup charter schools did not become unionized (UCLA Charter School Study, 1998). The research team found that although charter school teachers enjoyed the freedom and empowerment of working within smaller school communities, teachers faced difficult working conditions (UCLA Charter School Study, 1998). Across all 17 schools in the study, teachers described their conflicts in choosing between the positive attributes of working in a charter school and the possibility of teacher "burn-out" due to the added responsibilities, lack of time and overall exhaustive workload (UCLA Charter School Study, 1998). In addition, many teachers, mostly veteran teachers, questioned the sustainability of the charter school workload (UCLA Charter School Study, 1998).

The UCLA study provided a basis in examining the working conditions of teachers in charter schools yet this study is over 13 years old. In addition, the number of charter schools has increased and the types of charter schools have expanded since then. It also did not explore the role of the teachers' union in impacting the working conditions of teachers in the conversion schools. Although this study provided many insights into the early charter school movement in California, it was too early in the movement to truly examine the impact of charter schools on the teaching profession.

In a study of three different types of public schools, Johnson and Landman (2000) uncovered the working conditions of teachers in deregulated schools. They studied six deregulated schools, two state-sponsored charter schools, two in-district charter schools, and two public school-based management (pilot) schools in Boston. All of the schools served similar groups of students. In their interviews, they found that the charter schools

were the least favorable for teachers. Charter school teachers shared concerns about the scope and definition of their responsibilities, their role in the design and governance of the school, their right to raise complaints, and the guarantee of job security and fair pay (Johnson & Landman, 2000). The authors concluded that the flexibility granted to charter schools was not automatically extended to teachers. Because the power in charters went to the board and the principal, the teachers had no guarantee about the nature of their workplace and whether it would be fair, responsive, and supportive (Johnson & Landman, 2000). When teachers spoke out about their working conditions, their complaints fueled a suspicion that undermined the teachers' loyalty to the organization (Johnson & Landman, 2000). Therefore, instead of fighting for their rights, most teachers left within the first two years.

The other deregulated schools in this study, although somewhat autonomous, did not experience the same type of challenges. Both the pilot schools, and the in-district charter schools offered the teachers job security and predictable pay and benefits provided by the teachers' union (Johnson & Landman, 2000). Although the authors acknowledged the efforts of teachers' unions in deregulated schools, they argued that the restrictions of unions and districts alike continued to limit the district schools from providing the most responsive education for students by hiring like-minded teachers who could work towards a single mission (Johnson & Landman, 2000).

In 2003 Malloy and Wohlstetter studied the working conditions of 40 teachers at six charter schools in the Los Angeles area. The authors asked what the appeal was for teachers to choose charter schools over traditional public schools. In their review of

policy, previous literature and a case study of charter school teachers, the authors found that charter school teachers generally worked longer hours and more days, received less job security, and generally received less pay than their traditional public school counterparts (Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003). The teachers in this study acknowledged that part of the reason they felt an increased workload was that they served on committees and managed additional responsibilities that were part of a shared-school governance model (Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003). Despite the challenges, charter school teachers in their study generally enjoyed the autonomy of working at a smaller school and the collaboration of working with like-minded colleagues (Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003). The authors concluded that teachers in their study valued their voice in decision-making more than a dispute over their working conditions.

Because charter schools were born out of a belief in teacher innovation, teachers would be at the heart of charter school success. Despite the promise of innovation, Malloy and Wohlstetter (2003) found that limited research had been conducted on teachers in charter schools as well as the motivations of teachers in charter schools versus traditional public schools. They concluded that somehow the benefits of autonomy have not been used to improve the "bread and butter" issues that would keep teachers committed to working in charter schools. In addition, they found that although the starting pay for charter school teachers was equal to that of district teachers, the more experienced teachers earned less in charter schools than in traditional public schools (Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003). Although the teachers in this study valued the autonomy of working at a charter school, they did not fight over their working conditions and chose

to leave the school instead. Similar to the 1998 UCLA Charter School study, Malloy and Wohlstetter (2003) acknowledged the role of unions in charter schools, yet they did not distinguish between unionized teachers and non-unionized teachers within their findings.

In a more recent study, Malin and Kerchner (2006) presented a review of labor law and discussed whether charter law was compatible with labor law. The authors reviewed literature on working conditions and stated that many charter school teachers valued the trade-off of more autonomy and leadership in schools over their job security. Teachers in their review acknowledged that turnover was higher in charter schools. In addition, teachers in their review knew that they were taking a risk because they had less job security and their job depended on the success of the school rather than on policies related to job permanency (Malin & Kerchner, 2006). The authors contended that although teachers gave up their rights to job security they were working towards sharing in the risks of the organization moving towards creating change.

Teacher retention. The previous studies focused on the working conditions at charter schools, which promised professionalism and levels of autonomy different from that of district schools. Still, some of the findings pointed to factors that limited the sustainability of teaching in charter schools. In a report from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2005) charter school leaders acknowledged that hiring high numbers of young and inexperienced teachers led to an energetic and vibrant staff, yet they found that it also led to a higher rate of teacher turnover. The following studies further shared findings of teacher retention in charter schools.

In a case study of seven charter school teachers Margolis (2005) found that the freedoms associated with being a charter school teacher, became burdens for the teachers in his study. Out of the seven teachers who began the project, only three remained at the end of the year. The author suggested that although "choice and competition may lure teachers to a charter school—these business-world facets of school life are not often enough to sustain teachers long term" (Margolis, 2005, p. 105). He further argued that the market-like environment of charter schools may not fit with a teaching force that naturally seeks community and collaboration to sustain itself (Margolis, 2005). Although the study focused on a few teachers, the findings were similar to other studies conducted with a larger number of participants.

Miron and Applegate (2007) conducted a survey study of 2,532 charter school teachers in six states. The authors found that although teachers chose charter schools for their mission-oriented environments, teachers found a discrepancy between the expectations of the school and the reality of how the schools operated (Miron & Applegate, 2007). They found that attrition rates for charter schools ranged from 20% annually for older, experienced teachers to 50% for teachers under the age of 30 (Miron & Applegate, 2007). The authors argued that the high attrition rates in charter schools led to a difficulty in creating professional learning communities of teachers and would be a future obstacle for the charter movement to fulfill its promise (Miron & Applegate, 2007). Although this study utilized a large sample, the teachers were from six states with limited numbers of charter schools and did not include the states with larger numbers of charter schools like Texas, California, and Arizona.

In a study for the National Center on School Choice at Vanderbilt University, Stuit and Smith (2010) used data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey to compare the turnover rates at charter schools and traditional public schools. Stuit and Smith (2010) found that teacher turnover in charter schools was significantly higher than in traditional public schools. In addition, teachers named dissatisfaction with working conditions as well as involuntary attrition due to lack of job security as the important reasons why they left charter schools (Stuit & Smith, 2010). Their findings point to detrimental effects of turnover for charter schools and students. The authors argued that turnover affected the school's ability to build cohesion and trust amongst the staff. Another significant impact of higher teacher turnover was its effect on students. They found that inexperienced teachers more frequently taught students at the charter schools than students in traditional public schools (Stuit & Smith, 2010). Therefore, students in charter schools were less likely to ever be taught by an experienced teacher. Despite the important findings regarding teaching in charter schools, the authors did not acknowledge the role of unionization in any of the school settings.

A PACE (Policy Analysis for California Education) study out of UC Berkeley (Newton et al., 2012) provided the most recent quantitative study on teacher retention in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The study found that teachers in charter schools were more likely to leave the profession than teachers in the district schools. Younger teachers were more likely to leave the classroom and Hispanic teachers were more likely to stay in the classroom if they worked in largely Hispanic-serving schools (Newton et

al., 2012). This study did not follow the teachers to uncover where they went after they left charter schools. Although these studies provided important insights into the professional lives of charter school teachers, they did not include teacher unions as an option in negotiating better working conditions.

Unions in Charter Schools

The 1991 Minnesota Charter School Law created a de facto expectation that charter school teachers and their professional lives would be left out of the discussion. California, the second state to adopt a charter school law, continued the trend and did not require charter schools to collectively bargain with their teachers. Charter schools asked for more control of local schools without the support of the teachers' unions. The teachers' unions, seeing the charter schools as deregulated, and corporate-sponsored schools, in turn rejected the expansion of charter schools. Most charter school operators opened schools without a unionized teaching force. There are few unionized charter schools and the unionization of teachers in charter schools has been a slow process.

Green Dot Public Schools. In Los Angeles, Green Dot Public Schools (GDPS) founder, Steve Barr, believed that unionization of his teaching force would be vital in order for his CMO to function. Barr argued that, "Creating non-union jobs in a union-dominated industry is difficult to think of doing. If you are going to reform urban education, you need a union component to do it" (NewSchools Venture Fund, 2007, p. 4). Green Dot operates a CMO of 17 schools in which all teachers were unionized with a CTA/NEA affiliation and with a much thinner contract than the local teachers' contract (Kerchner, Menefee-Libey, Mulfinger, & Clayton, 2008). The story of GDPS may be an

example for other charter schools seeking to improve the working conditions of teachers yet there do exist challenges in this unionized CMO.

A study by the NewSchools Venture Fund (2007) found that by having a union contract, the teachers at GDPS had a higher sense of security and control, representation, and respect. Yet, they have faced challenges in that many teachers do not find the time to be active members in the union due to the heavy workload of working for Green Dot (NewSchools Venture Fund, 2007). Green Dot's founder, Steve Barr, suggested, "Most of our teachers hate UTLA and that's one of the reasons they come to our schools, but they don't come because they want to be union activists—they just want to work with the kids" (NewSchools Venture Fund, 2007, p. 7). In addition to a lack of participation in the union, GDPS teachers faced similar retention levels similar to those of other charter schools in Los Angeles (NewSchools Venture Fund, 2007).

In 2008, the New York City's teachers' union, United Federation of Teachers (UFT), opened up two charter schools run by the teachers' union (Malin & Kerchner, 2006). In 2009, other charter schools voted for unionization in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York City, and all joined existing district unions (Sawchuck, 2009). In addition, instead of outright rejecting the charter school movement, both the AFT and the NEA added charter school policy requirements and focused on creating stricter charter laws in the states (Sawchuck, 2009).

Other CMO's have not been so open to unionization and opted out of the increased bureaucracy and the perceived antiquated labor practices brought on by teachers' unions (Malin & Kerchner, 2006). In 2008, charter school teachers at a KIPP

(Knowledge is Power Program) school in New York City voted to unionize under the UFT. That same year when the KIPP management discovered the teachers' organizing efforts, they placed so much pressure on the teachers that the union asked to be decertified (Sawchuck, 2009). Other charter schools across the country have confronted the union issue in various ways. Yet there exists a lack of understanding over the future of teachers' unions, and the collective bargaining rights of teachers. Randi Weingarten, former president of the AFT stated:

> Short term schools always have this sense of being on the frontier and the extra shot of adrenaline you get when you're new and trying new things…Ultimately, long term schools will not be successful if teachers do not feel good about being there (Sawchuck, 2009).

With the expansion of charter schools, and the decentralization of large public school districts, the future of the teaching profession is to be determined. The reform movements in large cities like Los Angeles and Chicago have more work to do when it comes to collaborating with teachers and teachers' unions in order to include teacher voices in the reform movement.

Reform Efforts

On September 22, 1992, California lawmakers approved the Charter Schools Act providing for the establishment of up to 100 charter schools all eligible to bypass many of the regulations required of traditional public schools. California's charter law, only the second of its kind in the nation after Minnesota, became legislation as a concession to the controversial voucher laws circulating the California assembly (Kerchner et al., 2008). Defenders of public schools, including teacher unions, criticized charter schools for inciting a movement to privatize education. Charter school supporters argued that they

offered a choice for parents and students, particularly in low-income areas. In Los Angeles, specifically, there existed a unique coincidence of interests between parents who sought an alternative to the large school district bureaucracy of the Los Angeles Unified School District, and the interests of school choice supporters. The 1980s, spurred by a free-market agenda, incited the publics' perception of a failing public education system, therefore leading to their support of privatization. This ideology set precedent for the abundance of charter schools that formed under a competitive environment, fueled by an anti-teacher union agenda. The perceived conflicting missions of both charter schools and teacher unions created a rift between the proponents of both movements without a true analysis of how both movements could work together to change the educational spectrum of Los Angeles, and how educational reforms would affect the role of the teacher as professional.

LAUSD Reform Efforts

During the early 1990s, Los Angeles was brewing with reform within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now (LEARN) and the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP) involved LAUSD educators, including the very influential teachers' union United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), civic leaders and community members to envision a less bureaucratic LAUSD (Kerchner et al., 2008). LEARN became a reform effort to decentralize the school district. LAAMP was a community-wide reform effort led by philanthropist Walter Annenberg that included a more grassroots reform including strong parental participation (Kerchner et al., 2008). After a few years of

implementation, the program had not made the impact that was anticipated. The reform efforts had cost over $100 million dollars only to be upstaged by the California Charter Act of 1992. Charter schools, although considered a parallel reform movement, eventually outlived these two reforms, leaving reform in the hands of the LAUSD school board, charter school advocates, private donors, and philanthropists and out of the hands of parents, community organizers, and the teachers' union.

Rise of charter schools in Los Angeles. In the 1993-1994 school year, LAUSD had approved 14 charter schools, enrolling almost 13,000 students (Kerchner et al., 2008). The earliest charters were conversion schools, previously existing as district schools, and converted into charter schools after 1992. These conversion schools, many part of the LEARN reform, maintained some relationship with LAUSD and their teachers remained under the UTLA contract (Kerchner et al., 2008). The independent start-up charter schools existed as autonomous entities and their employees were not employees of the district. Eventually, these independent charter schools became part of larger Charter Management Organizations (CMO's) that have created a stronger contingency of charter school power in the Los Angeles area (Kerchner et al., 2008).

Public school choice in the LAUSD. In 2009, the LAUSD school board introduced a new model of reform titled the Public School Choice (PSC) Motion. According to the LAUSD, they developed this motion to "tap into the potential wealth of innovative ideas and educational models that would help the LAUSD advance its commitment to provide a quality education for students" (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2009). In the fall of 2009, the district accepted applications from groups of

teachers (often backed by UTLA), charter schools, and other community organizations, to run and manage LAUSD schools. The schools were either existing, designated, focus schools by the superintendent or brand new sites (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2009). According to the LAUSD board, the PSC motion was designed to give parents and the public participation in the decision-making process. Once the applications were turned in, each school site would hold community meetings and elections. The election results were given to an advisory board that then made suggestions to the LAUSD school board. In a school board meeting, the school board decided which school got the bid for the disputed site (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2009). In the fall of 2010, 30 schools opened under the first round of PSC and only 4 of those schools were given to charter schools.

The first round of PSC (known as PSC 1.0) left many charter school advocates and operators wondering if the LAUSD was truly seeking reform. In June 2010, the mayor of Los Angeles, Antonio Villaraigosa urged the LAUSD school board to create a stricter more rigorous plan of action (Villaraigosa, 2010). He stated:

> Here in Los Angeles, we have some of the most innovative charter school operators in the country. They have shown us real results, and they've established proven track records of turning around schools. We should give them—and any other organization with a reform agenda and proven record of success—a chance because we cannot place the same old failing school system into brand new buildings and expect different results (Villaraigosa, 2010).

The idea that the district could and should not open up new schools nor restructure existing "failing" schools fueled the charter school movement even more. Since the establishment of this motion, the public arenas such as newspapers and blogs further fueled the adversarial relationship between charter schools and teacher unions. In

a UTLA communication to the members, the union denounced the PSC process and called it "part of the larger push nationwide to privatize public education, bring in unhealthy corporate-style competition, and weaken teacher unions" (PSC Round 3 UTLA Response, November 3, 2010). UTLA further questioned the districts' capacity to monitor the school reforms and the sustainability of the movement. Although the PSC motion led to more open discussion and participation surrounding educational reform in Los Angeles, the reform movements have yet to be determined successful in improving public schools. In addition, if the reform movements continue to create an adversarial relationship between teachers' unions and charter schools, true reform may never be realized in Los Angeles.

The Future of Charter Schools and Teacher Unions

The contentious relationship between charter schools and unions led to the formation of a 2006 symposium titled *The Future of Charter Schools and Teacher Unions*. Participants from charter schools, unions, and researchers agreed to meet after the New York UFT opened the first charter schools started by a union (Hill, Rainey, & Rotherham, 2006). This decision by a union led both camps to wonder about the common ground that existed between them and the opportunities for progressive union leaders (Hill et al., 2006). Although they found many areas for disagreement, they united against the enemy of the large district bureaucracies (Hill et al., 2006). In addition, they agreed that unionization of charter schools held the possibility of transforming teachers from employees to partners in educational reform (Hill et al., 2006).

Public debates about the role of charter schools and teacher unions in reforming public education have also reached new levels. Early in 2010, renowned public education advocate and researcher Diane Ravitch published her book *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education.* The book came as an attack on testing, and described how competition and privatization were ruining the opportunities for most underserved students. In addition, Ravitch came out in full support of unionization placing value on the historical and societal impact of collective bargaining on maintaining teaching as a middle class profession.

In the summer of 2010, the controversial documentary *Waiting for Superman,* portrayed a different picture (Chilcott & Guggenheim, 2010). By following the aspirations of children in public, charter, and public schools, the film painted a grim picture of public education. In less than 90 minutes, the film delivered a portrait of teacher unions as leading to the demise of the public education system. Another strong message of the film was that charter schools were the ultimate saviors of inner-city students. Although Ravitch (2010) and Chilcott and Guggenheim (2010) spurred public interest in the issue of public education, they further polarized the two sides and neglected to show how to bring back a democratic and collaborative public school system that works to support the educational aspirations of students.

Further Research

Overall, the participants of the 2006 symposium determined that more original research was needed to understand these tensions and conflicts. They acknowledged the

differences among charter schools and the different roles of charter schools within individual states. They asked for exemplars and models of schools that have thrived under unionization, schools with innovative agreements, and models of teacher-led schools. Rather than working in separate camps, they agreed to act independently to demonstrate their own progress in the reform movement. Unions asked charter school leaders to stop abusive labor practices and discontinue the use of at-will employment. In turn, charter school leaders asked unions to stop campaigns that discredit charter schools and charter laws and begin seeing the charter schools as collaborators. Both sides agreed that the dialogue was the beginning step and that each side could do its part to create change. Still, it has been 6 years since this symposium and little work has been accomplished in creating a reform based on the democratic values of public education. Due to the complex and conflicted history between charter schools and teacher unions, it is relevant and timely to understand the experiences of teachers who unionized while being charter school teachers.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 provided a review of the literature depicting the historical underpinnings of education in this country pertinent to the future of school reforms with the inclusion of charter schools. In summary, two of the largest competing forces are school choice, fueled by a neoliberal ideology, and the teachers' union fueled by the ideology of democracy. Teachers have gained much needed rights in the last 40 years, yet there is a need to include the expansion of their professional rights alongside the improvement of working conditions. At the same time, the charter school laws have

denied teachers of basic rights therefore pushing back the gains made through collective bargaining. Though various studies have depicted the challenges of teachers' working conditions in charter schools, much of the literature has not provided an analysis of teachers' experiences in charter schools when they work with the intervention of a teachers' union. Furthermore, most studies have not utilized the voices of teachers themselves to describe their experiences.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology utilized to complete this study. This study was a qualitative case study of teachers in a charter school who unionized and remained unionized even when the management opposed unionization. In order to include the voices of teachers as they recounted their experiences in charter schools, the following research questions guided this study:

1. Why did the teachers at Hope Charter School decide to unionize five years after the charter school was established?
2. How has the culture of choice shaped the relationship between the charter school management and the teachers' union at Hope Charter School?
3. What is the model of unionism at Hope Charter School and what has it accomplished?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

In an era of school choice when a neoliberal ideology dominates public education, charter schools appear to be a viable choice for fixing inner-city public schools. Yet from the inception, most charter schools have employed a deregulated, non-unionized work force often leading to challenging working conditions, high teacher turnover, ultimately challenging the traditional role of the public school teacher. The neoliberal agenda has in turn created a full-fledged attack on teachers' unions suggesting that a unionized teaching force cannot co-exist within the reform of public schools.

This case study documented the unique experiences of current and former charter school teachers who decided to unionize albeit challenging the culture of choice prevalent in the charter school movement. Through a qualitative design, I utilized the voices of teachers to provide a glimpse into the working culture established in one charter school. Because the charter school movement is such a new yet rapidly growing movement in educational reform, it is vital to learn from the experiences of teachers that are working in these deregulated environments.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the methodology utilized to approach the research questions. In addition, I described why a qualitative methodology is the best fit to answer the research questions in this study. Then I described the level of analysis utilized in order to create a case study of this teachers' union. Finally, I concluded by

listing the various threats to the credibility, transferability, and dependability that are part of the study.

Research Questions

In order to explore the experiences of unionized teachers in a charter school, I posed the following questions:

1. Why did the teachers at Hope Charter School decide to unionize five years after the charter school was established?
2. How has the culture of choice shaped the relationship between the charter school management and the teachers' union at Hope Charter School?
3. What is the model of unionism at Hope Charter School and what has it accomplished?

Research Design

Qualitative Methodology

In order to explore the complex and rich experiences of teachers within the charter school movement, I conducted a qualitative case study. Qualitative research is "based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting in their social worlds" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Instead of determining correlations or comparisons, the qualitative methodology documented a "slice of life." Therefore, this qualitative research demonstrated concern in understanding behavior, experiences, and the meaning people have constructed from their own realities (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1998). By conducting a qualitative study, I provided a realistic description of the teachers' experiences in their own words.

The main benefit to conducting a qualitative study rested with the credible results and theories based on experiences, an opportunity to improve practice, and an ability to collaborate with the participants rather than just study them (Maxwell, 1996). Maxwell (1996) stated that qualitative work emphasizing the perspective of the teachers and school settings usually had more potential for informing educational practitioners. Furthermore, he blamed the lack of impact of educational research on educational practice, on the fact that quantitative work is disconnected with the realities and experiences of schools (Maxwell, 1996). Because previous studies of teachers in charter schools have not documented the experiences of teachers from their perspective and through their voices, the qualitative design of this study was crucial to providing that insight for the field of education. In order to truly explore the environment that these teachers experienced, qualitative methods were the most appropriate for this study.

Case study design. In addition to employing a qualitative methodology, this study utilized a case study design. Case studies are detailed examinations of one setting or subject within a particular space (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Merriam (1998) stated that a case study is a single unit of study that is defined and bounded. She argued that, "by concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). Rather than using statistics as a measure for educational inquiry, case studies provide a true understanding of what goes on in schools (Yin, 2005). Because this study focused on a unique environment of a unionized charter school, a case study approach was the most appropriate design.

Merriam (1998) defined case studies as using three special features. First, qualitative case studies can be characterized as being *particularistic*. Particularistic identifies the case study as focusing on one particular event and creates a model design for solving small, practical problems (Merriam, 1998). Second, she characterized case studies as being *descriptive*. The descriptive feature suggests that the case study will produce rich, thick descriptions, similar to those produced in anthropological research (Merriam, 1998). Finally, she described case studies as *heuristic*. By heuristic she argued that the case study could provide new meaning to expand the researcher's understanding or confirm what is already known (Merriam, 1998). Due to the lack of qualitative research that explored the experiences of charter school teachers, this case study design provided the most powerful insight about the experiences of teachers and the culture of a unionized charter school.

The intervention of a teachers' union in a charter school created a unique situation that is fitting for a case study design. The current research on teachers in unionized charter schools is limited. Furthermore, this study documented the experiences of teachers who chose to unionize and create an independent union after the school had been established. Merriam (1998) stated that case studies could provide insights that can help structure future research in order to advance the field's knowledge base. Because substantial research on teachers who unionized in charter schools is lacking, the case study design proved to be most useful in documenting the experiences of this unique group of teachers. In addition, the case study served to connect the experiences of these

teachers to the experiences of other charter school teachers and other unionized teachers, ultimately connecting them to the broader world that impacts them.

Research Setting

Hope Charter School. Hope Charter School opened its doors in the year 2000 with two small campuses located in a densely populated, area of Los Angeles. The next year, it opened an additional site 3 miles west of the first locations. By 2012, Hope Charter School became a charter management organization (CMO) that educated over 2,500 students, in grades K-12, on five campuses. Ninety-eight percent of the student population in K-8 was categorized as economically disadvantaged (Title 1) and 48% of students in K-8 were classified as English Language Learners (ELLs). In comparison to similar schools, all of the Hope Charter schools ranked 10 out of 10 on the Academic Performance Index (API measures are an outcome of California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999). In its 11 years of existence, the Hope Charter School has become a highly-regarded and well-respected CMO in the Los Angeles area.

Hope Charter School Teachers Association (HCSTA). The high levels of success reached by Hope Charter School came at a great cost to its teaching force who expressed difficult working conditions and high turnover year to year. In order to address the working conditions at HCS, teachers began discussions around unionization in the 2004-2005 school year. They met with teacher union leaders from United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) and from a teachers' union representing another charter organization in Los Angeles. After a few months of dialogue and deliberation, teachers

voted and formed an independent association through the California Teachers Association (CTA), a National Education Association (NEA) affiliate.

The Hope Charter School Teachers Association (HCSTA) created its own bylaws and governance structure based on the unique needs of its teachers. In addition, from its inception, the leaders agreed that teachers would have a choice to join the union and that it would be the union's duty to convince teachers about the benefits of membership. A little over 50% (50% plus 1 is needed to approve the union) of teachers signed cards to approve the union, leading to the negotiation of its first collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in 2006. The first contract negotiations covered an 18-month period of contentious deliberation. The formation years for this small teachers' union proved to be difficult and by the end of the first year, even before the contract negotiations had finalized, most of the union leadership had left the school. Only a few teachers remained to continue the work that teachers had originally envisioned. This study documented the initiation of this union, the experiences of the teachers who founded it, and the values of the current teachers who remained active members in the union.

Participants and Sampling Criteria

This case study employed a convenience and purposive sampling in order to ensure that teachers who could speak about the issues were part of the sample. I emailed five teachers initially to set up interviews in person. During the data collection process, I identified two other teachers that were brought up in some of the interviews. I contacted these two teachers and conducted one interview in person and another one on the telephone. Seven teachers in total took part in interviews about the formation of the

union. These teachers were chosen based on their a) availability and b) their involvement in the first years of unionization (most represented the two campuses highly involved in the unionization efforts). The teachers were all part of the founding union governance as president, bargaining team chair, site representatives, and bargaining team members. Because many members of the founding leadership left within the first year of the union's formation, they were teachers who were no longer employed by Hope Charter School. Two teachers continued to teach in other districts, two are school site administrators, one is a teacher coach at a charter school, and the remaining two are pursuing careers in non-profit work. Out of the seven teachers, three are Chicana/o, and the other four are White. Although some teachers are no longer in the profession, all of them had taught for at least 5 years before leaving Hope Charter School.

The focus groups were comprised of current teachers selected based on three criteria: a) current teachers at one of the Hope Charter School campuses, b) taught longer than one school year at HCS, and c) active union members or leaders in HCSTA. Therefore, teachers were selected based on having some knowledge and experience of the union and Hope Charter School. Three teachers who participated in the focus groups were interviewed before the focus group in order to allow for opportunities to triangulate.

The sampling was conducted in an open invitation; thus, the sampling was convenience and purposive. Teachers received an open invitation through email and were contacted if they replied to the invitation. Since there were not enough replies, I utilized the snowball sampling strategy and asked teachers interested to recommend or nominate other teachers for the study. I emailed the teachers who expressed interest the

date, time, and location. I promised them a 60 minute time limit with a light dinner included. Then, I formed two focus groups for a total of nine teachers from mixed grade levels and mixed campuses. All of the five campuses were represented in the focus groups. In addition, teaching experience levels varied and diverse teacher training experiences were representative of the actual teaching force at Hope Charter School. In order to capture the experiences of these teachers, I utilized a qualitative methodology and a case study design to present the data.

Access

Access to the research sites and the participants was a vital component to accomplishing the procedures in this study. In order to begin the research, I contacted the executive director to explain the basis of my study. I emphasized that all of the research would be conducted outside of the parameters of the school day and outside of teachers' workdays. Because I have been a teacher at one of the campuses for the last 10 years, I had a relationship with the executive director, the principals of the campuses, and all of the teachers that became participants in this study. The relationship with the school leadership allowed me the opportunity to use my classroom for the focus groups.

In addition to being a teacher, I was a founder of the union and have been a leader of the union for the last 5 years. Although I have not been part of the union leadership for the last year, I continued to attend meetings of the union leadership. Being a former leader allowed me access to the founding documents of the union and to the founding members who had left the school. In order to collect the data necessary for this case

study, I utilized my role as a teacher and a union founder to gain access to the site and the participants.

Methods of Data Collection

Qualitative data take on many forms including "direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" obtained through interviews, observations, and various types of documents (Merriam, 1998, p. 69 as cited in Patton, 1990). Merriam (1998) suggested that the concept of data collection could be misleading because the data are not out there waiting to be collected but rather the researcher determines the uses of data based on the purpose it serves for each individual study. In order to provide a complete picture of the experiences of teachers in this study, I utilized the following methods of data collection: observations, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis.

Observations

Observational data can provide a firsthand account of the phenomenon of interest for a qualitative researcher (Merriam, 1998). In order to get a glimpse into the experiences of teachers within a unionized charter school, I collected observations through ethnographic field notes. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) defined ethnographic field notes as "accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner" (p. 5). Therefore, it was important that the field notes represented what was actually occurring versus what I imagined was occurring. As Emerson et al. (1995) stated, "writing ethnographic field notes that are sensitive to members' meanings is primarily a matter not of asking but of

inferring what people are concerned with from the specific ways in which they talk and act in a variety of natural settings" (p. 140). The observations took place at union meetings and at meetings of the union leadership. The field notes themselves provided a lens into beliefs and practices of teachers and union leadership.

Interviews

The interviews of founding members and current union members were an integral component of this study. An interview is a purposeful conversation between two people intending to gather information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Interviews provide information on past events and are the best technique to gather information directly from a source (Merriam, 1998). In this case study, interviews were a crucial component of the data collection process because I was not able to observe all of the working conditions and the experiences of the teachers at HCS. In addition because this study was about the formation of the union, I conducted retrospective interviews. The retrospective interviews provided a glimpse of past events through the eyes of the participants (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative studies, interviews are used for data collection as a way to "gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 103). Therefore the interviews provided important insights into the teachers' experiences and the culture they experienced while working at a charter school.

Hatch (2002) argued that qualitative researchers should ask open-ended questions and listen intently for cues that may reveal how the participants make sense of their experiences. Therefore, I utilized an interview protocol but I also formulated new

questions by using the cues that revealed the participants' experiences. I utilized an interview protocol, informed by the literature on charter schools, to interview seven of the teachers who founded the union (see Table 1). The interview questions were semi-structured therefore they were flexible enough to allow me to ask questions based on emerging themes from the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Participants signed an Informed Consent form and were provided with The Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights (shown in Appendices A and B, respectively). It was important to ensure that the interview was guided by a protocol, but that it was not too rigid as to limit the stories of the interviewees (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998). The interviews were all 45-60 minutes, conducted individually, outside of a school campus, and were audio recorded using the Echo pen. Despite the use of an audio recording device, I also took notes by hand to ensure accuracy in representing the experiences of the participants.

Table 1

Interview with Founding Member

1. What was your position at HCS and how many years were you in that position?
2. What was your previous experience in schools and with unions?
3. Let me take you back to the 2004-2005 school year, what was the relationship between the charter school management and the teachers before unionization?
4. What were the reasons and influences that led teachers to seek unionization?
5. How was the union started?
6. What was your role in the founding of the union?
7. What was the managements' response to unionization?
8. What was the board's response?
9. Take us through the first contract negotiation process. What was that like?
10. What do you believe were the major challenges faced by the union?
11. What were the successes of this young union?
12. In your opinion, what were the values that defined the union?
13. Charter schools are often defined as schools of choice. Can you describe your experience within the context of choice?
14. How did the culture of choice impact the development of the union?
15. What made you leave the school and/or step down from your post?
16. What would you like to think was the legacy that the founders left behind for the current teachers?
17. What would you like to know about the union in its current stage of development?

In addition to the retrospective interviews, I also conducted individual interviews with four current teachers who were also part of the founding membership and had remained active members in the union. I utilized an interview protocol (Table 2) yet some of the questions came from the themes emerging from the retrospective interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998). These teachers were chosen based on their current involvement in the union and their involvement since the initial unionization.

These interviews were also 45-60 minutes, conducted individually, outside of a school campus, and were audio recorded using the Echopen. Despite the use of an audio recording device, I also took notes by hand to ensure accuracy in representing the experiences of the participants. Later, three out of the four teachers joined the focus groups with other current teachers.

Table 2

Interview with Current Member

1. What is your current position at HCS and how many years have you been in at HCS?
2. What was your previous experience in schools and with unions?
3. How did you get involved in the teachers' union?
4. Why did you choose to get involved in the teachers' union?
5. What do you believe brings teachers to work at HCS?
6. What do you believe are the reasons teachers leave HCS?
7. What is the relationship between the charter school management and the HCSTA?
8. What is the contract negotiation process like between HCS and HCSTA?
9. Charter schools are often defined as schools of choice. Can you describe your experience within the context of choice?
10. What do you believe are the challenges faced by the teachers at HCS?
11. What do you believe are the contributions that HCSTA has made to HCS?
12. In your opinion, what are the values that define HCSTA?
13. What do you envision as the future of HCSTA?
14. Do you believe HCS teachers need a union?
15. What would you like to think was the legacy that the founders left behind for the current teachers?

Focus Groups

Hatch (2002) defined focus groups as "sets of individuals with shared experiences who sit down with a moderator to discuss a topic" (p. 24). In addition, focus groups have served to supplement other qualitative data such as interviews (Hatch, 2002). After the individual interviews with current teachers, I held focus groups with teachers who were

active members in the HCSTA. Three teachers from the interviews participated in the focus groups. The focus groups were guided by a protocol and the discussions were documented through audio recordings and notes (Table 3). The focus groups both lasted 60 minutes and were held in a classroom at one of the HCS campuses to ensure access to the participants.

Table 3

Focus Group Protocol

Culture and Environment
1. What brought you to this charter school?
2. Prior to teaching at a charter school, what environment did you expect to encounter?
3. How accurate were your expectations?
4. Charter schools are defined as schools of choice. Can you describe your experience within the context of choice?
Relationships
5. What is the relationship between and within teachers, administrators, and the board?
6. Let's talk about turnover. How much of a factor is turnover at this school?
7. In talking to teachers who no longer work here, they described the relationships they built as being the best that they had ever experienced. Yet they left. In your opinion what would keep teachers working here?
Union
8. Unions were formed to protect teachers and make them middle class professionals: What is the role of the union in this charter school? Is it needed?
9. What do you believe are the challenges currently facing the union?
10. What do you envision as the future of this union?

Bogdan and Biklen, (2007) provided guidelines for researchers before conducting focus groups. They asked that researchers, a) choose a topic that will evoke multiple perspectives, b) develop a strategy to value ideas and keep them confidential, c) build

groups of diverse participants, d) plan the sequence of the group to start with introductions and then move into the center of the topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The two focus groups were made up of nine teachers representing all five campuses and all grade levels and subject areas. In addition, all of the teachers in the focus groups were active members in the union and/or union leaders therefore they had some knowledge and experience with unions and working with each other.

At the beginning of the focus group, I handed out a demographic sheet in order to gather data from the participants without adding more time to the focus group (Figure 1). Still, I asked an initial question in the protocol that allowed teachers to introduce each other and provide background on their experiences prior to becoming teachers at HCS. The initial question allowed each person an opportunity to speak and to become comfortable with the group. Through the initial question, many themes emerged that allowed participants to respond to each other therefore, I did not have to ask all of the questions in the protocol.

Name_____Email_____

HCS campus_____ Grade Level/ Subject Area _____

Years of Teaching_____ Years at HCS_____

Previous experience with unions_____

Figure 1

Focus Group Questionnaire

Documents

Because the founding of the union occurred over 7 years ago, it was important to find other sources that told the story of the teachers' union. Merriam (1998) defined documents as ready-made sources of data that can also be defined as artifacts. Therefore I found important documents in order to describe the current and previous experiences of HCS teachers in founding their union. All of the documents were addressed to the teaching force and included the teachers' collective bargaining agreement, governing board meeting notes, letters from the union to teachers and from the management to teachers, and other forms of communication since the establishment of the teachers' union. In locating the documents, I ensured that they offered authentic and accurate representations; therefore I only utilized documents that were publicly shared (Merriam, 1998).

Methods of Data Analysis

In qualitative research, the data are mediated through the researcher who is the main vehicle for collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (1981) claimed that because the researcher processes data at an instant, he or she clarifies and summarizes the data in order to expand the understanding of the context. The researcher, as a human instrument, becomes responsive to the data, and can adapt techniques to the various circumstances (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Due to my role as a teacher and a researcher, it was important to outline the different processes I went through in order to analyze the data in this study.

Hatch (2002) described an inductive analysis as a process that starts from gathering specific elements, then finds patterns and connections in order to make general statements about the phenomena being investigated. Instead of gathering data in order to test a hypothesis, in the inductive analysis model, the theory emerged from the context of the study. The steps outlined in Hatch (2002) (see Table 4) are very comprehensive yet they give the researcher flexibility to create domains and codes that emerge from the data collected rather than from the researcher. Hatch (2002) also suggested completing these steps while collecting the data so that the researcher can observe how each part of the data collection process influences the analysis. He argued that although inductive analysis should not be used for all types of qualitative work, its strength lies in "its power to get meaning from complex data that have been gathered with a broad focus in mind" (Hatch, 2002, p. 179). The inductive analysis approach provided me the opportunity to process large amounts of data while still giving me the confidence that the data were representative of the situation I was examining.

Table 4

Steps in Inductive Analysis (Hatch, 2002)

1. Read the data and identify frames of analysis
2. Create domains based on semantic relationships discovered within frames of analysis
3. Identify salient domains, assign them a code, and put others aside
4. Reread data, refining salient domains and keeping a record of where relationships are found in the data
5. Decide if your domains are supported by the data and search data for examples that do not fit with or run counter to the relationships in your domains
6. Complete an analysis within domains
7. Search for themes across domains
8. Create a master outline expressing relationships within and among domains
9. Select data excerpts to support the elements of your outline

After I collected data from interviews, focus groups, observation field notes, and documents, I analyzed the data utilizing an inductive analysis. I began with an in-depth reading of the interview transcripts. After reading them twice, I began coding them with key words in the margins. After a few rounds of coding, I began organizing the codes into an index of codes. The index of codes included over 10 themes with 18 different domains. I utilized some of the themes coded to revise the questions for the focus groups in order to target the themes emerging from the interviews. In reading the transcripts from the focus groups, I completed the same process of reading the transcript and writing codes in the margins. I continued reading the data in order to exhaust it and find the salient domains as well as the data that countered the domains. After exhausting the transcription data, I read the documents and the observation field notes to select data that I could add to the index of codes. Because I conducted an inductive analysis of the data, all four methods of data collection contributed to creating this case study.

In analyzing data from a case study, Merriam (1998) suggested following the process of other qualitative studies but being particularly concerned with a holistic and bounded case study analysis. By seeing the case study as a bounded unit, the researcher is more likely to focus on managing the data together to find patterns and interpretations (Merriam, 1998). Therefore as I collected data, I read the data and documented the themes that emerged. I continued this process until all of the data together presented a story of the experiences of the participants in this study.

Criteria of Trustworthiness

Because qualitative studies are not experiments in design, the criteria for determining the validity and reliability of the study are different. Lincoln and Guba (1986) discussed these criteria as exploring the truth (internal validity), finding the applicability of the study (external validity), exploring the consistency (reliability or replicability), and ensuring its neutrality (objectivity). A qualitative case study that relies on studying natural settings to construct truths can be deemed trustworthy if the criteria are explored.

Credibility

The internal validity of this qualitative case study was determined by making it a credible study. Merriam (1998) argued that the research study should match the reality in order to ensure its credibility. Still, the construction of reality is multi-faceted and the researcher, as a human, interprets the reality of the participants through observations and interviews (Merriam, 1998). Although it may appear to be a challenge of qualitative research, it is actually a strength in that the researcher is closer to the data rather than if an instrument had been used (Merriam, 1998).

The literature on qualitative research pointed to criteria that enhance the credibility of a study (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 1998). The criteria include: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). By meeting the criteria, I have enhanced the credibility of my study.

Prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement refers to a "lengthy and intensive contact with the phenomena (participants) in the field" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 77). My data collection including observations, interviews, document analysis, and focus groups spanned a time period of 6 months. During that time, I spent a lot of time revisiting the data, asking questions, coding and then repeating the process. It was vital to my study that I spend time in order to find misrepresentations of the reality that I was documenting. During the six months of engagement, I was also able to find themes in the interviews and focus groups that were also emerging from the observations and document analysis. Therefore the prolonged engagement also allowed me to confirm the findings through different data.

Triangulation. Triangulation is a process of using multiple sources of data, multiple investigators or multiple methods to confirm the findings in a study (Merriam, 1998). In this study, I used multiple sources of data, all qualitative and all collected by me (Figure 2). The multiple sources allowed for triangulation but there was additional triangulation within the data with the different participants in the study. I used the various data to create a case study, bounded by the reality of the participants, providing a holistic understanding of the reality experienced by the participants.

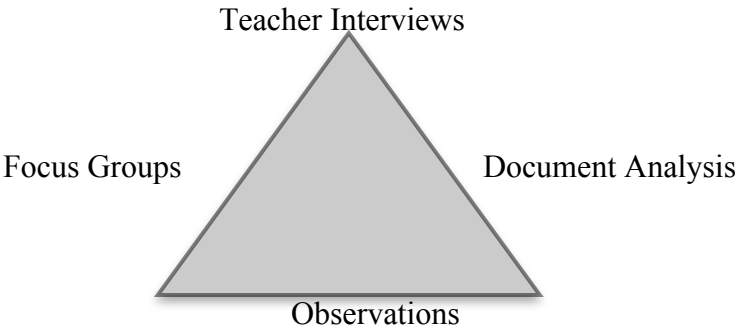

Figure 2. Triangulation of Data

Peer debriefing. In order to ensure the credibility of this study, it was important to include disinterested professional peers in the inquiry process in order to expose the data and keep the researcher honest (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, I engaged with other Ph.D. students and other colleagues through various writing seminars, and data days at the library. In addition, because I am married to a Ph.D. candidate at another institution, and have a circle of friends that have pursued or are currently pursuing doctoral degrees in the field of education, I had many peers to assist in debriefing. My peers and I shared our index of codes at one of our writing sessions where we gave feedback and helped each other finalize the themes and domains. As a result, although the participants in my study remained anonymous, my peers questioned my findings and analysis of the data as it emerged into the themes that made up this study.

Negative case analysis. The use of negative case analysis was a vital component in keeping this study credible. This process enabled me to share and discuss data that

contradicted the themes or patterns emerging from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Creswell (2009) suggested that because reality includes different viewpoints that do not always come together, the researcher should present all the information that contradicts the general perceptions emerging in the data. By presenting data that countered the general themes emerging, the case study became more realistic and credible.

Member checks. An important step in maintaining the credibility of the study was the use of member checks. Member checks consisted of giving the participants an opportunity to see the data before it was presented in its final form (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 1998). After I conducted the interviews of individual teachers, I emailed them a copy of the interview transcript. In addition, I asked each participant one question that remained unclear or one that I focused on to ensure that their answer would be the same. In the focus groups, the participants were able to provide feedback on the themes that emerged in the interviews because the questions I asked were based on the themes that emerged from the interviews. Through the process, participants were able to affirm themes that were true for them and counter ideas that were not true for them. The use of member checks assisted me in triangulating the data in order to improve the credibility of the study. Additionally, the use of member checks allowed me to verify that the themes emerging from the founding members were relevant to the current realities of the teachers.

Transferability

The external validity of the study refers to the relevance of the study to other situations. Lincoln & Guba (1986) described these criteria as transferability or

generalizability. Merriam (1998) argued that in order to enhance the possibility for generalizability in qualitative studies, the researcher can: provide rich, thick descriptions, describe the typicality of the case study, and use multiple sites to conduct the study. Yin (2003) suggested that qualitative case studies could be generalized to a broader theory when they replicate their findings to new cases. Although some literature suggested that the naturalistic nature of this study may not lend itself to be generalizable, it is the thick descriptions of the experiences of teachers that made this case study generalizable.

Various factors may affect the generalizability of this study. First, the study is of one teachers' union within a charter management organization (CMO) of only five campuses. Second, transferability may be affected because every state has a different charter law that may or may not allow collective bargaining for teachers. Finally, the participants themselves may represent different mindsets than charter school teachers or unionized teachers in different states or different contexts. Although this case study explored the unique environment of unionized teachers within one charter school, the literature suggested that many teachers, in different parts of the country may be facing challenges in regards to their working conditions and their ability to gain rights through collective bargaining. By acknowledging the limitations to the transferability of this study, and addressing the areas that do make it generalizable, I believe that I am enhancing the trustworthiness of this study.

Dependability

Reliability assumes that there is "a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Because the term reliability in the

traditional sense does not apply to qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1986) utilized the term dependability. They believe that researchers can use several criteria to ensure dependability in their study. The first is the positionality of the researcher. The second is triangulation. The third is described as an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Merriam (1998) argued that in order for the researcher to audit their process, they must describe in detail the steps and processes of their data collection, data analysis and the decision-making that went into it. The detailed description in this chapter served as an audit trail for replication of this study. Although the audit trail would provide dependability, there is also strength in the case study method in that it is a bounded, and naturalistic event.

Positionality and Reflexivity

The researcher has an inherent influence when conducting a study (Maxwell, 1996). Hatch (2002) stated that, "while it may improve chances for access and ease the sometimes-cumbersome task of building rapport, studying settings with which you are familiar is generally a bad idea" (p. 47). Despite the warning presented by Hatch (2002), a critical feature of this study dealt with the co-construction of responses between the researcher and the teachers that are part of this study. We had collectively been part of the union for so many years that it was their experience as much as it was mine. My role as a teacher, union leader, and researcher allowed me to co-construct knowledge with the participants rather than serve as a limitation. Through the use of researcher journals and bracketing in field notes, I was able to respond and reflect on the data in order to limit the amount of bias.

Positionality

This study chronicled the experiences of unionized teachers within one charter school. My positionality within this study included my role as member of the community, former union leader, current teacher, and researcher. First I have placed myself as a community member. I am a first generation Chicana born in Los Angeles from Mexican parents. I grew up in the very same neighborhood where Hope Charter School was founded. I am a graduate of public schools, all in the LAUSD; therefore, I fit the profile of the students that HCS serves.

In addition to being part of the community, I have been a teacher for 10 years at one of the HCS campuses. I came into teaching for the very same reason that my students attend HCS; for the promise that education could bring about social change. In the 7 years since the founding of the union, I have served as site representative, bargaining team member, union vice-president, and union president. I have also been the only teacher to participate in all three contract negotiations since the union began in 2005. Therefore, most of the union history and trajectory existed within my own experiences and in the documents that I have collected since 2005. In many respects, teachers have seen me as the face of the union, particularly because most of the founding teachers have left the school since the union's inception.

In terms of my union involvement, HCSTA was my first experience with unionization. I have always viewed teaching as a historically feminized role, and deeply connected to the struggles of unionization. In addition my working-class upbringing connected me to unionization. My father was in construction workers' union, which

provided our family with medical and dental benefits, and different opportunities that other children in my neighborhood did not enjoy. My mother has been a sewing-machine operator for 30 years, and has endured difficult working conditions, minimum wages, and a lack of labor presentation. Finally, I studied Political Science and Chicana/o Studies at UCLA, which were both two majors that instilled in me the passion to investigate the inequalities facing workers in the current political economy.

In my role as researcher, I acknowledge that the observations I have made and the discussions I have had with my participants may have been affected by my role as a former union leader and a current teacher at HCS. Because I myself was a part of this founding team, I ensured that the interviews reflected the teachers' experiences, in their own words, as opposed to my own experiences. In this study, I included utterances of experiences that I did not experience nor that I agreed with. Although I was no longer in the union leadership, my work as an ethnographer allowed me to develop an insider perspective (Hatch, 2002). I attended public meetings of the union leadership but I took a different role as a researcher and making connections through my field notes. The intersection of my identity and my beliefs gave life to my role as a researcher and how I approached this study. Therefore my positionality was not defined by one aspect of who I am, rather by the connections that I make through the multiple facets of what I contributed to this study.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the process of self-reflection that a qualitative researcher undergoes because he/she is not an objective scientist (Hatch, 2002; Kleinsasser, 2000). Hatch

(2002) stated that because researchers become part of the world they study, they need to keep track of their influence on a setting. Therefore, tracking biases through bracketing and monitoring emotional responses allows the researcher enough closeness to the participants that enable them to understand the phenomenon (Hatch, 2002). Bodgan and Biklen (2007) suggested that novice researchers practice ongoing data analysis as well as take time to reflect during the data collection. They suggested using brackets to include observer comments within a set of field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Because I was a participant in the community that I studied, I maintained a strict set of field notes that included observer comments in brackets. Another important aspect of my reflexivity was in the form of researcher journals as ongoing informal data analysis. For example, after a union meeting where I was a participant and observer, I went home to create a researcher journal and included brackets of my biases and questions. My positionality as a founding member of the union, a former union president and a current active teacher in the union could have interfered with my ability to create a trustworthy study, yet I had practices in place that allowed me to reflect on my role as researcher and not interfere with my analysis.

Conclusion

By using a qualitative methodology with a case study design, this study explored the experiences of charter school teachers and the culture they experienced leading them towards unionization. Through a qualitative case study design, I was able to explore the beliefs and experiences of both founding teachers and current teachers at this charter school. In order to maintain the trustworthiness of this study, I collected various types of

data over a 6-month period of time and utilized an inductive analysis to uncover emerging themes. In addition, I disclosed my positionality as researcher and current teacher at HCS and opportunities for reflexivity in order to limit the inherent biases. Chapter 4 describes the findings of this study and Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings and the implications for charter schools and teacher unions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

This case study focused on the experiences of teachers working within a charter school mediated by a teachers' union. Charter schools have become a widely accepted and rapidly growing option for educational reform especially for low-income, inner-city students. In Los Angeles, there are 183 charter schools under the jurisdiction of the LAUSD, serving approximately 78,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. They operate as schools of choice, leading teachers, students, and parents to believe that they must retain all flexibilities in order to create the type of schools that will be best for underserved students. They claim that this flexibility distinguishes them from local district schools. Charter schools also pride themselves in creating an environment where teachers have greater autonomy than in the traditional public schools. Nevertheless, previous studies have demonstrated that teachers become a disposable commodity in this culture of choice. Even though the charter movement promises to deliver results to the most underserved students, the working environment of teachers in charter schools may not create the conditions for this movement to create true reform in public education. This study captured the voices of teachers and documented their beliefs and experiences in a unionized charter school.

Among the findings from the study were the following: a) the culture and environment of a unionized charter school, b) the events leading teachers towards unionization, c) the relationships shaped by the culture of choice and d) their model of

unionism. This study shed light on how charter school teachers worked and became unionized within a charter school movement that inherently opposed teacher unionization. Due to the complex and conflicted history between charter schools and teacher unions, it was relevant and timely to understand the experiences of teachers who chose to teach in charter schools and to understand how unionization influenced their perceptions of teaching as a profession within a charter school environment.

Research Questions

This study focused on the experiences of current and former charter school teachers who worked within a unionized environment. In order to understand their working conditions, their relationships, and their values around unionization, the following questions were the focus of this study.

1. What was the culture and environment at Hope Charter School that led teachers to seek unionization?
2. How has the culture of choice shaped the relationship between the charter school management and the teachers' union at Hope Charter School?
3. What is the model of unionism at Hope Charter School and what has it accomplished?

The Context for this Study

In the past 20 years since the founding of the Minnesota Charter Law, few studies have looked at the culture and environment that affects teachers' working conditions in charter schools (UCLA Charter School Study, 1998). Even fewer studies have touched on the topic of unionization in charter schools. This study documented the experiences of

teachers in a start up charter school who decided to unionize four years after the charter school opened.

Setting

Hope Charter School. It is important to explore the history and culture of the research site in order to understand the work environment of its teachers. Hope Charter School (HCS) opened its doors in the year 2000 with two campuses located in a densely populated, area of Los Angeles. It was founded out of a community need to create an educational system that allowed students opportunities to be college ready and college bound. The next year, HCS opened an additional site 3 miles west of the first locations. By 2012, Hope Charter School became a charter management organization (CMO) that educated about 2,500 students, in grades Pre-K to 12, on five different campuses. Ninety-eight percent of the student population in K-8 was Title 1 (economically disadvantaged) and 48% of students in K-8 were classified as English Language Learners. In comparison to similar schools, all of the Hope Charter campuses ranked 10 out of 10 on the Academic Performance Index (API measures are an outcome of California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999).

Teacher's collective. In the first year of operation, Hope Charter School teachers at two campuses formed an organization, what they called a collective, in an attempt to confront difficult working conditions. Teachers met for months and decided that although HCS had only existed one year, it was important to create an organization that gave teachers a voice in the decision-making of the school. When teachers voted to approve a teachers' union, they faced harsh criticism from the governing board of HCS.

Teachers recounted yelling matches between board members and teachers. Yet the union was not formed. The teachers' union faced a loophole in the law that did not allow its existence. Because HCS was opening a new campus with 20 new teachers the next fall, and those teachers did not get an opportunity to vote for the union, the HCS governing board was able to challenge and eventually decertify their newly established union. Teachers, and administrators alike, felt that the unionization efforts had strained their relationships yet they continued to work towards a collaborative working environment. Three years later, with a total of 3 different campuses, an interest to unionize re-surfaced.

Hope Charter School Teachers Association (HCSTA). In the fall of 2004, HCS teachers began discussing their working conditions at their local campuses. They discussed the harsh working conditions and the lack of job security. They wondered how many more years they could continue to work a longer day, a longer year, and for the same pay that teachers in the neighboring district received while working 30 days less than they. They considered three options to create change: unionize with United Teachers of Los Angeles (the teachers' union of the Los Angeles Unified School District), create an independent chapter with the California Teachers Association (CTA) or option three, not unionize at all. Most importantly they sought an option that would allow them to stay true to the values in the school mission and to the unique situation of being charter school teachers. They wanted a union that would be teacher-led, focused on student achievement, and able to raise the level of professionalism. They invited representatives from the districts' teacher union, United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), and teachers from Green Dot Public Schools, another charter organization in

Los Angeles. At the time, UTLA had vowed not to unionize charter schools; therefore an unofficial representative attended one of the meetings. After a few months of dialogue and deliberation, a little over 50% of teachers voted to form an independent association through the California Teachers Association (CTA), a National Education Association (NEA) affiliate.

Some teachers at HCS feared that the negative experiences they had at large district unions in Los Angeles would influence this young union. Therefore, teachers agreed on the different values that would define their union. Hope Charter School Teachers Association (HCSTA) was born with its own bylaws and governance structure based on its identified values of professionalism with a focus on students. Teachers agreed that it would be a small organization, led, and operated by their own teachers. They sought support from the representatives in the California Teachers Association (CTA), but union leaders mostly made decisions collaboratively and with the input of all teachers. Secondly, the union leaders agreed that teachers would not be forced to join the union or pay dues. They believed that it would be the union's duty to convince teachers about the benefits of membership. Union leaders agreed that they would take a collaborative approach in their first negotiation process. Typically, the CTA representative would speak and lead the negotiations serving as the union's attorney. Instead, HCSTA leaders formed a team of six teachers who led the negotiation process, often breaking traditional protocols in union negotiations by having different speakers participate in the negotiations. The HCSTA decided that they would have to do things

differently, because they wanted to stay true to the values of innovation and autonomy, the same values that brought them to HCS.

The young union began negotiating its first collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in the fall of 2005 and by the spring of 2006 the union and the management were at an impasse. Even with the assistance of a state-appointed mediator, and the organizing efforts of teachers and parents, the HCS management and teachers' union remained at an impasse in the fall of 2006. With a new school year looming and a turnover of union leaders, the new union president faced frustrating bargaining sessions, and more time away from the classroom. In January of 2007, HCS and HCSTA finally reached an agreement after the union president and the executive director of HCS met in private one-on-one meetings. With the new contract, teachers gained a 9% raise, 120 minutes of preparation time for elementary teachers, 5 less calendar days, and a 2 year-contract (instead of being at-will every year). Although teachers were not fully satisfied with the gains provided in their first collective bargaining agreement, they felt relieved that the first negotiation process was over and that they avoided a strike.

The formation years for this small teachers' union proved to be difficult and by the end of the first year, even before the contract negotiations had finalized, most of the union leadership had left the school. Teachers shared different reasons for leaving including seeking different job opportunities, yet it was clear that the difficult negotiations process and the repercussions from union involvement were also factors. Only a few teachers remained to continue the work that the founding members had originally envisioned. This study documented the environment that led to the founding of

a teachers' union at Hope Charter School, the experiences of the teachers who worked in this environment, and the values of the teachers who continued and provided leadership of the union.

Participants

This study looked at the experiences of teachers within a unionized charter school. Seventeen different individuals participated in this study. Eleven were interviewed individually, nine participated in focus groups, and three teachers were part of both interviews and focus groups (Table 5). All of the participants had at least one year experience teaching at HCS and had been part of the union leadership. In addition, they represented the various grade levels and campuses at HCS.

Table 5

Participants in the Study

Pseudonym	Role in the Union	Participation	Grade Level	Teaching Experience	Current Occupation
Valeria	Founder	Interview	Primary	5-10 years	Non-Profit
Kim	Founder	Interview	Primary	5-10 years	School Administrator
Melissa	Founder	Interview	Primary	10+ years	Teacher
George	Founder	Interview	Secondary	10+ years	Teacher
Sean	Founder	Interview	Primary	10+ years	Non-Profit
Kelly	Founder	Interview	Secondary	5-10 years	Teacher Educator
Julie	Founder	Interview	Secondary	5-10 years	School Administrator
Elisa	Founder and Current leader	Interview	Primary	10+ years	HCS Teacher
Karina	Founder and Current leader	Interview and Focus group	Secondary	5-10 years	HCS Teacher
Luna	Founder and Current leader	Interview and Focus group	Primary	10+ years	HCS Teacher
Marisol	Founder and Current leader	Interview and Focus group	Primary	10+ years	HCS Teacher
Joao	Founder and Current leader	Focus group	Primary	5-10 years	HCS Teacher
Angela	Current union leader	Focus group	Primary	1-5 years	HCS Teacher
Emma	Current union leader	Focus group	Primary	5-10 years	HCS Teacher
Miles	Current union leader	Focus group	Secondary	5-10 years	HCS Teacher
Kasey	Current union member	Focus group	Secondary	5-10 years	HCS Teacher
Sonia	Current union member	Focus group	Primary	5-10 years	HCS Teacher

Summary of Key Findings

Six themes emerged from this study regarding the experiences of teachers within a unionized charter school. They were: a) culture of collaboration, b) culture of

exhaustion, c) culture of choice, d) consequences of unionization, e) model of unionism, and f) challenges to unity. These six emerging themes were further divided into domains that also served to tell the story of this young union. The domains are further explored later in the chapter.

The key findings in this study are framed by the themes and domains and verified by the various data collected over a 6-month time period. They were:

1. Culture of collaboration: Teachers at HCS described arriving to a collaborative culture, where professionalism flourished and like-minded individuals worked towards a student-centered and socially-just focused mission.
2. Culture of exhaustion: Teachers characterized the environment of HCS as a culture of exhaustion defined by a lack of work-life balance, a lack of job security, and a lack of stability caused by a longer school year, challenging transitions, and turnover in leadership roles. Teachers did not believe that the environment created sustainable working conditions for teachers with families.
3. Culture of choice: Teachers described their experiences at HCS as employees of a school run by a non-elected governing board with corporate ideals masked under the ideals of flexibility. However, teachers embraced the ideals of choice when it came to having autonomy, making curricular decisions, joining the union, and in creating a unique union different from the traditional district union.
4. Consequences of unionization: Teachers at HCS declared that having a voice and a contract was a successful outcome of unionization, yet the damaged relationships

between teachers and administration and the backlash they faced during the unionization process were unintended consequences of unionization.

5. Model of unionism: Teachers at HCS envisioned a different model of unionism that was a teacher-led, small operation with unique values. Their vision called for a union focused on teacher leadership, and professionalism that would improve working conditions and create sustainability for the profession. Their vision was a result of their perceptions of unions fed by their experiences with district unions. In their desire to move away from the traditional model of unionism, they were left without a model and without an understanding of what being a union meant.
6. Challenges to unity: Teachers at HCS reflected on the challenges to their unity characterized by a lack of participation, a weak leadership structure, and conflicting ideas in defining the role of the union within the charter school model. Teachers described how decentralization of the campuses and the addition of more campuses led to a distancing between teachers, thus challenging the strength of the union's power as a collective of teachers within HCS.

The Research Process

I utilized a qualitative case study methodology in order to uncover the richness in studying teachers' experiences and the unique environment of a unionized charter school. In conducting a qualitative case study, I highlighted the unique experiences of teachers rather than determining correlations or comparisons. As a qualitative researcher I sought to understand behaviors, experiences, and ideologies from the participants' own frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The main benefit of conducting a qualitative study

resided in the credible results and theories based on experiences, an opportunity to improve practice, and an ability to collaborate with the participants rather than just study them (Maxwell, 1996). Since there exists limited research that studies the experiences of teachers within a unionized charter school, the case study provided an in-depth examination of that unique experience and a critical insight into the environment.

Access

My position as a current teacher at HCS and a founding member of the union allowed me an emic status throughout the research process (Hatch, 2002). I have been a teacher at one of the campuses for 10 years, a union president for four of those years and a bargaining team member for 6 of those years. My experience as a colleague of the participants gained me access and enabled a greater degree of trust among participants. Therefore, I was able to secure interviews with the teachers who had the most information about unionization at HCS. Yet, my role as a union leader often characterized as the face of the union, may have inhibited the participants from sharing their true feelings and critiques against the union. Due to my positionality as a current teacher, founding member, and researcher, it was important to ensure that I met the requirements to make it a trustworthy study.

Criteria of Trustworthiness

In order to enhance the credibility of the study, I utilized the following criteria: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The data I collected over a 6-month period included observation notes, interviews, document analysis, and focus

groups. It was important for me to ensure validity and reliability by observing the participants, interviewing them, creating focus groups, and then conducting document analyses. In order to annotate my thoughts on the data, I posted notes to a researcher's journal during and after observations and interviews. I met with colleagues and attended various writing retreats with other doctoral students to ensure opportunities for peer debriefing. I also ensured triangulation within the data through various interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and observations. After I conducted the interviews of the founding members and current teachers, I sent the transcriptions to the participants as member checks. From their feedback, I was able to find instances where my interpretation was different from the intention of the participant.

Participant Selection

Interviews with founding members. This case study employed convenience and purposive sampling methods in order to ensure that teachers who could speak about the issues were part of the sample. Seven teachers labeled as "founding members" took part in individual interviews about the formation of the union. I chose these teachers based on their a) availability and b) on their involvement in the first years of unionization. All of the founding members played a role in the founding of the union. Because many members of the founding leadership left within the first year of the union's formation, most were teachers who no longer work at Hope Charter School.

Of the founding teachers who left HCS, two teachers have continued to be teachers in public school districts, two were school administrators, one was teacher educator at a charter school, and the remaining two were pursuing careers in non-profit

work related to the field of education. Although some teachers were no longer in the teaching profession, all of them had taught for at least 5 years before leaving Hope Charter School. In addition to the seven interviews with teachers no longer teaching at HCS, I conducted interviews with four teachers who were part of the founding group but who continued teaching at HCS. These teachers I labeled as "current members who founded the union" and they represented both sites that were actively involved in the unionization efforts. In order to allow opportunities for triangulation, three out of the four teachers interviewed also participated in focus groups with current union members.

Focus groups with current members. In addition to interviews with current union members who founded the union, I conducted two focus groups with "current members" Three teachers who were interviewed joined six other teachers who fit the following qualifications: a) current teachers at one of the Hope Charter School campuses, b) taught longer than one school year, and c) active members in the Hope Charter School Teachers Association (HCSTA). Therefore, teachers were selected based on having knowledge and experience of working at Hope Charter School and with some understanding of the teachers' union and its history.

The sampling was conducted in an open invitation; thus, the sampling was convenience and purposive. Teachers received an open invitation and were contacted if they replied to the invitation. Since there were not enough replies, I utilized the snowball sampling strategy and asked teachers interested to recommend or nominate other teachers for the study. Then, I formed two focus groups of teachers from mixed campuses, and mixed grade levels between kindergarten and twelfth grade. Teachers teaching K-5th

grades were classified as primary while teachers teaching 6th-12th grade were classified as secondary. Finally, I tried to gather a group of teachers with ranging experience levels, and diverse teacher training experiences, in order to have a sample that was representative of the actual teaching force at Hope Charter School. All of the existing five campuses were represented in the focus groups.

Interviews

Data collection. The research journey began with interviews of five teachers who founded the union in 2005, but who were no longer working for Hope Charter School. Then I interviewed four teachers who were also part of the founding in 2005 but who continued teaching at HCS. After conducting the nine initial interviews, I decided to interview two more teachers who were no longer at HCS. These two teachers were part of the founding group and their names were brought up by several of the participants. All of the 11 interviews with founding members were scheduled to be 1 hour yet they varied in length from 40 minutes to 75 minutes. Teachers met with me, outside of school, starting in July 2011 through February 2012. I conducted one interview over the phone in February. I utilized an interview protocol to guide the conversations, yet I added and deleted questions depending on the flow of the conversation. All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis. From the initial analysis of the transcriptions, themes emerged that I used to create questions for four other teachers who were also part of the founding of the union but who continued working at HCS. I transcribed six of the interviews and a professional transcriber completed the other five. All of the interview transcripts were

read and reviewed by me, and coded for themes by hand. The analysis of the interview transcriptions occurred during November and December. In January, I sent the interview transcriptions to all of the teachers I interviewed as a form of member check. Three out of the eleven teachers interviewed replied with comments and additions to their transcriptions. From reading their interviews, along with re-reading the interviews with founding members, themes emerged that I used to create focus group questions for current teachers.

Documents and Observations

Data collection. The observations of union leadership meetings occurred from October thorough February. These observations were limited in scope since I was also a participant in these meetings. They were also limited because there were very few meetings during the duration of my study. I took notes by hand during the meetings and then created researcher memos after the meetings.

During those months, I also delved through all of the historical documents of the union including meeting notes, teacher contracts, flyers, and letters in order to triangulate with the themes that emerged in the interviews and focus groups. I had a box and two large binders that were housed in my classroom closet. I took the documents home, went through them, organized them in files, read them, and made copies of them for analysis.

Data analysis. During the months of November and December I analyzed documents. I took the documents that provided confirming as well as disconfirming evidence and then added them to the index of codes. I continued reading through the documents as new themes emerged from the focus group and interview analysis.

Focus Groups

Data collection. After interviewing ten individual teachers, I decided to conduct focus groups with teachers currently involved in the teachers' union at HCS. Upon returning from winter break, I emailed the union leadership and had them send out an open invitation to the membership. The focus groups took place in January after all of the previous data had been coded and analyzed. Nine teachers attended two focus groups in my classroom. These were held at the school site in order to allow access to the participants. I audio recorded the meetings using an echo pen.

Data analysis. I listened to the focus group audio recording and transcribed it myself. After listening to it three times, I printed the transcription and began coding for themes by hand. Many of the codes matched the existing codes from the interviews, but new themes also emerged. The focus groups also served the purpose of triangulating the data in order to create validity for the study.

Themes Emerging in the Data

Through an inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002), six themes emerged to create the story of the teachers who worked in a charter school environment mediated by a teachers' union. They were:

1. Culture of collaboration characterized by the domains of (a) reasons teachers came to HCS; (b) seeking community, and (c) professionalism.
2. Culture of exhaustion characterized by the domains of (a) lack of sustainability; (b) at-will employees; and (c) transitions and leadership turnover.

3. Culture of choice characterized by the domains of (a) teacher autonomy; (b) choice to unionize, and (c) flexibility: the business model.
4. Consequences of unionization characterized by the domains of (a) effects on the culture; (b) relationships with administration; (c) repercussions for union involvement, and (d) voice and presence.
5. Model of unionism characterized by the domains of (a) unique values, and (b) collective identity.
6. Challenges to collective identity.

Unionism in a Charter School: Past, Present, and Future

Teachers who founded the Hope Charter School Teachers Association unionized to improve working conditions in order to create sustainability, parity, and security for teachers at Hope Charter School. They envisioned a new model of unionism that would be different from the union in the local district and that would be inclusive of the school's mission. From the beginning, this young union faced many challenges including a slim majority with just over 50% membership in the union. Although they have managed to keep the union alive, there are questions as to how much of what the union set out to do has been accomplished.

Theme 1: Culture of Collaboration

In the past 10 years, teachers have gravitated towards Hope Charter School for various reasons. For many teachers interviewed, HCS represented their first teaching job, while others joined the HCS staff to escape the negative culture of other schools. They hoped to achieve a level of collaboration and professionalism that would allow them to

do the best work possible as educators. The emerging theme of a collaborative culture at HCS expanded from before unionization to the present experiences of teachers.

Reasons teachers came to HCS.

Escaping the negativity of LAUSD. In the interviews and focus groups of both founding and current teachers, one emerging theme was teachers' responses to a negative experience in the neighboring district, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Marisol, a founding and current teacher, recalled, "I was sick of working with LAUSD in South Central for a few years, with super negative leadership. I was going to leave the teaching profession because I was so burned out by the negativity." She had previously come from a district in Texas where she was able to teach in a bilingual setting. She claimed that in her previous LAUSD school she would get "in trouble for using Spanish." She recalled a moment that showed her what the environment would be like at HCS. She stated, "When the principal covered the classes so the teachers could interview me and it was the first time I had seen that in years; a principal that could handle a classroom. It was like a dream come true." Other teachers shared their experiences arriving at HCS and comparing it to their experiences in their previous schools. Luna, another teacher who has been at HCS since the time of unionization agreed:

> I had been at LAUSD for 4 ½ years and left in the middle of the year. I was so young that I didn't know the repercussions. I didn't care. Open court had taken over, the standards, all the negativity, working with a grade level that didn't want to work with you and it was so cliquish. When I came in for the interview, I was taken back by how young everyone was and how enthused everyone was to meet me. There was something in the air, a positive energy; I wanted to be part of this.

Luna and Marisol are both teachers who have worked at HCS since before the unionization. Their experiences leaving LAUSD resonated with other teachers who arrived at HCS after unionization.

More recent arrivals to HCS also reported that coming to HCS was an escape from the negative environment at LAUSD. In addition, they stated that they would probably have left the profession if they had stayed at LAUSD. Kasey, a current teacher, recalled:

> I don't think I would've lasted a whole lot longer at my old school because it was super negative at all levels: admin, teachers, parents, students. I found HCS to be way more positive and more collaborative on all of those levels.

Sonia, a current teacher who was laid off from the local district due to budget cuts, stated, "I don't think I would've lasted in LAUSD. I wasn't happy. I wasn't happy with what I was teaching and with my colleagues. It was negative." The collaborative and professional environment they sought directly correlated with what they were missing in the other schools.

Teachers who have worked in other charter organizations shared similar experiences to the teachers who worked in district schools. Miles, a current teacher, recalled:

> I've worked at four charter schools and this is the only charter school with a union. At two of those schools there's a consistent regular abuse of power from various people in leadership roles. Because of the hierarchy of power in schools if there's no collective voice, people abuse their rights. If you disagree with leadership, there seems to be a collective that can support that disagreement. In other schools it was one-on-one and people's ego come into play and the person in power manipulates the situation. The other person may not want to step up. It tends to level that power dynamic in some way.

The environment described by Miles was similar to the environment at HCS before unionization. Teachers felt that they had no power to disagree with the management. Kelly, a founding teacher, who now works at another charter school, stated her reasons for wanting to return to HCS as a teacher. She stated:

> If I had to go back into the classroom, I would choose to do so at HCS before I would consider the non-unionized charter school organization who I work with now. Some of that is based on the union and some of it on organizational philosophy. The more work I do outside the organization has shown me that life at HCS was pretty good in terms of teacher and school leader autonomy.

Other teachers who had not taught anywhere else previous to HCS shared their experiences escaping the negativity. Angela, a current teacher, described her experience as a student teacher in the local district schools after being a teachers' aide and student teacher at HCS. She described her experiences:

> Then I finally got to experience LAUSD and the teachers hated me. I would go into the teachers lounge and say, 'Did you know that HCS teachers do this? Why aren't we doing this?' They didn't want to be there. They were miserable a little bit. I realized that I didn't want to be a teacher; I wanted to be an HCS teacher. I didn't want to work anywhere else.

Another teacher, Karina, who began as a teachers' aide and has never taught anywhere else, shared her perceptions about other schools. Karina, a founding and current teacher, stated, "The main thing I hear from other schools is that it's scripted [curriculum] and teachers can't move away from the pacing plan." Teachers who came to HCS valued the positive environment and sought a change from their negative experiences in the local district. Other teachers were drawn to the grassroots origin of HCS and its emphasis on social justice.

Social Justice. Some teachers spoke about the element of social justice that drew them to HCS. Sonia stated, "I was drawn to the grass roots origin of the school." The school, which opened in 2000, was founded by a community coalition led by a local priest, parents and other community members. Its mission statement states a focus on social justice yet it has taken on different meanings throughout the years. Miles recalled, "The thing that excited me was the emphasis in social justice, at least in the literature. There's an implied emphasis for social justice." Teachers drawn to the school's mission of social justice also connected with their colleagues on the shared progressive ideologies. Marisol observed, "Here I was working with people who shared a lot of the social justice activism even outside of the school. It drew in a lot of people that shared a lot of similarities." Teachers at HCS utilized the ideals of social justice to bond with other teachers through those shared ideologies.

Seeking community. Hope Charter School was founded as a community school by teachers and community leaders. It was her first year out of college when Kim came to Hope Charter School as a founding teacher at the first campus. She was young, and eager to commit to anything to make the school the best possible school for the children of the community. Kim recalled:

> We loved our school, we loved our kids, we loved their parents, and we loved our colleagues. We had such a strong relationship and we really believed in quality education…we wanted to create a place where we could do the absolute best for the kids.

The school was starting from scratch, all new teachers, all new students, and a community that was yet to be established. George, a founding teacher described, "I remember where we would have Saturday night dances and every parent would bring

something and people really were a community like that. That was the coolest thing I remember seeing." Teachers at HCS described a special closeness to the students and families of HCS. Joao, a current teacher, recalled, "The families have embraced me. I've always felt that if I was to leave I would miss my colleagues and the families." In unionizing, teachers also feared that their relationship with parents would be adversely affected. Despite the challenges that teachers have faced, the culture of community and professionalism has always remained important to the teachers at HCS.

Professionalism. Teachers at Hope Charter recounted a level of professionalism that had not been achieved at other schools they worked at. Even within the stress of starting a new school, and with the pressure of meeting all levels of accountability, teachers found the value in counting on each other for support. George, a founding member, recalled:

> To this day, they're the best people I've ever worked with and that's the one thing I do miss. They're the people who were willing to work at a whole different level and they work like that and that's just something I haven't seen since.

Many teachers, like George, described Hope Charter School as a unique environment characterized by collaboration and camaraderie. Teachers believed that despite the workload, the people that they worked with created a culture of collaboration. Part of what brought them to HCS was the type of professional development and collaboration that they heard occurred in charter schools. Kim, a founding member, called it an "ideal." Michelle, a founding member, remembered arriving to a, "A climate of respect. Respect for teachers and their classrooms and a commitment to professional development. I felt like there was an open door policy and I could go in and if I said

something sensible, then it was listened to." Teachers who came to HCS enjoyed the collaborative atmosphere and the level of professionalism that they experienced.

Part of what kept them at Hope and prompted the unionization efforts was the desire to preserve this type of culture. Melissa, a founding member, recalled:

> You'll let us do what we know to be right for kids, and develop a community of professionals with common goals for professional development. Integrated in our discussion about unionizing was that having this kind of conversation and parity with our employer would allow us to work there for the long term.

Teachers saw this community of professionals as an ultimate goal and they recognized that this type of environment could lead to the highest quality of education for the students in the community.

Maintaining a collaborative and professional culture was one of the factors motivating teachers towards unionization. Current teachers agreed that this type of collaboration was what had kept them at HCS. Luna described her experience at HCS:

> You had professional development that was really professional compared to what was going on in LAUSD which was people screaming at each other for about an hour, talking about where they should park and things that had nothing to do with professional development. [At HCS] we were tackling issues revolving around students instruction, lesson planning and investigating science kits.

Other teachers shared their surprise at the level of collaboration existing at HCS. In coming to HCS, Sonia recalled, "I had an expectation that I'd be doing my own thing. I didn't expect it to be so collaborative and team oriented. In most schools, there's some degree of collaboration but you have to seek the collaboration." Before coming to HCS she had worked at both a district school and a charter school. She added, "I just feel really professionally alive and creative and there's so much integrity and positivity in this work. A lot of beautiful professionalism that I think is hard to find." The

professionalism that teachers described above has led most of them to stay at HCS and continue to grow as educators yet not all of the teachers shared the same experience.

Teachers at HCS valued collaboration and professionalism, yet they experienced it in different ways. At one of the new campuses, teachers arrived to a different environment. Angela recalled:

> But then at the new school, they hired no administration that had HCS experience so it was nothing like working at HCS. We had no PD. PD was like, "Please pick up your kids on time." It was administrative junk. That was not PD [professional development].

Angela had worked at another site and knew the level of professionalism that teachers experienced. She voiced this among other teachers and they were able to get professional development halfway through the year.

Although most teachers relished in the professional environment and sought it out when they did not experience it, some teachers expressed the challenges of this professionally demanding environment. Emma, a current teacher, recalled:

> Coming into it, I was surprised that there was collaboration and professional development but [that] it fell on the teachers' shoulder. It felt like there was so much work to be done… I felt like a first year teacher. There's a lot of professional development but a lot of it has to come at our own time.

Teachers truly valued the culture of professionalism at HCS yet some who had been in the organization also identified the challenge of the added work and the effects of turnover on professional development. Luna recalled:

> In professional development, what we're talking about now, we've talked about 4-5 years ago. To me, I'm not very engaged. I want to do something else on my own because I want to focus on my professionalism but I know that I can't because I have a new partner and I need to work with her. I don't think it's sustainable.

Teachers valued their professionalism and often viewed it as an impetus for staying in the profession. Yet they understood that it was not always beneficial or sustainable for all teachers. In fact, the demanding professional culture became a leading contributor to a culture of exhaustion.

Theme 2: Culture of Exhaustion

In order to create the type of program that distinguished Hope Charter School from neighboring public schools, teachers at HCS described working in an exhaustive environment. Teachers at HCS described this type of environment as leading to a culture of exhaustion where it was understood that everyone was going to work in this manner. Teachers internalized this expectation as both an internal pressure that teachers placed on themselves, and an external pressure to perform better than their public school counterparts. George, a founding member, described his experience in founding one of the middle schools. He recalled:

> We were developing our middle schools: starting advisories, AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination), CFG (Critical Friends Groups), UBD (Understanding by Design), just learning a bunch and that just used up everything you had and you see yourself working hard, you see your colleagues working hard.

Teachers described an additional accountability of exceeding the achievement levels of neighboring schools. The additional pressure of accountability ultimately fell on the shoulders of the teaching force. Valeria, a founding member, recalled:

> Working at a charter, you have very high standards and you as a professional put a lot of pressure on yourself and you also have an outside pressure to do more than what the public school next door is doing.

The teachers at HCS felt that although they created high standards for themselves, there was an added pressure of having to outperform the neighboring public schools that also led to the culture of exhaustion.

The HCS teachers who unionized in 2005 sought to relieve the heavy workload and create a sustainable work environment at HCS. Still, seven years after unionization, the teaching force at HCS continued to work within a culture of exhaustion. Teachers described an environment of working long hours that established the working environment at HCS. Sonia reflected:

> Getting A-Z done is what makes us so successful but getting A-Z done means working pretty outrageous hours. There's something to that. There's so much joy working here because there's so much positivity and productivity so when you leave you feel how great it was. But you leave because you can't have two kids and do all of this at the same time.

In order to create the type of program that distinguishes Hope Charter School from neighboring public schools, teachers at HCS described a culture built around work. Joao, a current teacher who has worked at HCS since unionization, recalled, "I was working long hours, but everyone was working long hours. It was the norm…People are leaving because of burn out." At his campus, teachers have continued the tradition of staying late everyday even though many of them have become more experienced teachers. At the high school campus, teachers have experienced this exhaustive culture since the establishment of the high school in 2004. Miles added, "There were some habits of a couple of teachers who stayed on Fridays until midnight. They had a culture around working. It was an obsession." At the newer campuses, teachers shared their experiences. Angela, a current teacher, stated:

> At our site, many of our teachers were district people, who got pink slipped and they knew the desperation of not having a job. They didn't want to complain even though we would stay until 7 every single day. I felt like this is what HCS teachers do, right? They didn't know what the evaluation was like. They were fearful for their jobs. This year we have a sense that we can't do it all. We started a running group once a week.

The current teachers at HCS described a culture around work that resembled the one described by the founding members of the union, yet some teachers saw a different culture of exhaustion.

Karina, a teacher who worked at HCS before unionization, pointed out one of the differences. In referring to the autonomy that teacher's valued at HCS, she recalled:

> It's interesting because I feel overworked now but in a different way. Now I'm the one who makes myself overworked because I enjoy what I'm doing and I want to do more and more. Back then some things were just unnecessary.

Another difference in the experiences of current teachers is that they believed that the leaders at the different campuses were addressing the issue. Kasey stated:

> HCS has a weird double thing going on, they expect this huge amount of work but at the same they say, 'We really want to value your time. Please don't work too hard, but get all this stuff done.' It's something that they're consciously trying to work on but don't really know what to do about it.

It was evident that teachers at HCS understood their working conditions within a culture of exhaustion. Some teachers felt that it was part of a culture created at the campuses while others felt that they placed it on themselves. The culture of exhaustion that led teachers towards unionization continued to plague the campuses and threatened the sustainability of the teaching profession at HCS.

Lack of sustainability. Because teachers wanted to do so much for their students, many did not prioritize their own quality of life. When the schools were

founded in 2000 and 2001, the teaching force was mostly composed of young, single people and by 2004 this demographic was beginning to shift as more teachers were beginning to settle down. Teachers felt torn between staying at the school and continuing to work the way they were working or choosing to leave. Valeria, a founding member recalled:

> It came to a point where people really wanted to stay at Hope and felt really committed to the mission but the quality of life was deteriorating to the point where people said If I stay, I can only give another year, but I want to stay for the next few years, so what is it going to take?

The idea that many teachers wanted to continue working, but felt that they could not continue working at this pace was one of the main factors leading teachers towards unionization. The teachers wanted to improve their work-life balance mainly to ensure that they would be able to stay at the school longer and ultimately benefit the students they taught. Kim, a founding member, stated:

> A lot of us felt like we could not deliver the highest quality because of this exhaustion factor because we were so distracted by the fact that we were working all the time and we had such short breaks and that extended calendar.

Even though charter schools are supposed to be delivering the best instruction in an innovative manner, the culture of exhaustion at this school led many teachers to leave the school. The teachers, who wanted to stay, felt that their teaching suffered. In addition, if they were going to continue working here something had to change. They envisioned that unionization would create sustainability at HCS.

When speaking about sustainability, current teachers at HCS shared disappointing conclusions. Luna, a teacher who has taught at HCS for 9 years, reflected, "Work-life balance weighs heavily on me because when you have kids it is impossible." Similar to

the founding teachers, the question on sustainability weighed heavily on the new teachers who were beginning to see the challenges of keeping up with the work environment while planning to settle down and form families. Angela, a current teacher, stated, "It didn't happen at this [campus] because there was no retention. Now that people are staying and they're getting older, they're getting married and going to have kids. The workload is not sustainable if you have families." Sonia, a current teacher, stated:

> Sustainability. I don't know what that would look like but I know that it's important. Sometimes things come down the pipeline that we are asked to do. Sometimes it feels like it's beyond, more than what should be expected and [more than reasonable]. The person sending it down the pipeline does not regard that at all. I don't think the union steps it up. I think that they need to. We need to.

Teachers shared real concerns around sustainability, yet there were some teachers who returned to HCS year after year. According to Kasey, a teacher who has worked at HCS for four years, the real question should have been how retention could improve the workload at HCS. She stated:

> I do feel that the longer I've been here the easier it gets especially staying in the same content. It does get easier. We have to get people to stay long enough to get to the part where it gets easier.

Why are teachers not staying at HCS? Teachers at HCS shared the challenges of an extended calendar and a compensation package that did not match the heavy workload.

Calendar. At HCS, students received an additional month of instruction compared to the students in a district school. The teachers at HCS recalled how the extended calendar added to building a culture of exhaustion. Joao, a current teacher stated, "When vacation is here, I'm so happy. People say, 'You have so much vacation' but believe me it's not enough. It goes by so fast. You need that time if not more

because of our schedule." When HCS opened its doors, teachers worked 10 additional days than what they work now. Throughout the years and in the first collective bargaining agreement, teachers shaved off those 10 days to now make it 200 days. Still, the calendar remains an issue that adds to the culture of exhaustion. Luna reflected:

> I feel like I have to build the momentum myself and still teach 200 days. Is the longer school year conducive to the students? If we knocked off a week, I think it would be fine. No one here is lazy. My vacation is not a vacation. It's just trying to get back to the things I neglected in my personal life.

In addition to the exhaustion factor, teachers at HCS viewed the longer school year with skepticism because they had never received a clear answer as to why this was needed and how the school managed to pay for the additional classroom time. Luna recalled:

> We've been given an answer that makes it sound like it's what's best for the students and if you can't deal with it then you can leave. Show us where it shows that a longer school year and a longer school day benefits the students. Show us where the funding for an extended school year goes. Can we afford it? The school needs to be more transparent. They put it on the website that we have a longer school year. Parents love it and our scores have shown gains for the last years but I don't believe that there's a correlation with a longer school year and higher test scores.

Teachers at HCS found that working an additional month compared to the teachers in the local school district added to the culture of exhaustion that made working at HCS not sustainable for teachers.

One of the solutions that teachers attempted was to turn five school days into professional workdays so that they could get some of the work done while students were not in class. The last negotiations period in 2010, teachers bargained the work year article, but failed to get any changes made. Emma stated, "The union has been fighting to get us more PD time and less instructional days. There's been an effort towards that

but it hasn't been achieved." Instead of asking for the days to be completely cut, teachers at HCS would rather work the additional days in order to cut down on the workload that usually falls on their shoulders during the year. They believed that having more professional development days could lead to creating a more sustainable work environment. Furthermore, having a salary that did not match the workload was another factor that teachers tied to the exhaustive culture at HCS.

Salary. Some of the teachers interviewed tied their work-life balance to their compensation. When the schools opened, they adopted the salary scale from the local district yet they were working 210 days, for a total of 30 more days than their public school colleagues. They knew that they were working more days and hours than teachers in neighboring schools and their pay was the same. Luna, a current teacher, stated, "Teachers didn't realize it until half way through the year when they did the calculations of their daily rate that they were working a whole month for free." Karina, a current teacher, recalled, "One main thing on top of the work was the pay. We were getting paid incomparable. We were working more days for less pay and we were starting a school from scratch so it was even harder." Marisol, another current teacher, stated, "This is a kind of job that makes it hard to support a family in terms of time and energy and it's not fully compensated." All three teachers, who remained in the organization, recognized that beyond the challenging working conditions, salary became a factor in their decision to unionize. Michelle, a founding member, reflected, "Research will say that teachers don't ever put salary at the top of their list for what they need, usually they need lower class size and better working conditions, but in the first year, it was that. We needed to

be paid more so that we could stay there." When the initial contract was ratified in January of 2007, teachers received a 9% raise on their pay.

In January of 2009, the negotiating team for HCSTA worked on a pay scale to improve the salaries of teachers at HCS. The changes to the table created more equitable increases year-to-year and column-to-column, yet it was not beneficial to all teachers. Emma stated:

> The pay scale was a big issue, getting us to be on a pay scale that was more equitable for everyone. I haven't heard anyone celebrating the pay scale recently. There were some changes made but I don't know if it benefitted everyone equally.

Teachers who remained in the organization viewed salary as an existing challenge to creating sustainability at HCS. Elisa reflected, "[HCS] is always talking about retaining teachers and keeping teachers yet the salary table doesn't reflect that." The current salary table cuts off at 9 years of experience in some places and at 12 years of experience in others. Teachers who have more than 12 years of experience were not compensated for their additional time spent in the classroom.

In addition to the table that did not value longevity, teachers at HCS had not received a raise since the new scale was adopted in 2009. The issues of salary and calendar weighed heavily on teachers who wanted to stay at HCS. Kasey commented, "I would like the union to be in charge of things regarding time and money. Anything they can do to get us more time for everything we have to do and money for all that we do is well-deserved." Although he left HCS, George, a founding teacher, hoped that current teachers were being valued as much as he thought they deserved. He wondered, "Is [HCS] looking at ways to pay people what they're really worth if they're still working

like that. I mean, to me, HCS teachers should be the best paid in LA County and if they're not, why not?" The issues of calendar and salary were directly related to the collective bargaining agreement yet there were other issues in the contract that created a culture of exhaustion at HCS and led teachers to leave.

At-will employees. When the schools were founded in 2000, the majority of teachers at Hope Charter School were young and single. Many teachers had never taught before, and were teaching with an emergency credential. Other teachers were on a special leave granted to LAUSD teachers who wanted to work in charter schools. By 2004, the charter leave was no longer valid, most teachers had a teaching credential, and many were planning to expand their families and settle down. Julie, a founding teacher at the high school campus, recalled, "We were young and single, none of us had a husband or kids. We were super dedicated to this job. We put in a lot of hours. We were there a whole lot. Everyone was very mission-driven." However, teachers, whether single or married, united on the issue of job security as being a top reason for seeking unionization. Valeria, a founding member, stated, "I felt like I was giving my life to this school, and I still didn't feel like I had security." They wanted to know that they were going to work hard for this school, but that they would have a job at the end of the year.

At that time, all teachers were at-will employees meaning that they could be dismissed at any time and for any reason in the middle of the year or at the end of each year. As a result, every year, at the end of the year, there were teachers who were let go, often without any notice and for reasons that were not based on performance in the classroom. Kim, a founding member, recalled:

> The stronger influence was when people didn't get invited back. I felt that management should have the ability to get what they want but I didn't support the fact that people had no idea. People started to say, what if everything seems fine but then I lose my job.

Kim, like many teachers, valued the choice that the managers should have but wondered about the environment that it created for teachers when they had to worry about their jobs year to year.

In spite of the fact that teachers were working in an exhaustive environment, they were willing to work in this type of environment if they felt they had some job security. George, a founding member, stated:

> My wife's pregnant and I'd like to establish something here, to provide a little more job security because once you have a family you need some security…if we get a union started then maybe it can be a little more secure for people like me who have kids and want to work in an environment like this.

Many teachers expressed that at the time they were willing to work that hard if they had some security. Yet it became a challenge when teachers had to worry about their families. Since they were at-will employees, at the end of every year, they were informed if they had a job for the following year. If they did not, their contract would be over and all benefits would end by June 30th.

Not being a "Good fit." The teachers who were not invited back were not necessarily dismissed but simply non-renewed. This was the case with teachers who were often outspoken and took risks when speaking to management in the higher ranks. On several occasions teachers were simply told they were not a "good fit." George recalled:

> I saw people leaving at the end of the year. I can't take a risk here. I can't speak my mind freely. I always have to be looking over my shoulder to see if they're

> going to get me next…I'm working my butt off and they can come after me any day of the week just because I like to talk a lot and argue somewhat.

The management at HCS used the idea of "good fit" to justify their dismissal and non-renewal of teachers who would rebel or speak out against the management. Marisol, a current teacher, recalled:

> There was unfair treatment by our current principal because we were at-will employees, the firing had been exercised and teachers had been let go without giving any reason why and they were generally teachers who did not get along with the principal.

At the end of the day, being at-will employees created a distrust of management, and a distrust of the processes, and the policies governing teachers' work.

In 2006, George believed that he might not be rehired and since his wife was pregnant he left the school in the middle of the year when the teachers' union had just ratified its first contract. He recalled:

> Ultimately, I had to leave [HCS] because I felt that my boss was retaliating against me. I no longer felt the desire to work in an environment where people were out to get me. I made the hardest decision of my life by leaving in the middle of the year because I realized that [the HCS] contract was written in a way that I would be responsible for paying for health benefits as soon as the year ended (at end June). As a new dad and no teaching job possible to pay for family benefits until September (which would have meant at least 2 months and quite possibly 3 months of having no benefits), I had to look for employment [sic].

Despite the need for job security, the teachers leading the union wanted to ensure that the union was not going to protect bad teachers. They saw the union as a way to create a process that would protect good teachers. Valeria recalled, "We're good teachers. How can we keep good teachers here and if somebody else isn't pulling their weight there's no favoritism for that person and how can we get them out." Teachers did not see the union as a protector of everyone. The collective bargaining agreement would

be a way to create a fair process so that teachers could be warned, and coached if they were not doing an adequate job.

Transitions and leadership turnover. Teachers who founded the union spoke of difficult transitions and leadership turnover as triggering the creation of an exhaustive work environment and eventually leading them to seek unionization. The current teachers reflected on how transitions and turnover in leadership continued to affect the working conditions at HCS. Ultimately, teachers shared concerns that the expansion of HCS could lead to a dangerous bureaucratic environment similar to that experienced in the local districts.

In 2004 when teachers met to discuss unionization, it was not a random choice of time. Teachers who had founded the schools in 2000 and 2001 were starting to see the fruits of their labor. In addition, HCS had opened its third campus, a high school. Teachers at the time felt that they had not been included in the discussion about the high school. Kelly, a founding member, recalled:

> Teachers felt a little angry about the high school. We weren't in full support of the school when it started. We felt that our voices were not really heard. Teachers were concerned that money was going into building this new school and we were not happy.

In fact, this was the type of transition that really frightened teachers particularly when they felt it would affect the programs for their students.

When the high school opened in 2004, it signaled the beginning of the distancing between the different HCS campuses. Julie, a founding member, recalled:

> We hadn't been exposed to the politics of this school, the principal was coming from a large district, and he helped with a lot of the politics coming from the executive director. When the issue of unionization came up, we didn't feel like

> we needed it. We could talk to our leaders; we had a lot of money. We didn't see it as an issue.

The high school teachers, were new, and young, and were still very excited about the possibilities of working at HCS. In that first year, they only lost one teacher, but ever since, the high school campus has faced many transitions that have led to high turnover and dissatisfaction.

At the same time that HCS was opening a high school, the central administrative roles were changing and beginning to be more off-site. Michelle, a founding member, recalled, "There was a little bit of transformation going on at the school because the administrative roles were changing as the campuses were developing." In the first years after unionization, many administrative roles changed and the central administrators moved to their own building, not located on a school campus. Luna reflected:

> Since the executive director and other central administrators got their own office then it was like they were more disconnected. Even the school founder would show up to board meetings and a lot of teachers did not know whom he was.

Although she did not state that it was a result from unionization, Luna also observed this type of decentralization occurring within the campuses. She added, "Every school became it's own entity. We started becoming islands. Every site it had it's own issues. I felt like it wasn't what it was when we first started." As new schools opened, more transitions occurred that impacted the culture of exhaustion at HCS.

In 2010 and 2011, HCS opened two new campuses as a result of the LAUSD Public School Choice motion, which allowed HCS to win a bid and operate two new LAUSD buildings. The first school opened in 2010 with brand new leadership and

mostly new teachers. Angela, teacher who had previous experience working at another HCS campus before becoming a teacher at the new campus reflected:

> There was no structure. We didn't know where to pick up our kids. The first rainy day, they figured things out as they were happening. There was no support. The administrators were so overwhelmed and our leaders were not from HCS. The AP left [in the middle of the year].

Because the school campuses were now more distanced, the teachers at the new campuses were left alone with their challenges and the union had a difficult time supporting them. In her second year as an HCS teacher Angela stated, "The new school is going through what we went through last year. They would benefit so much from joint PD's and talking to us. We haven't had that connection at all. I wonder if it's purposeful." Teachers acknowledged that there should be more support and dialogue between the sites and they questioned why this was not part of the expansion model at HCS. They wondered if this built-in support would lead to more retention and satisfaction amongst the teachers at different campuses. The decentralization of the campuses was also aided by the high turnover of leadership at HCS.

Although teacher turnover was a concern at the time of unionization, most teachers reflected on the impact of leader turnover in creating a culture of exhaustion. HCS was plagued with a revolving door for leadership in its first years. Principals hired teachers in the summer and when they returned in the fall, there was a new leader. Teachers were new, and leaders were new, so teachers felt that there was a missing sense of understanding. Kelly, a founding member, stated:

> Our management turned over a lot. The two principals who hired me both left. The executive director was a constant but the first year I was there she was also

> [serving as] the principal. She wasn't really present so this may have led to the lack of communication.

Teachers saw turnover as one of the factors that led towards unionization because there was a different message relayed from leader to leader. Karina, a current teacher, recalled:

> One message changed from year to year. Each admin [sic] had its own vision. We had no voice and we were expected to follow orders. Because we were newbies, and they could take advantage of it, because we didn't know any better.

Both Kelly and Karina were teachers at the same campus where they experienced a principal turnover that affected their new staff. In the second year of existence, the principal at this site left a week before school started which created a shuffle in leadership. Directors moved up to principals and teachers moved up to directors. Teacher assistants moved up to being teachers.

At another campus, teachers started to see that being new to HCS sometimes affected the principal more than it was affecting the teachers. Valeria, a founding member, remembered:

> Our principal was learning her way because it was her first year as a principal and there was a lot going on. It felt as if she was kind of unsure of what to do, unsure of what to do about certain situations.

The principal was new to HCS therefore some teachers had to inform the principal of the culture and play a role of historians of the school. Kim, a founding member, recalled, "When new people [leadership] came in, we were kind of in charge like we knew and I wonder how that might've impacted new people [leaders]." Teachers understood that the lack of stability in leadership impacted the confidence of the leaders as well as their ability to create continuity for teachers.

HCS teachers faced a huge challenge when the founding principal from the high school left in the summer of 2008. The leader at the high school campus had been under pressure by HCS to raise test scores and turn the high school into a stellar campus. Julie, a founding teacher recalled:

> There were so many changes and he felt a lot of pressure. He cracked. When he left, we realized that all of this was happening. We did the WASC accreditation and the charter renewal because we had an interim principal, who was the executive directors friend, and was never there.

The leadership turnover at the high school impacted the teaching staff by adding more work to their plates and not providing them with sufficient leadership guidance. After arriving at the high school campus that fall, Miles a current high school teacher reflected:

> The first year, it was a mess. There was no principal and one pretty inexperienced AP. There was a big absence of leadership. It was a big absence of a lot of things. It wasn't very different than anything else that I had experienced before in other schools. It was so chaotic that I was left to myself, which I like. I kind of like charter school headaches, as opposed to district headaches.

Even teachers who were new to HCS faced the additional challenge of coming into an unstable environment with the transition of leadership.

Many years later in 2010 and 2011, HCS opened two new campuses, a K-5 campus, and a K-7 campus. One important difference between the school that opened in 2010 and the one that opened in 2011 was in the leadership. The school that opened in 2010 was opened with leadership entirely new to HCS while leaders who had teaching experience at one of the HCS campuses opened the school that opened in 2011. Angela reflected, "But then at the new school, they hired no administration that had HCS experience so it was nothing like working at HCS. We had no PD." The type of collaboration between administrators and teachers that existed at HCS proved to be

difficult at the new campuses, yet teachers who work at the campus opened in 2011 found that having a "home grown" HCS leader benefitted their environment. Kasey reflected on the level of collaboration between leaders and teachers. She stated, "It's more so true with any administrator that came through HCS. When we've hired people from outside, they haven't quite gotten that it's sort of expected." The teachers at the new schools faced the challenge of starting a school from scratch, yet the transition for teachers seemed to be easier when the leader had been acculturated at HCS versus a leader who was hired from outside.

Teachers at HCS reflected on the factors leading to a culture of exhaustion. The lack of sustainability and job security along with the transitions and turnover of leadership led to a culture of exhaustion that did not create an environment where teachers could continue to thrive. Still, the school campuses thrived and some teachers remained in the organization to see the fruits of their labor. Even though teachers organized and founded a union, they found that the HCS management retained most of the control. What factors contributed to this control? Why did the HCS management feel that schools could continue to thrive without the retention of teachers and leadership? The answers can be found by understanding the experiences of teachers within the culture of choice. The culture of choice refers to the ideological context that created HCS and continued to foster the ideals of flexibility and autonomy that kept the school running and thriving.

Theme 3: Culture of Choice

Because charter schools are defined as schools of choice, and they are one of the outcomes of the choice movement in education, the ideals of choice permeate to create a culture for teachers, students, parents, and the management. The ideals of choice emerged in different ways among the teachers interviewed at HCS. Michelle, a founding teacher, stated:

> As a charter school we have a choice right. So let's pool from the best. Let's not pool people who are going to say yes to us all the time or have little experience. I hope that if it's a school of choice that we are choosing to have the best and the brightest—because that's what the kids in that community need.

Teachers discussed the value of choice in choosing the best teachers and choosing a curriculum that worked for their particular group of students. Yet they recognized that the flexibility of the management was powerful in limiting their choices as instructors. Teachers did not connect the term "choice" with the unionization; instead they connected with the term "flexibility." Furthermore, the flexibility of a charter school, following a business model, further limited their role as a teachers' union, and the role of a collective bargaining agreement that sought to protect teachers.

Teacher autonomy. One of the most distinguishing factors of a charter school is the ideal of autonomy. Charter schools were founded and envisioned as schools that would provide autonomy to its teaching force. Teachers came to HCS seeking instructional freedom from prescribed curriculum existing in district schools. The school itself sought teachers who were innovative to take this autonomy and do what was the best for students, often the students who have been underserved by other schools. This was the case at Hope Charter School where teachers came looking for the so-called

autonomy. Valeria, a founding member, recalled, "In charters you have more autonomy in how you teach. From a teaching perspective it's what excites teachers, that idea of having more freedom to be creative, having more say in how you teach." Even teachers who had never taught in other districts came with the idea that they wanted that autonomy and instructional independence. Karina, a current teacher, recalled, "Teachers [have] more opportunity to grow as educators, challenge themselves to mold their lessons. The main thing I hear from other schools is that it's scripted and they can't move away from the pacing plan." Teachers sought autonomy in their classrooms to make curricular decisions, yet they also sought the power to make decisions outside of their own classrooms.

Teachers at HCS bought into the ideals of choice; nevertheless before unionization they realized that some of the instructional choice that brought them to HCS was not always extended to them in the decision-making of the schools. Valeria, a founding member, commented:

> Even though we were told that we had a lot of say about things, we realized that we didn't. We realized that we were asking for the same things over and over again but we weren't really given any action.

The instructional autonomy that teachers experienced did not translate to having power in decision-making. In 2004, when HCS re-authorized its charter with the LAUSD, teachers were invited to participate in writing the sections related to instruction and curriculum but not the pieces related to the organizational structure and governance.

Teachers at HCS also saw their working conditions within this lens of choice. Before unionization, teachers often heard that it was their choice to take on the heavy

workload. At the bargaining table, the management would often accuse teachers of taking on the additional work and accused teachers of creating the culture of exhaustion. Valeria recalled:

> Some people would argue, "Well, that's really because of how you choose to work." But I would say it's not, because a lot of times we felt like we had to get certain things done that were outside of the scope of the work hours.

Although many teachers at the time disagreed that it was not a choice to have such a heavy workload, others believed that with unionization their choice changed.

When current teachers reflected on the idea of choice, they applied it to the current definition of choice within Hope Charter School. In 2010 and 2011, HCS participated in two politically charged campaigns that gave the consortium of schools managerial control over two new schools within the LAUSD. Therefore, as a result of the public school choice motion these teachers reflected on their role within this movement. Sonia stated:

> [Choice] doesn't impact my work. What I do feeds into that ideology. I'm part of a public school choice entity. I'm here everyday serving that purpose of providing choice. It doesn't necessarily impact me but I impact it.

Teachers at HCS challenged the notion that they were affected by choice and instead praised their work as providing choice to the community. When discussing the campaign that opened the last campus, Kasey reflected:

> In the broader world with people that are anti-charter, they take that choice as a negative thing. There were a lot of people out there saying that [our new site] was out there recruiting parents to our school. No, we were telling parents that this is their school now and it's not a bad thing. Technically they can choose to go elsewhere. The angry LAUSD people don't want them to have that choice. They see it as a threat.

At HCS, teachers generally fed into the ideology of choice because they believed that students in the community deserved an opportunity to have a better education than the one provided in their public schools. That is why teachers used the ideals of choice within their own classrooms. Kasey stated, "I use it as a selling point. I tell my students, 'You are actually at a special place because everyone chose to come here and work hard and do their best.'" The culture of choice at HCS continued to permeate through the teaching experiences within the charter school movement, yet teachers had a difficult time pointing out the direct implications of choice in their work experiences.

Since unionization, teachers shared different opinions regarding how choice had impacted their work. Karina, a current teacher, suggested:

> I was feeling overworked. It's interesting because I feel overworked now but in a different way. Now I'm the one who makes myself overworked because I enjoy what I'm doing and I want to do more and more. Back then some things were just unnecessary.

Before unionization, teachers reflected on the amount of work that they were given and the fact that they had no say. After unionization, some teachers felt that they had a say and that the amount of work seemed to be their choice and on their terms. In addition, since unionization, there had been various factors that changed the teachers' ideals regarding choice.

Choice to unionize. From its inception, teachers at HCS tried to create a union that itself valued the ideals of choice so as to make the best instructional choices for students while still providing teachers with basic protections and sustainability for the profession. There were two main consequences of this choice. First, teachers at HCS chose to unionize independently through the state affiliate CTA, and not through the local

district union UTLA. Many teachers at HCS had experienced working in the district and felt that UTLA was a large bureaucratic union that did not engage its members and did not work to benefit students. Kelly, a founding member, stated:

> Another thing about choice was that we had the option of joining UTLA, although at the time they didn't want us and we would've been the poor little step child...If we would've gone the UTLA route, it would've been a mess.

Teachers valued their ability to choose the model of unionism that fit their needs. Michelle, a founding member, recalled:

> They wanted—we wanted some say in what our lives were like between 8 in the morning till 3:30 in the afternoon in keeping with the mission of the school which is why we didn't go with the UTLA option. That wasn't going to work for us.

Teachers felt very strongly in creating a union that was organically formed, on their terms, and aligned with the mission of the school. Sean, a founding member, had served as a UTLA representative and felt very strongly about this choice. He stated, "I wanted to steer it, to influence it, and in a certain way to make it as professional as possible not like UTLA and there was an opportunity for that." Teachers sought to create a model of unionism that was different and focused on the mission of the school.

Another instance where teachers ascribed to the ideals of autonomy was in providing choice to teachers who did not want to be union members. Teachers at HCS decided that teachers would not be required to join the union or pay dues if they chose not to. Becoming members of the union would be a choice for each individual teacher to make unlike UTLA where teachers were forced to join or to pay dues if they chose not to join. Marisol, a current teacher, recalled, "There were some teachers that did not want to be a part of the union, but I don't think that they were chastised or anything like that.

From what I recall there was respect for everyone's choice." Even though teachers needed more members to create a stronger union, they valued the idea that everyone had a choice of whether to join or not. Valeria, a founding member, stated, "There were a couple of teachers that opted not to participate. You know, we didn't pressure them and we didn't tell them that they should. We never crossed any lines." The values of teacher autonomy permeated to the choices that teachers made towards the type of union they wanted and to the type of membership they wanted.

Valeria and Marisol reflected on the positive attributes of giving teachers a choice to join, yet some teachers believed that choice played a negative role in the unionization efforts. Some teachers who chose not to join believed that teachers who were organizing the union should choose to leave if they were not content with the working conditions. Kelly, a founding teacher, remembered, "I do recall the sentiment among teachers who were not interested in becoming union members, basically 'If you don't like it, then you could choose to go somewhere else.'" The teachers at HCS felt that choice was an important tenet of the unionizing efforts, but to some extent they did not realize was that the management viewed choice through the tenets of operational flexibility. Therefore their power as a union was limited when the charter school management used a business model of education to demonstrate the type of flexibility they needed in order to operate as a school of choice.

Flexibility: Business model. Teachers at HCS valued the autonomy of choosing curriculum and doing what was right for kids in choosing their union model and in allowing teachers the choice to join the union voluntarily. However, many teachers

recognized that the management of the school was the true beneficiary of the power of choice that was articulated as flexibility. In order to exert their power during the negotiation process, the management used the term "flexibility" to divide teachers at different campuses and pit them against each other. Michelle, a founding member, recalled:

> They kept repeating the word choice to actually keep dividing us, to say that the different sites needed flexibility… They wanted principals to have choice. The difference is that they wanted to retain all of the power. They wanted to define what choice meant and what flexibility meant. It felt like a one-way street.

Teachers were led to believe that the flexibility granted to charter schools was important to creating a school different from the local public school. Because teachers ultimately wanted to do the best work for their students and for the schools, they subscribed to the ideals of flexibility and choice. Kelly, a founding member, exclaimed, "In the contract, we couldn't put things in writing because they needed the flexibility. We had to agree to a 30 minute lunch time because they had to have the flexibility if they had staffing challenges." Overall, teachers ascribed to the ideals of choice. Teachers believed that the management should maintain the flexibility to make the decisions that benefitted individual sites. Through the initial 18-month negotiation process and since then, teachers identified that unionizing was a step against the flexibility granted to charter schools and ultimately positioned the teachers' union against the mission of the school. The ideals of flexibility existed within a business model that kept teachers from gaining power in their working conditions. The main perpetrators of flexibility were the members of the governing board of HCS.

Governing board. Hope Charter School, like many charter schools, had a governing board made up founders and funders. The board members were appointed, not elected, and served 2-year terms. The board served as the direct employer of the executive director, the other officers in leadership positions, the principals, and the teachers. Before unionization, there was a teacher representative and a parent representative on the governing board. These positions held no voting power, yet the board considered this a collaborative model of decision-making. A message to teachers from the governing board dated January 17, 2006, stated that, "Over six years ago, parents, board members, administrators, and teachers came together to develop a charter that would spell out our vision and plan to educate some of the most underserved students in our neighborhood." After unionization, the governing board removed the teacher and the parent representative citing that, "Collective bargaining represents a change in the way that we have done business in the past." Although the board claimed to be collaborative in its' founding of HCS, having to answer to a group of teachers did not appear to be collaborative to them.

In a different letter to teachers dated September 20, 2006, the board president reminded teachers that, "Our intention was to create a small neighborhood school that was totally controlled by local decision-makers." Yet, he continued by stating that:

> [HCS] was established as a nonprofit corporation governed by a volunteer board of directors using a traditional private school employment model…And we are also for excellence and accountability, which we believe can best be accomplished through Board autonomy, operational flexibility, and straight-forward personnel policies and procedures.

The board had never been forced to respond to teachers or parents in the past. Their responses demonstrated a contradicting understanding that they were both "local decision makers" and "following a private school model." In addition, their responses suggested that although they claimed to be collaborative, they did not value the forced collaboration that collective bargaining had created between them and teachers.

Teachers described the governing board as "disconnected." Elisa, a current teacher who has been at HCS since unionization, remembered, "The board members, they didn't know us. A lot of them hadn't been into the schools to watch us teach. They didn't know the students." In a letter to teachers dated October 25, 2006, the union president at the time wrote:

> I was recently visited in my classroom by our HCS board president and I was amazed that as board president he had not ever visited a class. Yet, it does explain the dilemma faced by administrators having to work with a governing board that is disconnected from our school, our teachers, and our students. This I believe, more than any other factor, appears to be the stumbling block in finalizing a fair contract.

During the initial negotiation process, the governing board remained distant from the campuses and sent the executive director to conduct the negotiations for them. The teachers' union bargained their contract against a board that did not seem to understand the issues that led teachers towards unionization. In addition, they appeared to have a misconception about the role of teachers in the decision-making processes at HCS. In a letter to teachers regarding unionization dated February 3, 2005, the board president stated:

> Therefore, I think that it is very important that our school administrators and board be included in dialogue and discussions that affect the school and its staff. Some of you might disagree with this premise, believing that certain matters must

> be decided unilaterally and presented by a union. I don't believe that this premise is consistent with the spirit of our school. When important decisions are made, I believe that all parties should be included and have a chance to personally air their fears and concerns, without the intervention of a 3rd party such as a union.

The governing board joined with the administration to place themselves as a party within the schools while they placed teachers as a third party. Yet it was the board that was the third party within the eyes of teachers. Michelle, a founding member, stated, "At the end of the day, people who didn't work in our buildings were making all these decisions." The teachers and the school leaders were the ones that parents trusted and the ones that were visible to parents and students. This type of rhetoric divided teachers and further established the governing board within a business model of education. The business model of education contributed to the culture of choice by allowing the governing board to exert their power over the teaching force at HCS.

Distrust of governance. Although teachers were directly managed by the principals, they felt, at the time, that the principals, who were often new and inexperienced, were making decisions based on what the central administrators and board members decided. In describing his relationship with the principal at his site, George, a founding member, stated:

> It just seemed that they kept bringing in people who were new, who did exactly what they were told to by the people at top and our concerns weren't that important. Maybe that's why the union happened because she didn't know what was going on.

Turnover in leadership and the transitions occurring at the time showed teachers that there was a larger influence of the "people at top" on their working conditions. The power of the people who "didn't work in our buildings" came through several policies

and documents that they used to delineate the responsibilities of teachers. These governing documents were often conflicting and maintained a unilateral power of the management over the employees.

Much of what defined the flexibility of the governance at HCS came through the form of the documents that governed teachers' work. Teachers distrusted the policies of the HCS governance expressed through a series of documents including, but not limited to, the school's charter, a work agreement, and an employee handbook. At a public board meeting where both the teachers' union and the management stated their intentions for the contract negotiations, the executive director of HCS stated:

> The [HCS] proposes to maintain the flexibility that the status quo affords our Board and managers to make decisions that support the education of children and the work of teachers, as provided in our charter, employee handbook, teacher contract, and other policies and practices as they may be modified by [HCS] from time to time. (From the initial proposal for contract negotiations 9/13/05).

Teachers felt that forcing the management to collectively bargain would create one document that would then govern their working conditions. Michelle, a founding member, stated, "We had a work agreement, management from 'time to time' would call it a contract, but at the end of the day, they held all that power." Teachers felt that the governance of the school used the different documents to maintain a unilateral power over all employees including teachers. In unionizing, they sought one document, a collectively bargained agreement that would serve to delineate and govern their work.

In the first round of negotiations, teachers realized even though they had unionized, the process of getting one collective bargaining agreement that delineated their working conditions would be much more of a challenge. The persistence on the part of

management to maintain the status quo led them through a contentious 18-month contact negotiation process. Michelle, a founding member, remembered a moment from the negotiations table:

> We would have discussions that sounded like we were on the same page with management and then the executive director would say, 'That's already in the handbook.' We had ongoing discussions about what was in the employee handbook versus what would be in the contract.

The managements' perspective about maintaining their governing documents intact became a symbol of their unwillingness to come to the table and bargain fairly. Kelly, a founding member, recalled, "They didn't come with anything. There was no movement, their answer was no to everything, they were just delaying and their proposals and their counters were the existing contract." Teachers came to a school where they believed in a charter that was founded upon a collaborative model, yet the culture of choice dictated an environment where management maintained a unilateral power over the employees.

During the initial round of negotiations, the HCSTA fought to create one collective bargaining agreement that delineated their roles and responsibilities. As soon as the negotiations process began, they faced an uncooperative management team that refused to incorporate basic issues already delineated in the schools' charter into the collective bargaining agreement. In a flyer from the union's bargaining team on May 7, 2006, teachers argued, "For issues that are already addressed in the charter, [HCSTA] members wonder 'Why is management opposed to incorporating that language into a contract?'" The first item was in regards to class size requirements. There was language in the school's charter stating that, "an average student to teacher ratio of 20 to 1 in grades K-3, 28 to 1 in grades 4-5 and 30 to 1 in grades 6-8." Teachers proposed the

similar ratios, except they asked for a ratio of 28 to 1 in grades 4-8 and a class size cap of 30 students. The HCS management rejected the proposal even though it was aligned with the charter. In the same flyer, the teachers' union claimed that the charter included due process for teachers with "just cause" language in the charter but that the HCS management refused to include it in the collective bargaining agreement.

Teachers at HCS were at-will employees yet they did not seek tenure in their collective bargaining agreement. Much of the contention between teachers and the HCS management was regarding the issues of job security. Teachers wanted just cause and termed contracts while the management refused. In a letter to teachers dated September 15, 2006, the HCS executive director stated:

> We are not LAUSD... At HCS employees are held accountable to job performance and therefore do not have employment permanency, otherwise known as tenure. Tenure is not always good, there are times when students suffer, other teachers suffer... and parents are disempowered due to deficient job performance by a tenured teacher.

Teachers sought just cause in the contract which provided reasons for their dismissal, yet management accused them of wanting tenure which divided the teaching staff and pitted teachers and administrators against each other. In a letter to teachers dated September 20, 2006, the board president addressed this issue with teachers. The statement claimed, "Just cause language is inappropriate because it is a phrase that triggers many decades of voluminous arbitration decisions and precedents in labor matters in fields of industry that have little in common with the context of public school education." The management's position was simply to say no. Due to the anti-union

rhetoric surrounding the issue of job security, teachers did not seek tenure and were unable to get a "just cause" provision to provide reasons for their dismissal.

Teachers sought a "just cause" clause in the contract that would be fair and not one sided. In fact, most teachers rejected the ideals associated with tenure but they had witnessed principals dismissing teachers without much warning and there was nothing in place that could protect teachers. In a flyer to teachers dated October 3, 2006, the HCSTA leaders claimed:

> [HCSTA] negotiators have never proposed tenure. We have proposed that teachers have just cause and are given a reason when they are disciplined or dismissed. We have proposed that administration be held accountable for their decision and actions.

Ultimately, the contract did not include the just cause that teachers sought.

In addition, there was language in the charter describing the roles and rights of teachers at HCS. The HCS management refused to include these rights in the collective bargaining agreement. For example, the initial charter, accepted by the Los Angeles Unified School District as the founding document of the school, described the school as teacher-led. Kelly, a founding member, recalled, "There was all this talk in the charter about us being teacher led. In reality, it was a lot of lip service because we were being told what to do." Beyond the documents that delineated the role and responsibility of teachers, was the idea of power. Hope Charter School was a community charter school, where teachers and administrators worked collaboratively, yet there was an imbalance of power. Teachers experienced a collaborative community with each other and with the families they worked with, but at the end of the day that community did not extend to having parity in decision-making, especially when dealing with their working conditions.

Teachers at HCS knew that there were consequences to their decision in forming a union. They had attempted to unionize in 2001 and received a heavy backlash on behalf of the governing board. In working at a charter school they knew that they were part of the culture of choice yet they never expected that the ideals of choice would limit their rights as employees within a public school entity. In addition, they did not expect that the opposition to unionization would create a rift in the relationships between teachers and administrators and that it would create repercussions for their future career opportunities at HCS.

Theme 4: Consequences from Unionization

Teachers at HCS worked within a collaborative culture at their individual sites, yet they knew that the school operated within a larger business model. Before unionization, many teachers saw themselves distanced from the board members who most of them had never met. The real relationships in the school were between administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Teachers referenced a strong sense of community, one that they have not been able to encounter at other places, and one where initially they did not feel they needed a union.

Michelle, a founding teacher, came from a district school where she had been protected by a union before she came to HCS. She questioned whether she should be concerned that Hope Charter School had no union to protect teachers. Michelle recalled, "I remember at the time that I went to the school asking my dad, 'Is there gonna be a problem that there's no union?' He was like, 'If the relationship is good between teachers and management, you don't need one.' And I felt that way arriving at the

school." Yet the experiences of teachers within the culture of exhaustion and the culture of choice led them to seek unionization. The immediate effects of unionization caused a strain to many of these relationships. Although teachers who remained at HCS after unionization felt that most of the relationships had been mended, many of the teachers who left were not sure that they would be able to return to HCS. Still, all teachers interviewed felt that the existence of the union was the largest success they could have received. Kelly, a founding member, stated, "It was a painful process but well worth it. Much like childbirth. We birthed the union." The birth of the union and its first few years proved to be rocky and tumultuous. Still, teachers reflected on the value of having a representative entity that was focused on student needs and provided a voice for the collective.

Effects on the culture. Before teachers voted to unionize, they met as a collective to address their concerns primarily with what unionization could do to the collaborative culture at HCS. This concern over the relationships between management and teachers stemmed from the initial attempt at unionization from 2001. Those teachers remained scarred and were very wary of attempting this again. Kim, a founding member, recalled, "It was really hard, and contentious and awful, awful board meetings where we would show up. It was full of lots of really bad feelings. It felt like it took all of that time to heal my relationship with [the board president]." The relationship with the governing board became a minimal worry when teachers realized that parents and the administrators at their individual campuses were the people that they worked with on a day-to-day basis.

In founding a union, negotiating the first contract, and then organizing towards settling the contract, teachers shared concerns about the effects that unionization would have on students and parents. They were concerned that it would affect the parents' perceptions about the success of the school. Parents from the community had declared their loyalty to the organization by leaving their local schools and enrolling their children at HCS. Parents were an important part of the organization and they were considered crucial stakeholders. Valeria, a founding member, recalled, "We didn't want it to affect students' learning, we didn't want to affect the parents' engagement. We didn't want parents to feel that the school is unstable and that things are bad." This was a concern brought up by George as well. He recalled:

> I remember trying to get parents on board to support [teachers] but part of me was uncomfortable talking to parents about it because I didn't want them to see me as some kind of agitator who was there to agitate rather than focus on their child.

Because the schools are small and run like families, teachers felt that they had to be very careful with how they approached parents for support. Then, the governing board removed the parent representative from the governing board and left parents out of the decision-making processes. The union did not seek the support from parents beyond the first year of unionization and have maintained a relationship with parents within the parameters of the school.

Relationships with administration. Before unionization teachers differentiated their relationships with management between school leaders and central administration. Teachers had friendships with their school leaders, yet as a result of unionization, the school leaders and the central administration automatically merged and became the

management. The management's bargaining team included a principal from the high school. The unionization process, and the ensuing negotiations created a strain between the teachers and their school administrators.

The first strain was a result of how the unionization occurred. Teachers felt that although administrators were fully aware of their concerns, teachers had to be secretive in their unionization efforts. Kelly, a founding member, recalled, "We had been advised that it needed to be secretive so that it wasn't squashed before it got too far. Judging by their reaction, I think it was a surprise to them." The secretive aspect of the unionization efforts was one of the factors that led to a strained relationship between teachers and their administrators. Valeria, a founding member, recalled "I received emails from them, emails that said, 'I'm very hurt by this. I feel like it's dividing our school. I feel like you guys are being secretive.'" Although teachers were cautious in keeping the unionization efforts a secret, many teachers felt that the administration was fully aware of their efforts. They mentioned speaking to site leaders and board members about their concerns before unionization occurred. George, a founding member, claimed:

> There were lots of emails back and forth between me and [the executive director] and me and [the board president]. I remember getting myself in a little bit of trouble but I wanted things to be honest. I didn't want this to be hidden from them.

It appeared that the central administration and the governing board had been aware of the unionization efforts yet they decided to take it as a personal attack against them. In addition, they may have claimed that it was a secretive operation to justify their antagonism towards unionization in order to accuse teachers of disloyalty to the organization. Valeria referenced feeling that her decision to unionize was seen as an act

of disloyalty. She stated, "I think it became an issue of pride obviously for the management and it would be for anyone if they feel like people are biting the hand that feeds them." The relationship between teachers and the management of HCS was a one-sided street where the management expected loyalty but did not reciprocate it to their teachers.

Still, the central management and the governing board were not with the teachers on a day-to-day basis. Teachers interviewed described how the site leadership took the unionization as a personal attack. Luna, a current teacher who had been at HCS since unionization, recalled, "The principal at the time, came into my room and she cried. She was really scared of what unionizing meant…I felt bad for her because I saw her as my friend and not my boss." Teachers, who had previously been friends with their principals, felt torn by their efforts to unionize. Kelly, a founding member, reiterated that unionization was not a personal attack on the leaders of the schools. She stated, "It wasn't against the management on a personal level. We didn't think 'We don't like these people, we're going to go against them.'"

Teachers and management at HCS were accustomed to treating some matters in a collaborative fashion. Yet, when teachers realized that site administrators could not respond to their needs in terms of their working conditions, teachers decided to unionize. The unionization effort was never against the management. It was against the policies and lack of fair processes that existed. Karina, a current teacher who was at HCS during unionization, reflected:

> We were fighting for the recognition of the work we were doing, hours we were putting in, and equality and that had nothing to do with administration. They're

> not the ones in charge of giving us the figures or deciding the calendar days. It was above them, so why were they taking it personal.

At the high school, which was the new campus, the school leader felt very strongly about the impact of unionization on his school. Julie, a founding teacher recalled:

> He said, 'I believe in teacher unionizing. I was a representative of CTA. However, I don't think we need that here. Unions get in the way of real work and if we're doing such a great job, why do we have to get involved in that level of animosity?' I felt that him saying that was very discouraging and intimidating to my other colleagues that were less inclined to speak out.

Other leaders who had worked at district schools felt similarly that HCS did not need a union. The division between the teachers' union and HCS site leaders further deteriorated during negotiations when teachers faced the high school principal at the bargaining table. Teachers initially felt that the unionization would be against the governing board and the executive board but when a principal joined the managements' team at the bargaining table, it further deteriorated the relationships between teachers and administration.

Teachers believed that the management had various concerns about the unionization efforts at HCS. From the beginning, the governing board of HCS refused to view the union as a partner in governance. Valeria, a founding member, recalled:

> I felt that there was a lot of bitterness about the fact that we had unionized, and there was not an acceptance of us as a true union. The people at the [negotiating] table did not want to hear what we had to say. They had already decided before we walked in that they weren't going to give us anything in the end.

Although teachers had unionized to create better working conditions, job security and sustainability for the profession, they realized that the management did not share the

same sentiment. The management felt that the union was formed to take away the flexibilities that the school had been founded upon. Not only were board members against the unionization efforts, they used the fact that the board was a fundraising entity to further divide people at HCS about the union issue. George, a founding member, recalled hearing a response from the board president regarding unionization:

> I remember him saying, 'You can't make it public that we're a union school – we got people that are giving us money that are...' He didn't say people that are anti-union but you can tell the way he was talking that he was worried about getting funding for the school because of what happened.

Teachers understood that the board never meant to share power with the union and that their real concern was about the union's threat to the board's fundraising interests. In a letter to teachers dated February 3, 2005, the board president stated:

> We have become known for quality instruction and teachers, exceptional administrators, stable fiscal management, and an inspiring vision for a community school. This success has made it easier for us to attract resources such as money and good teachers to the school. Obviously, this is a trend that depends upon a united school community.

In a letter to teachers dated November 3, 2006, another board member wrote, "The [HCS] board, which is responsible for managing the interests and meeting the expectations of multiple stakeholders, considers the expectations of our financial benefactors to be quite important." Teachers understood and valued the work of board members to govern and fundraise for the benefit of the charter schools. Michelle, a founding member, recalled, "The school board people are not elected and at the time there were a lot of sort of big business corporate people who didn't understand what we were trying to do because that's not their model." The board members claimed that the union was taking away the collaborative aspect of running their charter school.

Another concern was the public perception that unionization would have on the charter school community in Los Angeles. Valeria stated:

> Obviously management was very unhappy that we were doing it because of the message that it would send to the outside world that despite having high test scores and high student achievement that we had unhappy teachers that want better working conditions.

Despite these concerns, teachers moved on with unionization efforts and organizing efforts that were often contentious. Teachers did not see unionization as a way to limit the flexibilities of the charter school; instead, they saw it as a way of protecting the vision that the school was founded upon. Michelle, a founding member stated, "We wanted to have the best school that we could have and we respected the management leaders. We respected those people, the community leaders and educators that founded that school." Even though there existed a respect for the work of the founders, funders, and managers, during negotiations teachers found that the same respect was not reciprocated.

There was a sense of disappointment when teachers learned that different people in management and their lawyer, repeatedly made comments at the bargaining table that demoralized teachers and questioned their intentions in unionizing. The management team repeatedly rejected proposals where they questioned the moral decisions of some teachers, even identifying them as "bad apples." Teachers interviewed spoke about being called "bad apples" which later became a slogan that they used on t-shirts and buttons to organize during negotiations. Marisol, a current teacher, recalled:

> I was very disappointed that I worked in an organization that allowed teachers to be called bad apples. Knowing that our leadership at that time was at the negotiating table to just sort of demonize what we were doing and demonize our desire to have fair rights and establish our working conditions which would then empower us to be better teachers for our students.

Teachers began to realize that although their intention in unionizing was to eventually create a better school for the community, the board and management did not share the same values as they did. The board and management did not want to provide teachers the same rights that they had set out to provide for the students in the community. The HCS mission was focused on building critical thinkers who were agents of change within a college-preparatory environment. Yet, teachers felt that the same progressive ideologies were not being extended to them, particularly when they were demanding a change in their working conditions. Marisol, added:

> There seemed to be so much animosity and lack of understanding when we were at a school that was supposedly trying to promote agents of social change for our students yet we were not given the same sort of rights to be socially just in our work conditions.

Teachers recognized the difficulty of working for an organization that did not extend them fair rights; yet teachers remained loyal to the school's mission, to the students, and to each other. Michelle, a founding member, stated, "For a progressive school, in terms of curriculum and what they believe to be true for kids, I think it's just sad that it happened that way." This type of backlash was one of the consequences of unionization that teachers did not expect especially from a school founded collaboratively and within the community.

Unionization and the ensuing negotiations had become a personal attack between teachers and the management of HCS. Teachers called it an unintended and unfortunate consequence of unionization. Michelle, a founding member, reflected:

> [One regret was that] There was no bridge built…that teachers and management could have bargained this as collaboratively as we wanted [but] it continued to be

> confrontational. I know my principal at the time felt really damaged by it—For as hard as we worked as a teacher group to try to be inclusive, it's just too bad that we didn't, we didn't ever connect with management that way.

Not only did teachers regret this as an unfortunate consequence of unionization, they reflected on how this strained relationship affected the culture at HCS. Kim, founding member, recalled, "It just felt uncomfortable and I felt that we had such an amazing relationship and we had such a nice community and it felt like we were all throwing each other under the bus." The contentious negotiations and the organizing efforts further tested the relationships between teachers and management. Kim described being "exhausted and kind of beaten down" from the unionization efforts. The conflicts between teachers and administration stemmed from the initial unionization but transferred to the negotiations table where tensions grew between teachers and the management.

Since unionization, the governing board has continued to expand and build a group of founders who manage and fundraise for HCS. In the last seven years, the teachers who have attended board meetings have understood that the board is not in line with their needs as educators. Luna who has been at HCS since before unionization observed:

> It's difficult for the board members to walk in our shoes. They're not educators. It's whatever they see delivered on those PowerPoints presented by the CEO. Statistics, graphs, and pie graphs and there's a human element of teaching and being with children, children who are at risk.

Luna is among one of few teachers who has ever attended a board meeting at HCS. Since unionization, teachers have been informed about board meetings but have not gathered together to attend board meetings the way they did during the initial negotiations period

in 2005 and 2006. Kasey reiterated, "I've been to one board meeting. It was really interesting. It would be cool to go there but it's a chunk of time that I don't have to devote once a month." In fact, fewer teachers attend board meetings and other social events than before unionization. Since teachers were more disconnected from each other in their separate schools, they were also disconnected from the governing board. Sonia shared her relationship to the board, "The board is pretty distant. I feel disconnected." Since the first negotiation process when teachers showed solidarity and went to board meetings together, the governing board had not been an important presence for the teachers at HCS.

Repercussions for union involvement. Teachers at Hope Charter School unionized to provide job security, secure better working conditions, and to create sustainability for the profession. They believed that the charter school model could be sustainable for teachers if these issues were addressed. They never intended to strain the relationship with management and they remained hopeful that even within a business school model the union would gain some parity with the management. One consequence they did not expect was that doors would close for them in their future endeavors at Hope Charter School. Before the unionization, Kim, a founding member, had been in talks with the executive director to create a new position for herself, outside of the classroom. At the end of that year, that option was no longer available. Kim described her experience, "After [unionization] it was as if doors closed for me in terms of what I could do within the school, and I wasn't happy staying so I started to look [for another job]."

Kim was never told that it could have been a result of unionization but she felt that it was related.

Michelle, another founding member, applied to return as a teacher four years after she had left HCS. There were two fourth grade positions at one of the sites and the principal, who was not present during unionization, interviewed her and then did not give her a second interview despite of her experience and history with the school. She recalled, "I tried to return, and applied for a job. It was my understanding that the hiring principal (who was not on staff when we founded [the union]) wanted to hire me but that was blocked by the Executive Director due to my history at the school." In fact, Michelle's friend, who applied at the same time, did get the job to teach fourth grade. Other teachers who founded the union had also tried to return to HCS and had not received a call back.

For other teachers, it was the question of whether they could move into administrative roles at HCS. Kelly, a founding member, believed that she would be rehired as a teacher if she chose to return but she was not so confident about returning as an administrator. She stated:

> I'm not sure that I would ever be considered for a principalship or any other type of administrative role because of my role in the union leadership. It's just a hunch, I don't have any evidence, but it's a hunch.

To this day, no one who was involved in the unionization efforts had been hired in a leadership capacity. Although there was no direct evidence suggesting a connection, teachers interviewed noted the possibility of this being a consequence of their involvement in the union. Elisa, a current teacher, pondered, "It's hard to say at this point

in the year for myself personally, but it has always been a concern. Based on what I have seen, it [unionization] does seem to have a negative consequence." Despite the possibility of having decreased opportunities in the organization, teachers described that the most important value gained from the unionization efforts was the existence of the union.

Voice and presence. Teachers described that the most important consequence from unionization was the voice that it gave to teachers. Before unionization, HCS paraded an ideal of being teacher-led yet teachers considered it a façade. Teachers led professional development and organized committees, but when it came down to making decisions they were left out of the equation. At the time, teachers had little say about who was hired as an administrator. Teachers also had little say in the board's decision to open new schools. There was a teacher representative on the governing board, but that position held no voting power. Although that role was able to secure some changes such as a raise and a decrease in work days, the position did not itself give teachers the voice they were seeking.

In the past, teachers had felt frustrated and left the school. They felt that only a few people were heard and they were usually teachers who had close relationships with the administration. When teachers decided to unionize, having a voice became a priority. Valeria, a founding member, recalled, "It [unionization] helped teachers feel that they had a voice and I think that prior to that, people would just leave. They didn't really continue because they didn't feel they had a voice." Even though the teachers had sought

unionization as a vehicle towards job security, sustainability, and parity, they realized that having a voice could be an avenue to keep teachers at HCS.

Teachers at HCS were not able to secure job security in the traditional sense because they chose to give up tenure. They also did not secure sustainability. Every year, the schools continued to lose between 25 and 40% of their teaching staff. The founding members of the union still believed that the presence of the union and the creation of a collective bargaining was a success in itself. Michelle, a founding member, stated, "I think that was a success that we tried to incorporate as many viewpoints as possible and come up with an organic union that was true to ourselves. I think it's a success that it happened…that the contract continues." Teachers who founded the union all expressed a value in having a contract, the collective bargaining agreement, which provided a process for teachers to have a voice in their working conditions.

Still, the contract was not an end all for all teachers. Some teachers saw it as a representation of the union but they valued the presence of the union even more. When I asked Kelly, a founding member, if the values of the union were reflected in the contract, she declared:

> I don't know that it has anything to do with the contract. It has to do with the presence of the union…It reflected the values in that our voices were heard and they hadn't been heard. The fact that there were site reps that would talk to the principals and talk about issues…I really feel like it was our biggest win. That spoke to our vision in unionizing. We wanted to be active participants.

Teachers at HCS valued the presence of the union and saw it as a successful outcome of unionization. In addition, the voice of the union and their ability to talk with administrators became an important outcome of unionization.

Improved relationships with administration. The founding teachers spoke of the animosity and antagonism that occurred between them and their administrators when teachers decided to form a union in 2005. Since the unionization, most of the leaders have moved on to other positions outside of HCS. In fact, unionization created a communication between teachers and leaders that gave teachers some of the parity they sought in unionizing. Elisa reflected, "There's a disconnect when you leave the classroom and you're a central administrator. The fact that we have forced communication [is important]. Before they didn't have to listen." The forced communication has provided a process and has given the teachers some parity in the organization.

Most of the current site leaders were not present during unionization. Since unionization, teachers and site leaders have been able to create a more collaborative and harmonious relationship. Elisa stated, "Our admin are really open, we can talk about issues." The collaboration described can be a result of various factors. First, teachers did form a union that spoke to their needs as a collaborative. Second, the leaders were new and not tainted by the adversarial effects that unionization created. Third, there exists a new evaluation tool that is more streamlined and collaborative. Luna claimed:

> There's a relationship between site administrators and teachers that's more collaborative. Teachers go up to them and tell them what they need help with and now it's more of a conversational tone. Now they come into our rooms and we don't have to worry about them. I welcome them to my room so that they can see how hard my job is.

Both Elisa and Luna are teachers who worked at HCS before unionization and have experienced the changes since unionization. Kasey, a teacher who arrived at HCS after unionization reflected:

> It feels collaborative especially with administrators. They're there as my help and my coach. At my old school, [teachers] didn't want to be observed. They saw them as a threat. I want them to see me. Our coaching relationships are the thing that's grown me the most. The feedback. I don't feel like our administrators are above us, they don't act like they're above us. They act like we're partners in the mission.

Teachers at the different campuses shared a positive reaction to the level of communication and collaboration that they experience with their administrators. Sonia stated, "It's collaborative and solution-oriented. 'What can 'we' do about this?' It works both ways. I can go to her and she can come to me. It's really nice." This level of communication and collaboration may have existed before unionization but it was damaged by the unionization efforts. One of the consequences of unionization was that it established communication between the site leadership and the teachers' union.

Since unionization, union leaders have created more dialogue between teachers and administrators. This is an effort that is not directly stated in the collective bargaining agreement, yet it is a practice that has been established since unionization. Kelly, a founding teacher, recalled, "The fact that there were site reps that would talk to the principals and talk about issues... I really feel like that was our biggest win. That spoke to our vision in unionizing. We wanted to be active participants." Teachers found that this type of communication with site leaders provided them leverage in the decision-making process. Karina shared, "The new principals want to meet with the union at least once a month to hear what our teachers want and how to relieve the stresses at the site

level before it becomes a bigger school-wide issue." Administrators realized the importance of addressing issues with teachers before the issues became open to the bargaining process.

In addition to meeting with teachers and problem solving, site leaders have worked to appease teachers when an issue arises rather than let it become a union issue. Marisol added, "Administrators have different ways of dealing with situations. Our administrators appease us in different ways." This type of appeasement has maintained the peace at HCS, yet it has prevented teachers from having leverage to organize around common issues when it comes to bargaining with the managers at the central level. Angela reflected on the way that teacher satisfaction keeps them from organizing around issues. She recalled, "They want to be represented, they want a union as a backup but since they're appeased it's not important to them right now. But a union doesn't work that way." Teachers at HCS acknowledged that their leaders have worked to appease. The teachers today acknowledged the role that the evaluation process has had on building the collaboration between teachers and administrators.

Teacher evaluation rubric. A committee of teachers and administrators created the evaluation tool and process during the 2008 negotiation process. The tool itself is aligned with the California Standards for the Teaching Profession and because leaders have actively worked on norming the tool, they have provided more equitable evaluations across the campuses. In addition, leaders are required to provide evidence twice a year on how the teachers are progressing. Sonia reflected, "Our evaluation system works. On a whole it's a very qualitative approach to evaluation. I like that. It feels real to get a

narrative account of what your teaching looks like to somebody else." In addition to the extensive narratives, teachers fought for an opportunity to provide their own documentation for the evaluation if they did not believe that the evaluation accurately captured their teaching during that evaluation period. Luna shared her perspective on the evaluation process:

> There is a more precise language in our evaluation. You know who your evaluator is within the first 30 days of the year, there's check-ins with your evaluator, we have professional growth goals, your evaluator asked you what you wanted to see. Last December when I met with my evaluator, I didn't sign it and she let me add in some things that she had not seen and I felt like it made a more complete picture of my teaching and then I felt comfortable signing it. I didn't take it so personally because I know she's not in here everyday.

The evaluation system is one positive effect of the union formation that has led to concrete changes for teachers in their working conditions. Since the union was founded, fewer teachers have been surprised to be let go at the end of the year. Still, in the Dismissal article of the HCSTA collective bargaining agreement, the language clearly states that teachers can be dismissed if they show:

> Unsatisfactory performance, as defined by the Professional Evaluation Rubric, provided employee has been given written notice of the deficiency and has been given thirty (30) days to cure the deficiency. The Administration will provide a written support plan outlining the resources offered to the employee during the 30-day period.

This decision is also delineated as final and at the sole discretion of the executive director. In addition, the collective bargaining agreement stated that, "The judgment of the evaluator shall not be subject to the contractual grievance procedure." Teachers at HCS shared their support for the evaluation process, yet the actual language in the contract proved to be limiting for teachers. Because not many teachers have been

dismissed since unionization, the teachers did not see the language as a threat. The contract has become less important than the actual practices that have changed and have given teachers more parity and voice within HCS.

When asked what founding members wanted to know about the current situation at HCS, all of them asked if teachers had a voice and if the contract continued. The strained relationships between teachers and administration and the closed opportunities for union leaders could provide enough evidence to deem this unionization as a failure, yet HCS teachers believed that the existence and presence of the union provided a voice for teachers who in the past did not have one.

Theme 5: Teacher-Led Model of Unionism

Teachers at this school prided themselves in creating a union in an organic manner by and about teachers. Although they do not name a new model necessarily, they made references to an organic formation and a unique existence. Kim, a founding teacher claimed:

> I feel like it was really important for all of us to maintain what was—what we believed in—that we weren't just doing a standard contract, that we weren't doing what CTA wanted us to do necessarily**.** That we were really committed about this being our thing**.**

Founding teachers spoke of creating a union that worked alongside HCS in meeting the needs of students. Elisa stated, "This union was created for teachers by teachers at our schools that really met our needs and really took into account our students." They did not explore many different models yet they knew that they did not want to replicate the model existing in the local district union. The union faced many challenges in

participation, leadership, and disunity, which delayed the initial plans to create security, sustainability, and improve the working conditions of teachers at HCS.

Unique values. Teachers at HCS wanted to establish an independent union with its own governance, policies, and values. Teachers wanted it to be different from the existing unions in the local districts. They sought to include all teachers and to think about the values that led to their formation. Michelle, a founding member, recalled, "This is a unique situation and how do we form, how do we want to have some power, parity with management but stay true to ourselves and include everyone." One of the values that led the formation of this union was in regards to the mission of the school. Kim, a founding member, stated, "Our values were about creating a place where we could do the absolute best that we could possibly do for the kids." Teachers repeatedly mentioned that the driving force behind the union was to put kids first.

Teachers also shared an interest in building the relationships within the staff and between teachers and administrators. This value stemmed from how they judged the values of the local district union. George, a founding member, recalled, "It was nothing like I had seen before. I mean we were trying to get an authentic relationship that wasn't adversarial or confrontational with management. We didn't want to create a division with the staff." Although the relationships did become adversarial, teachers were truly seeking a collaborative existence as a union. Kelly, a founding member, stated:

> If we would've gone the UTLA route, it would've been a mess. That organization does not speak to our values. So being able to craft our own everything, our policy, based on what we think it should be and not what LAUSD teachers think it should be.

Hope Charter School teachers saw their union as an alternative to the district union and saw that their existence would create a space for a different type of unionization. Even though teachers saw their existence as unique, one of the struggles that the union faced had to do with its identity as a representative of a collective force and voice.

From the beginning, founding members sought to create a union that was democratically founded and teacher led. Marisol recalled, "I think we definitely created something unique. The fact that we are teacher-led, that is really unique." Teachers in the HCSTA leadership have conducted their own negotiating, organizing, and governing independently from the California Teachers Association, which is their state representative. They have managed to keep the union alive while operating with a few teacher leaders and little support from CTA. Elisa stated, "We are teacher created, by teachers for teachers." HCS teachers viewed their existence as uniquely embedded within the values of a charter school and did not view traditional unions as led by teachers who were still in touch with the profession.

Part of the reason that teachers have worked independently from CTA is their view that charter school teachers have different values from teachers in traditional public schools. They believed that the state and local district unions did not speak to the same values as this union. Karina stated, "Teachers from charter schools are from a different breed and it's a good thing. We're asking for a little bit. We do the hard work, we're happy to do it but if something is unfair, we'll speak up." In fact, due to budget cuts and backlash from the media, charter schools have received less attention from the state union that represents them. Elisa stated:

> CTA still views us as negative. A lot of the talk from CTA is anti-charter, especially in the face of budget cuts. I hope we change the mentality that teachers in these charters are starting the unions. I think that makes us unique.

Teachers who had been part of UTLA also compared their experiences in this union compared to unions that they had been part of in local districts. Luna stated:

> The fact that this union has a young bargaining team, a young president, and vice president makes them more approachable to the staff and to the other teachers. I remember the UTLA reps at my old school always seemed very jaded, liked they had given up and they liked to yell a lot. Our teachers are very organized, and articulate and getting our feedback and contacting us when we need to talk.

In fact, part of the rhetoric that has surrounded this union has been a focus on students' needs. Elisa recalled, "In other schools, the students weren't taken into consideration, it wasn't about learning, it wasn't about teaching." Teachers leading HCSTA believed that putting students at the forefront is a unique value of charter school teachers. Karina recalled, "I've heard of other districts not liking charters because we work more. We're definitely in it for the kids. We're very different. We're not asking for much." The perceived difference between charter school teachers and other teachers is what has led this union to maintain a unique identity within other unions.

Right now HCS serves about 2,500 students and employs about 150 teachers on five campuses. Therefore the union is very small compared to the large district union, which represents 40,000 teachers and classified staff. Kasey, a current teacher, recalled:

> The thing that I like about our union is that it is so small. That's something that gets lost when you get to an LAUSD union where you have no way of interacting with the people that are making decisions.

Kasey shared an experience where during negotiations she contributed feedback that ended up being on the contract. That experience led her to believe that this union spoke

to her values and was small enough to interact with its members. Sonia, a current teacher, agreed, "I like the small quality too. Because it's small, the things that we discuss actually pertain to us. Unions get slogged down in a bunch of stuff that gets bigger and bigger." Teachers shared a desire to keep the union issues small and simple compared to what they viewed the larger unions to represent. Karina shared, "Our values are a little bit more simple. Other schools make greater demands. We're asking for a little bit." Teachers at HCS value the simple values and the localized control that this union holds, yet many were not satisfied with what the union had accomplished. They shared ideals of what they would like to see and the challenges that limit this type of growth for their union.

One stark difference between teachers at HCS and teachers in other unions was over the issue of tenure or job protection. The founding teachers did not ask for tenure in their initial contract and teachers since have not ever mentioned it as something that they seek. Kasey shared:

> I know I do a good job and I trust and respect our administrators enough to know that they know I do a good job. I don't feel that I have to go back to the union and say, "protect me," because I think I'm fine already.

The ideas surrounding job protection had a negative connotation in this union due to the experiences that teachers had with other unions such as UTLA. Emma reflected:

> I don't know if job security is what I think of when I think of our union. There's a negative connotation with unions that they protect bad teachers out in the other LAUSD type union. At HCS, I've never connected the two. It's more about making sure that we can be evaluated justly. There's a process you can go through if something is unfair.

The founding teachers at HCS fought for job protection in the form of "just cause." Although their contract did not give them "just cause," teachers at HCS were satisfied and confident that they did not need that type of protection. Kasey reflected:

> Part of why I never joined UTLA was because I hated that they did that. They would do things to make sure bad teachers didn't get in trouble. That's part of why their school [LAUSD] is such a mess is because they do that. I'm kind of glad we [HCS] don't do that.

Teachers at HCS believed that their values were different from those teachers in LAUSD, yet there were teachers who acknowledged the value of having some protection. Sonia stated:

> We don't have job security because if someone needs to be let go, they're going to be let go and the union can't do much about that. The union really doesn't provide job protection but at the same time it provides some protection. Part of me wonders, if I said something that was really unpopular and there was a different administrator, would that outcome look different. Would my job be on the line?

Even though job protection had a negative connotation with teachers at HCS, some teachers did believe in having some protections in the workforce. Teachers who founded the union sought protection in the form of a fair process. The current teachers valued the processes that were established in the collective bargaining agreement and saw it as a source of pride for what their union had accomplished. They defined their values in maintaining a small organization focused on the needs of their teachers and students.

Collective identity. When the union was founded, teachers saw a need to be united as a collective. They believed in a democratic form of participation where everyone had an opportunity to express their concern. Teachers spoke of meetings at a local café where everyone was invited to share their perspective. Teachers who had been

part of the 2001 unionization efforts were hesitant to unionize and in this forum, they were heard. Michelle, a founding teacher, recalled:

> It felt that we were trying to include everyone, include different perspectives and yet when the high school was founded it was like they had a different experience and hadn't been at HCS as long, they haven't been as active since then.

Many teachers did not want to unionize at all and wanted to seek an alternative. George, a founding member, recalled, "We had several meetings where everybody had a chance to give input. We had all the people having the chance to give their inputs not like anybody was silenced during the discussion." Teachers interviewed had both positive and negative experiences with unions. Some teachers had never worked anywhere else, while others had been part of local district unions and came with negative perceptions of unions. In addition, many of the teachers interviewed shared that their positive perception of unions came from their own parents' experiences with unions. Julie, a founding teacher recalled:

> As one of the leaders of the teacher team, I said it was important that we join even if we're not having those same issues we need to stick together as colleagues as teachers as professionals. I spoke up to get other teachers to sign up to the union and be part of that time.

Teachers interviewed shared that seeing themselves as one school with shared experiences led them to seek unionization and the presence of a representative body.

Teachers approached the process of unionization and the organizing efforts that came later through a collective lens. Even though some teachers had been vocal about their opposition to unionization, every teacher at HCS was approached individually and given a ballot. Kim, a founding member, declared:

> Being so organic, we approached all of these people and had everyone vote. I feel like we went to everybody so it wasn't just like once we had our sixty percent—we didn't selectively go around, I remember that process.

Kim recalled a recent experience at a charter school where only some teachers were approached to vote for a union while others were left out of the process. The union at HCS was founded under the ideals of the collective and they felt that it made them unique.

Even after unionization, during the first negotiation process, teachers approached both members and non-members to organize around a letter writing campaign that eventually led them to their first collective bargaining agreement in 2007. Marisol, a current teacher, stated, "We knew that we had to really come together, like we had to come together to write letters…It's just something like you do, like you work together as teachers to support your unions." The teachers had always held meetings open to everyone who wanted to attend, and all of the informational flyers were sent to the entire staff. Marisol added, "Union meetings should never exclude the non-members." Teachers at HCS had a sense of collective identity and viewed the union as a vehicle towards reaching a collective voice. Yet there were challenges to the collective identity that continued to inhibit the power that the union had at HCS.

Theme 6: Challenges to Collective Identity

Teachers who founded the union recalled a need for one collective voice as the representative of teachers. They felt that the challenge came when teachers saw their individual needs above those of the collective. The struggle between the collective identities versus the individual identities emerged as a theme in this study. The founders

of the union viewed the unionization movement as something more than their immediate realities and organized for the benefits of the collective. However, for current teachers, the challenges were different because they had experienced the development of the union in the last seven years. One of the changes was the physical separation between the now five sites. Teachers who had been at HCS since before unionization remembered the days when the two original campuses worked together and even shared one charter. Luna recalled:

> At the beginning we felt like one unit, we were only two sites and we shared professional development flip-flopping back and forth between sites and as we started expanded, we were becoming disjointed. We started to break off and there came a point where I started to not know everyone's name and not recognizing everyone's face.

The distancing between the campuses added to the distancing between teachers at all of the campuses and to the challenges in unity that this young union faced. Due to the challenges in maintaining unity, this union had not been able to secure better working conditions, sustainability, and security for its teachers.

In discussing the unionization efforts with teachers, many shared the opinions of teachers who did not have the same view of the collective identity that they did. At the time of unionization, 40% of teachers voted against the union. Some of these teachers were not vocal, yet others were clear about why they opposed unionization at HCS. The teachers who unionized declared a need to see themselves as a collective voice, yet other teachers did not see that. Valeria, a founding member, reflected:

> So there were people that did not think we needed it because they felt fine about it. They didn't necessarily have an idea of the collective ideology or collective movement, 'Just because you're okay, did you notice that the teacher next door to you was mistreated? Did you care about that?' So it's kind of like, the challenge

> was to try to convince those teachers who thought, 'Well I'm fine, so we don't need to unionize.'

This issue was a recurring theme in the interviews with HCS teachers. It reflected an individualistic approach also disguised in the ideals of autonomy. Elisa, a current teacher, stated "We as a group of teachers saw a need to be heard, as equal voices. The ones who were already heard didn't see the same need." Teachers were divided on this issue of voice and many teachers did not see the value in having a collective voice because they were already getting their individual voices heard. She added, "Teachers felt that the ones who were close with administration got the things that they needed and the ones that weren't didn't." At the time, it did not appear that teachers who were against unionization or who chose not to join the union posed any threat to the movement, yet the ideology behind their decisions affected the movement from the inside out.

George, a founding member, recalled what he told teachers who were against the union. He said:

> I didn't do this just for myself. I did this for everybody. It's not like I'm trying to take the money from you. I'm not trying to change the school completely but this is just something that I felt we needed.

Teachers strongly believed in creating a sustainable future that was beyond their own experiences that would meet the needs of the future teachers at HCS. Again, this was for the benefit of the students. Valeria, a founding member, recalled, "I didn't necessarily see myself in teaching for the next ten years but at the same time I have this collective idea that it's not just about me, it's about what my colleagues want." The division between teachers who saw a collective need and those that did not created a larger

division that continued to divide the union and limit its power within Hope Charter School.

Since the union's inception, leaders have discussed the challenges to getting people to join and participate. If the union were to fall below the 50% participation required for it to exist, HCS could challenge and decertify the union. When asked about the current status of this union, Michelle, a founding leader, wondered:

> I am curious that the school keeps expanding so there are more people and I assume there's not a majority anymore. So I'm curious about whether management is trying to challenge the actual union at this point. I was afraid of that when the school got added last year.

Michelle and other leaders who founded the union knew this would be a challenge, yet they maintained the value of giving teachers the choice to join the union. Union leaders believed that teachers should be convinced by the accomplishments of the union; therefore there were barriers to participation that could be addressed through the union.

Teachers at HCS worked in an exhaustive environment where they worked late everyday and were undercompensated. Therefore it was difficult to get teachers to participate in the union and be a united front. Karina shared, "When we want to change things it's really difficult to come to a consensus. Getting people to come to meetings because they're tutoring after school or planning is more of a challenge than anything." The participation of teachers is minimal even at the individual campuses. Angela recalled, "At our site, they don't want to ruffle feathers. They don't want to be part of a union because it has a stigma that they're unhappy with their work." Teachers at the individual campuses shared a stigma that marked teachers who were union members and kept others from being active in the union. Julie described:

> [The principal] made it seem that you're not about the kids if you're involved in unions. It's about guilt. A lot of these people are middle class or upper class and not first generation educated. They don't have a higher need to have workers rights and be protected like those that are first generation. Like me.

Therefore, teachers like Julie who shared an ideology and a value of unionism, saw the need for a union versus other teachers who may not have shared the same working class values. Teachers at the different campuses explained different reasons as to why their teachers remained inactive in the union. Many teachers united on the idea that a stronger leadership was necessary to strengthen the union.

The leadership of the union faced challenges since the first group of leaders left in 2006 before the first contract was ratified. Teachers who moved up to leadership positions, moved up by default, and every time ran a campaign unopposed. In the first year of it's founding, most of the leadership left the school and new leaders had to step up. Kelly, who was a site representative at the time, was nominated for the presidency. No one ran against her and she won the presidency by default. She reflected on the participation of charter school teachers:

> Charter school teachers are young and overworked and getting them to take on more work in this organization is too much. Because your union is only as strong as the people active in it. When there's two people running it, it's no longer a union.

All of the presidents since the beginning have been elected in the same fashion. One person is identified as a potential leader and then placed on a ballot to be elected. Since then, a small group of teachers have been the face of the union. Luna reflected:

> In the past years, it's been a few people that you connect with the union and when it comes time for somebody else to take over, you hear crickets, people are very hesitant and if no one wants to do it they'll say, 'I'll do it if this person does it with me and shares the responsibility.'

There were three teachers that led the union between 2008 and 2010. They took the role of governing board and bargaining team at the same time. Teachers who held leadership positions in the HCSTA understood that the workload was heavy and the addition of union responsibilities to the workload was a huge sacrifice for teachers. Luna shared, "Getting other people to step up and sacrifice [is a challenge]. They're either scared or assume that someone else will take over." The challenge of getting teachers to "step up" to leadership positions limited the access that the union had to all of the teachers at the different campuses and the power it had to educate all of the teachers on their rights as union members.

In 2010, the union governing board expanded to include teachers from all of the campuses and included teachers from the new campuses. Still, only teachers from the two original campuses held positions in the governance board. At the end of 2012, these teachers will give up their posts and new teachers will need to run for leadership positions. Elisa stated, "I don't want, at the end of this year, to have to ask someone to be president. It has to be someone who wants to do it, who has the time…It's going to be really difficult." In addition, teachers who held leadership positions in the union felt the added burden to be the holders of information and the only ones who knew the contract well. Elisa reflected:

> I understand the reason to have leadership but I believe that it's better that everyone does their part. If every site leader, and every teacher took it upon themselves to try to fix their issues before coming to us….If it affects you then you need to do something about it.

As the leaders of this union, these teachers faced many challenges in getting people to participate and to take charge of their working conditions. Marisol reflected, "Our membership is under involved but it also depends on the leadership. We're operating like really minimally. Just handling what can be handled because it's a lot of work. We're just meeting the basic needs." Part of the difficulty in leading a union comes with being a completely teacher led operation. Teachers who lead HCSTA were untrained, yet they were committed to leading the union without much support from CTA. Marisol stated:

> We don't really have the necessary knowledge or wisdom to know how to really proceed forth with strengthening the organization. We've never had the experience working with unions nor are we going to workshops offered by CTA to be trained on how to do these various aspects of leadership.

Teachers at HCS wanted to create a union different from the existing models, but they did not have the member buy-in or the leadership capacity to create these changes. The challenges to leadership and participation were directly linked to the culture of exhaustion. Kasey suggested, "Getting people to do it on top of everything else that we have to do is the challenge." The teachers valued the union and its unique values yet they had been unsuccessful in meeting all of their desired outcomes. Some teachers believed that it was part of a larger plan that kept teachers divided and unable to create solidarity through their union.

In 2005 during the initial unionization the organization had less than 50 teachers. By 2012, this number has doubled with the addition of two sites and the expansion of a high school. Karina, a current teacher, reflected, "The challenge has been being united as a whole group. Because each school has their own needs and everyone sees things a little bit different." Teachers found it more difficult to connect with the other sites due to

having different needs and simply not knowing each other. Miles stated a need for the union to reach out to the high school. He said, "The first 2-3 years of the high school the union wasn't really present at all. It was the nature of the culture. It's history, it's presence, and its involvement hasn't been clear at the high school." The site specific needs have always been there. That was one of the factors that the management used to divide teachers, using the sites' needs as reason to need more flexibility.

Not only were teachers seeing that their needs were different, they were also not connecting on a personal level. Luna, a current teacher, recalled, "We are very disjointed as a [union]. We don't have three goals that we're working on and I don't feel like I know anyone. I don't feel that familiarity and that camaraderie." Because teachers did not know each other, the teachers who had been in the organization for 10 years and had been through the unionization efforts did not feel that they could help the new teachers. Karina, a current teacher, reflected, "Our schools have been through a lot of the challenges that the new schools are facing, and we can help them." Even the teachers at the two new campuses had not worked together through their common issues of being Public School Choice schools. Angela shared, "We haven't had that connection at all. I wonder if it's purposeful." In discussing the challenges to unity, teachers shared this idea that the HCS management could be purposefully dividing teachers in order to limit their power as a union. As teachers discussed their frustration with being so divided, Karina, observed:

> It seems like divide and conquer. As long as we [HCS] keep making new schools, then teachers don't get to know each other and they don't know what's going on over there. They'll never know unless it's through the union but that

> might be after the fact and we keep making them work so hard. It's like they [HCS] know…

Union leaders shared their frustration with getting all teachers to be on the same page. Even though some of it was a result of the heavy workload, there exists another aspect of being pitted against each other that kept teachers from feeling the camaraderie that used to exist before unionization. Emma argued:

> It's hard to make unified decisions especially because each site is so different. It becomes so hard for us to come together and take a stance on something. It's hard because it's so dependent on our administrators because every site has different things going on.

The administrators at each site also learned to appease their own teachers and work on this competitive aspect between sites. Luna recalled, "We were hearing at our campus that [another campus] was bringing our scores down." This lack of unity kept HCSTA from really gaining ground as a force in the organization. Teachers assumed that because they had a union that the union would speak for them, but when there was a lack of consensus the administration took advantage of the disunity and did not take the union seriously. Sonia commented:

> Getting people to buy-in but like strength [is the challenge]. Like strong leadership and a strong force and a strong vision. I've gotten the sense that when the union meets with the [central officers] or with the board that there's a sort of expectation that we will agree to what is being proposed. I'm not saying that we need to be in battle because that's not productive. But we do need to hold our own. We should be able to come together and decide on what would be the best solution. We should be able to propose that and be a real force in the negotiating process rather than a group that is being expected to consent. I don't think we're taken seriously.

A consequence to this disunity is that teachers were not able to make gains in their collective bargaining agreement. In 2008, the union successfully reconfigured the salary

table and collaborated on an evaluation tool. Since then, there have been no changes to the contract. Karina reflected:

> The teachers aren't as passionate about it. Around the time when things aren't budging then we all come together but it's not as passionate as before…whenever we need to change something we need to seem stronger like a stronger front.

Other teachers in the organization shared this same concern. The union's role became more reactive than proactive. Emma argued:

> It feels like our union is always responding to something instead of being proactive. It happened last year about class size and this year about benefits. We were asked to make quick decisions by the board. I feel like we're not prepared, it's always responsive. That's a problem that we're not well organized is because new schools are starting to come.

Other teachers reflected on other changes that have occurred at HCS. Julie reflected on the challenges she experienced at the high school campus when trying to get teachers invested in the union. She recalled:

> It's a different type of teacher that they're hiring. There was one teacher that told me that he wasn't going to do social justice. This is what we do here. You cannot say no to doing social justice. They strategically hire teachers that are by the book, data-driven and submissive, not questioning and fresh-green teachers with no experience or understanding of the charter school model compared to the public school model. It's not even on their radar because they're just trying to survive.

Many union leaders blamed the teachers for not being passionate and the union for not being strong, yet there existed a concern that strategic decisions by the HCS management could be challenging the strength of this union. One thing was for certain: the union was not helping retain teachers at HCS. So what lies ahead for this young union and what is in store for its future? Both former and current teachers reflected on their vision and their hopes for the future.

The Future of this Union

Even though teachers identified many challenges to their unity, they shared a strong belief that the union belonged at HCS. Teachers shared different perspectives on what the union should do and how it should evolve in the future. Miles suggested:

> What's needed is a collective voice. Whether it's a union or not. We're part of the cause, we're doing the work, we're part of the people doing the work. It's important that we have a say in what we do, how we do it, how it's compensated.

Teachers at HCS valued the power of the collective voice especially in giving the teachers a say in the organizations' decision-making processes. Kasey added, " [The union] is another body that fights for what is best for everybody. If the board is making a decision that has to do with money, having that voice that says 'We need to think about people.'" In addition to giving teachers a say in the organization, the teachers also needed to have a collective power. Angela claimed, "Once the union, if it has a future, and it's something that we need, it needs to voice that we have power." Teachers at the newer schools felt that the union had to communicate the rights that it afforded its members so that teachers felt empowered.

Teachers who worked at HCS longer understood that the union did have that power, but that it was not communicated to the newer teachers. Karina stated, "Yes we need a union to centralize the schools and the needs and to reconnect." The future of the union lies within the teachers who work within it to make these changes. Marisol claimed, "Right now the union are our teachers. I get real defensive when we say the union needs to do this and that. We are the union. We need to make these changes."

The future of the union lies in the collective identity that gives teachers the power to see themselves as agents of change.

In addition to seeing the union as a collective entity, the teachers also saw the union as establishing a different reputation for charter schools. Sonia shared:

> Charters have a reputation of having a really intense workload and having teachers be really young and burn out and leave. I think that reality exists because there aren't organized forces to make the work more protected and more realistic. The existence of a union is really important so that HCS doesn't fall into that stereotypical pattern of getting teachers for two years, burning them out, and them letting them go. Parts of us fall into that pattern, just some aspects.

According to Sonia, the role of the union is to also establish the strength of teachers within charter schools so that they stop creating oppressive working conditions for teachers.

Other teachers saw the union as an evolving organization that could fit the needs of the teachers working within it at a given time. Miles shared:

> Part of naming the role of the union, it has to be a living entity that deals with the issues that are necessary to deal with at the time. The role of when it started could be something different than what it is now. The union is asking itself now: what is our role? Part of the role is the contract because negotiations are coming up.

Teachers recognized that the union needed a new focus but there existed the issue of the contract, which required teachers to negotiate every 2 or 3 years. That process became arduous and exhausted the union leadership. Emma argued:

> I don't know think we have anything set, like these are our goals as a union as a HCS school these are the things we take pride in as teachers as protecting ourselves. Now that it's time to negotiate, now we're having these conversations. These conversations should have already happened and established. I feel like we're moving slow.

Although the negotiation process took most of the energy out of the teachers, there was hope that teachers could move beyond the collective bargaining agreement towards a more professional existence in order to keep teachers engaged in being union members. Marisol believed:

> I just feel that we need a different phase now of our union to keep teachers invested in who we are. The future would be for our union to take a more active role in really developing our teacher leadership and provide avenues that allow our work as instructional leaders to shine because then that really supports our profession. We want our union to go beyond just the negotiation process so that we're the ones that espouse the social justice so that we get the recognition of the work that we do with our schools, and our kids.

Teachers at Hope Charter School did believe that there existed a role for this union to achieve parity, security, and sustainability for teachers at HCS. In addition, teachers had a vision for a union that creates a collective, unified, front that serves to dispel stereotypes about the working conditions in charter schools. Finally, the teachers believed that developing leadership and professionalism was going to lead teachers beyond the collective bargaining agreement and recognize their work in public schools.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 detailed the experiences of teachers who founded a union within a charter school and the experiences of teachers who continued to be part of this environment. By using a multi-step inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002), I identified themes as they emerged from the participants. Their experiences, beliefs, and values provided an insight into the culture of a charter school organization, one bounded by ideals of choice, and the response they received in attempting to provide a collective voice for teachers. These teachers detailed how as a school of choice, Hope Charter School, reinforced an

environment focused on autonomy and flexibility for a non-elected governing board. These ideologies of choice created an environment where teachers were motivated to work on behalf of a social justice mission, but their power as a collective was limited by the flexibility required by the business model of the charter school and the ideologies which kept them from gaining power as a collective. Nevertheless these teachers strove for a model of unionism focused on teacher leadership and professionalism that would create sustainability, parity, and security in order to create the best teaching force for the underprivileged students of the community. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings, answers to the research questions, analysis of the findings, implications, and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Chapter 5 is organized into five parts: summary of the study, discussion of findings, implications, recommendations, and conclusion. In the summary of the study, I reviewed the purpose of the study and the research questions that guided this study. The discussion of the findings included answers to the research questions and explored the themes that emerged from the study. The implications section delineated how this case study informs the community at Hope Charter School and charter schools in general. I included recommendations for future studies, and I concluded with a reflection of how this study impacted my work as a researcher, teacher, and union leader at HCS.

Summary of the Study

Purpose of the Study

Utilizing a case study methodology, this study focused on the experiences of teachers within a unionized charter school in Los Angeles. There are 183 charter schools under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) serving approximately 78,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Charter schools have become a widely accepted and rapidly growing option for educational reform especially for low-income, inner-city students (Newton et al., 2012). Because charter schools operate as schools of choice, they lead teachers, students, and parents to believe that operational flexibility distinguishes them from other public schools in order to create schools that serve the needs of students best. Charter schools also pride themselves in

creating an environment where teachers have greater autonomy than in the traditional public schools. Nevertheless, previous studies have demonstrated that working conditions are worse in charter schools and that charter schools experience higher turnover than traditional public schools. Even though charter schools promise to deliver results to the most underserved students, the working conditions of teachers in charter schools have not created the conditions for this movement to create true reform in public education.

This study captured the voices of teachers and documented their beliefs and experiences in a unionized charter school. Through this research, I uncovered a) the culture and environment of a charter school leading teachers towards unionization, b) the relationships shaped by the culture of choice, and c) the charter school teachers' model of unionism. This study shed light on how charter school teachers became unionized within a charter school management organization that inherently opposed their unionization. The voices of teachers in this study provided a glimpse into how the culture and environment of a charter school led them to seek unionization and how unionization affected their relationships and opportunities as charter school educators. The charter school movement has claimed that they are the response to saving public education, yet it is important and relevant to understand the perspectives of teachers who work in this environment.

Research Questions

This study focused on the experiences of current and former charter school teachers who worked within a unionized environment. In order to understand their

working conditions, their relationships, and their values around unionization, the following questions were the focus of this study:

1. What was the culture and environment at Hope Charter School that led teachers to seek unionization?
2. How has the culture of choice shaped relationships between teachers and management at Hope Charter School?
3. What is the model of unionism at Hope Charter School and what has it accomplished?

Findings

In a six-month period, I conducted interviews and focus groups with 17 former and current teachers of Hope Charter School (HCS), a charter management organization (CMO) with 5 campuses in Los Angeles. In addition, I observed leadership meetings of the Hope Charter School Teachers Association (HCSTA) and analyzed historical documents from the organization. By using a multi-step inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002), I was able to find themes as they emerged from the participants. Their experiences, beliefs, and values provided an insight into the culture of a charter school organization and the experiences that led them to seek unionization. The six key findings in this study were framed by the themes and domains and verified by the various data collected over a six-month time period. They were: a) culture of collaboration; b) culture of exhaustion; c) culture of choice; d) consequences from unionization; e) unique model of unionism; and f) challenges to the collective identity.

Discussion of Findings

By revealing the voices of teachers who worked in a charter school mediated by a teachers' union, this study looked into the workings of charter schools and their part in the larger movement of school choice. The participants' voices detailed a collaborative culture that lured teachers to escape the negative environment in public district schools, to then face so much work that very often they chose to leave the charter school environment.

Teachers experienced the joys of autonomy in choosing their curriculum while not realizing that the true choice existed only for the management of the school that had the ultimate power over their working conditions. When teachers decided to unionize they faced antagonism from their school leaders, the very same people who hired them and gave them positive evaluations on their teaching. Teachers also faced a backlash from the management including letters from their board members and verbal attacks at the bargaining table. Teachers heavily involved in the unionization were harassed, marginalized, ignored for promotion, and even let go for their alleged disloyalty to the school and to the students. Still, they maintained the importance of unionizing and founded a local union with unique values and different from the existing district unions. However, by moving away from the traditional model, this union was left without a clear understanding of what being a union meant. Teachers fell to the intimidation of the public's perception on tenure and gave up this fundamental protection granted to teachers in the last 40 years of collective bargaining in this country. Leaders of this union continued to face many challenges in creating a union that sought parity with the

management of the school. Following is a discussion of the findings in relation to the three research questions.

Question 1: What was the culture and environment at Hope Charter School that led teachers to seek unionization?

Teachers found the collaborative environment at HCS that focused on improving the education of students in the community as the pinnacle of their professional experience. They recalled arriving to a collaborative culture, where professionalism flourished and like-minded individuals worked towards a student-centered and socially just mission. Teachers at HCS believed that working with like-minded individuals was one of the reasons they came to a charter school and they sought the collaboration as an escape to the negativity existing in large district schools. When they arrived at HCS, they were surprised by the professionalism exhibited by the young and vibrant teaching staff. They were drawn to the leadership that teachers exhibited and to the professionalism and mentoring of their administrators.

Along with the high levels of professionalism, teachers at Hope Charter School experienced an exhaustive work environment that eventually led them to seek unionization. They questioned the sustainability of the exhaustive environment especially because they were all young and single when they began at HCS. They described the additional responsibility of starting a school from the ground up, from writing the charter to being part of committees and creating programs from scratch. In addition, teachers at HCS worked an additional month compared to the teachers in the local school district, yet they received similar pay. Even when teachers received a raise

after the initial unionization, the raises were not equitable and the salary scale failed to promote teacher longevity at HCS. They continued to work long hours every day as they created new programs to keep their school competitive with the neighborhood schools. Yet HCS teachers felt that the responsibility to develop and carry a professional culture at the school fell on their shoulders and turned into a reality of a heavy workload marked by exhaustion.

Before 2005, Hope Charter School was a non-unionized charter school with a vibrant community of teachers, students, and parents. Many teachers found this environment invigorating, creative, and professional, yet the alleged autonomy provided to teachers led them to "choose" to work harder, and made them feel overworked and undervalued. Teachers respected their leaders, who also worked exhaustive hours, and who received less pay than administrators in other public schools. Yet within the charter school model of governance, the site leadership had to remain loyal to the decisions of the governing board, even if those decisions negatively impacted teachers and their students.

Another factor that drew teachers to HCS was the decision-making power that working at a charter school provided. Teachers tried to participate in the decision-making processes by serving as representatives on the governing board, collaborating on writing the school's charter, and serving on countless committees. However, they realized they did not have any voice or power when their requests were ignored. They were vocal about their needs, but they needed a teacher's union to seek parity with the management. Therefore, a group of HCS teachers found it important to dispute their

working conditions and took action by forming a union. They tried it in 2001 and failed, yet when they reluctantly re-organized in 2005 they succeeded. These teachers believed that unionization would be a vehicle towards maintaining the collaborative culture at HCS and making teaching a sustainable profession in a charter school setting. The literature on the culture and environment of charter schools described a similar experience.

Al Shanker, the leader of the larger teacher's union in the nation, and the original proponent of charter schools, envisioned a school where teachers could be professionals, take charge of curricular decisions, and manage their own schools (Kahlenberg, 2006). Yet, in 1991 when Minnesota signed the first charter school law in the country, it failed to fulfill Shanker's original vision. Instead of working within schools and with teachers, charter school operators created structural changes that deregulated public education leaving teachers out of the equation (Gyurko, 2008). Although the unions have been left out of the discussion in charter schools, previous studies have showcased the working environments of charter schools.

Teachers in 40 Los Angeles charter schools generally favored an environment of working with like-minded teachers despite the difficult working conditions of the schools (Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003). However, at the end of the year, instead of fighting to improve their grim labor situations these teachers chose to leave their schools. Other studies found that teacher turnover in charter schools is significantly higher than in traditional public schools. Teachers named dissatisfaction with working conditions, and involuntary attrition, due to lack of job security, as the important reasons why they left

charter schools (Stuit & Smith, 2010). In addition, charter school teachers generally worked longer hours and more days, received less job security, and generally received less pay than their traditional public school counterparts (Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003). In addition, they found that although the starting pay for charter school teachers was equal to that of district teachers, more experienced teachers earned less in charter schools than in traditional public schools which was a factor leading to higher levels of turnover in charter schools (Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003).

A study of teachers in three different types of public schools uncovered the working conditions of teachers in deregulated schools in Boston. The authors concluded that charter schools were the least favorable to teachers (Johnson & Landman, 2000). In addition, the flexibility granted to charter schools was not automatically extended to teachers. Because the power in charters goes to the board and the principal, the teachers had no guarantee about the nature of their workplace and whether it would be fair, responsive, and supportive (Johnson & Landman, 2000). Other studies found that the market-like environment of charter schools was in direct contrast of the role of teaching, which naturally seeks collaboration (Margolis, 2005).

The findings in this study add to the current literature on teachers in charter schools. Charter schools like Hope Charter School are luring teachers by offering the ideals of autonomy, collaboration, and shared-governance. They rely on young teachers' idealism and their service ethic. Because teachers feel invested in the community, they agree to the work or they choose to leave if they feel that they do not fit in. Therefore, teachers in charter schools leave the school and/or the profession at higher rates than

teachers in district schools. In addition, the salary scale at charter schools does not reflect a value for longevity because charter schools do not expect to retain teachers.

Question 2: How has the culture of choice shaped relationships between teachers and management at Hope Charter School?

Teachers described their experiences at Hope Charter School as employees of a school run by a non-elected governing board with corporate ideals masked under the ideals of flexibility. The governing board was recruited to serve as capital fundraisers yet they were disconnected from the schools. Teachers valued having a board that volunteered their time seeking no political gains or public appreciations. Yet, this was a board that did not represent the values of HCS families, teachers, staff, and students. Teachers described feeling like they were part of a business operation and were disposable employees of the organization. They also realized that their power as stakeholders was limited by the unrestricted governing board's control over their work. Flexibility was used a justification for the board's resistance to unionization and to giving them basic protections like tenure. These ideals created an environment focused on students' needs and in turn exploiting the work of teachers. As a result of the board's insistence on maintaining operational flexibility, the site leadership was loyal to the board's decisions rather than to the teachers they had themselves hired. This led to a distrust of the leadership who served as the instructional leaders and coaches at the schools. When teachers unionized, it was to protect their roles as professionals yet their own site leaders and the board chose to attack their unionization efforts.

Because teachers were expected to maintain their loyalty to the organization, the school leaders felt personally attacked by the unionization efforts. The unionization created a backlash of broken relationships with their administration and repercussions for union involvement. Teachers discovered that they were referred to as "bad apples" during a negotiation session so they questioned the school's emphasis on social justice. Even though the school used social justice as a tenet in the mission of the school to lure them in, it was not applied to them as workers. The backlash teachers received from the administration eventually divided the teaching staff. The experiences of teachers at HCS were not unique to the experiences of other teachers in charter schools. Their experiences stemmed from a culture built through a neoliberal approach that has transformed the role of schooling to that of a business.

Neoliberalism has transformed public education from a government investment to one that can be bought and sold (Davies & Bansel, 2007). Therefore schools, like other public services, which were once essential to the collective well being of the country, were now managed like any other private business. Even the role of parents and students has been transformed from that of participants to that of entrepreneurs seeking and choosing the best schools where they can maximize profits for their children (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). The culture of choice, in particular the expansion of charter schools, has transformed parents into consumers, and in turn, has pitted them against public schools and teacher unions.

The rhetoric of school choice fabricated by neoliberalism faulted public schools because despite the resources provided by the government, the educational system has

not improved (Chubb & Moe, 1990). It also blamed unions and its large bureaucracies for spending money pleasing teachers rather than meeting students' and parents' needs (Chubb & Moe, 1990). This ideology treated parents as customers and schools as businesses competing in a free-market. In schools that are managed by non-elected, business-like governing boards, the management maintained all of the flexibilities granted within a culture of choice. In the last 20 years, the ideals of neoliberalism have created a system of deregulated public schools within a culture of choice that looks at public education as a business and not as a public good.

The last 20 years since the first charter law was signed in Minnesota, states and districts across the country have been restructuring schools and districts within a lens of school choice. Schools are being reconstituted and often turned into charter schools. Out of the many different deregulated schools, charter schools have taken away the most rights from teachers (Johnson & Landman, 2000). Even though charter schools were founded as places where autonomy and innovation would flourish, the flexibility granted to charter school operators has not automatically been extended to teachers (Johnson & Landman, 2000). Because the power in charter schools goes to the board and the principal, the teachers have had no guarantees about the nature of their workplace and whether it would be fair, responsive, and supportive (Johnson & Landman, 2000).

In addition, when teachers have questioned their working conditions, it has fueled a suspicion that undermined the teachers' loyalty to the organization (Johnson & Landman, 2000). School administrators, who are also employees of the board, take the responsibility to pressure teachers into maintaining their loyalty to the schools to the

point where some teachers have given up their rights to unionize altogether (Sawchuck, 2009). Furthermore, because charter schools are managed by a typically conservative, business-oriented, non-educational, and non-elected governing board, they are wary of teacher unionization seeing them as an external third-party entity (Gyurko, 2008). The culture of choice embodied in the charter school movement has changed the role of public education and has diminished the need for teachers to seek their rights as workers.

Charter schools are led and managed by non-elected governing boards with a strong corporate mentality that envisions schools as private rather than public entities. Charter schools often claim to pay competitively but it is meant to appease teachers so that they do not seek their rights as workers. In addition, with the neoliberal ideologies guiding the establishment of charter schools, the workers of these schools become a commodity that can be bought and sold. Ultimately, charter schools are creating a disposable workforce out of a profession that has traditionally valued experience, collaboration, and professionalism.

The relationship between teachers and management in charter schools suffers when the administration realizes that teachers seek improvements to their working conditions because it contradicts what they promote to their funders and board members. The funders, philanthropists, and board members, usually sign up to donate money to these schools because they perpetuate the corporate ideals that the funders embody in their everyday lives. Administrators realize that they themselves are victims of the business model because they have no rights either, but they know that they have no option but to perpetuate the business model. Therefore, administrators accept the

teachers' actions as a betrayal to the values of the school and pit students and parents against the teachers. In turn, when teachers feel that they are betraying the families they came to work for, they turn away from pursuing their rights and instead they give in or they leave the school. By pitting teachers against the needs of students, the HCS management maintained their control over the teachers and prevented the teachers from seeking rights such as tenure.

If everything within the culture of choice is defined as a choice of the individual, then teachers have no rights or reason to unionize. Within this model, teachers should not complain because they chose to work here just as parents and students cannot complain because they can choose to go somewhere else. Choice gives complete authority to the management and self-blame to the teachers. Before the charter school movement, the community had a responsibility to make schools work for students and families. With the institution of charter schools, the ideology of school choice has changed the concept of community to that of choice.

Question 3: What is the model of unionism at Hope Charter School and what has it accomplished?

Teachers at Hope Charter School believed that they created a unique model of unionism that stayed true to the mission of the school while protecting their rights as employees. Teachers at HCS envisioned a teacher-led, small operation with unique values, focused on teacher leadership and professionalism that would improve working conditions and create sustainability for the profession. In unionizing, they moved away from the traditional model of unionism, which had left many teachers hopeless and jaded

in their previous teaching positions. Therefore, they sought to be an alternative model to both the local district union and non-unionized charter schools in the area.

However, instead they were left without a model and without an understanding of what being a union meant due to the backlash from the HCS governing board, the turnover of union leaders, and the lack of teacher participation. By not delineating a real understanding of what they wanted their model to be, teachers at HCS had not reached the success that they originally sought. Teachers believed that they had not been able to move beyond the contract to reach true professionalism because they lacked participation of teachers and strength in the union leadership. Without a model and without the strength of their membership, this union has not created the parity with the management that they sought.

In sharing the accomplishments of the union, teachers at HCS described the value in having a contract and their presence, as the markers of success for their union. The fact that the union provided a united voice for teachers and maintained a collectively bargained contract with the management was an achievement that teachers valued. Despite these two important accomplishments, teachers identified many challenges to this young union and the need to redefine its role. With only a little over 50% of teachers as members, they had not been taken seriously by the management of HCS. Still, teachers believed that the existence of the union was necessary.

Teacher unionism was modeled after the industrial model of unionism derived from the private sector. Teacher unions have described their basic demands as the "bread-and-butter," pointing to improvements in wages, working conditions, and job

security. In a traditional labor-management relationship, the role of the worker is to obey the management and to negotiate agreements that protect them from the decisions made by management (Malin & Kerchner, 2006). Therefore the worker does not have a role in forming the culture of the organization and is just paid to obey (Malin & Kerchner, 2006). Teacher unions have followed this model yet because they work in schools with students and parents, they have more at stake than employees in a for-profit industry.

When teachers first unionized to improve working conditions many feared that they had traded their professionalism and public trust in exchange for unionization (Cooper & Sureau, 2008). Because following a collective bargaining agreement would create more rules and regulations, teachers also feared losing the autonomy that identified teaching as a profession. In addition to the teachers' own concerns in unionization, there were many critics of teacher unions who saw unions as giving rise to mediocrity in public education (Cooper & Sureau, 2008). Albert Shanker, the original proponent of charter schools, envisioned a public school reform system centered on the role of the teachers' contract, which would "go beyond collective bargaining to the achievement of true teacher professionalism" (Gyurko, 2008, p. 6 as cited in Kahlenberg, 2006). He believed that in charter schools the teaching profession would be marked by high collaboration with management and a focus on teachers' voices rather than on the issues in a typical union contract such as wages, benefits, and due process (Gyurko, 2008). The charter contract would focus on allowing teachers to be the true professionals and innovators of schools (Gyurko, 2008). Shanker believed that if teachers felt valued, then the workforce

would be more attractive to capable and innovative educators (Gyurko, 2008). Shanker's vision was turned into a school choice campaign that left teachers out of the equation.

There have been charter schools that have unionized teachers to improve their working conditions. The founders of Green Dot Public Schools (GDPS) in Los Angeles formed the school with a teachers' union as part of the foundation. These teachers reported having a higher sense of security, control, representation, and respect (NewSchools Venture Fund, 2007). Yet, they faced challenges in that many teachers did not find the time to be active members in the union due to the heavy workload of working for Green Dot (NewSchools Venture Fund, 2007). In addition, teachers at GDPS did not include tenure and job security in their collective bargaining agreement. Even though charter schools and unions have existed as opposing movements, union and charter school leaders believed that the unionization of charter schools held the possibility of transforming teachers from employees to partners in educational reform (Hill et al., 2006).

In their study of how charter schools fit within labor laws, Malin and Kerchner (2006) stated that charter school teachers know that they are taking a risk because they have less job security and their job depends on the success of the school rather than on assurances of job permanency. The authors contended that although teachers gave up their rights to job security, they were working towards sharing in the risks of the organization by creating alternative models of unionism and moving towards creating change in organizations. Their observations were based on analyzing the law and not the actual experiences of teachers working in charter schools.

Due to the intimidation of the school governance, the teachers' union at Hope Charter School faced limited the opportunities to create a strong united front and a unique model that could reach the levels of professionalism envisioned by Al Shanker. The union sought to create a different model of unionism grounded in a collaborative existence with the management. Yet collaboration could not exist within a culture of choice where the governing board retained the power and flexibility rights to operate as they pleased. Teachers sought a different model because they, along with most of the public, perceived that the current values of teacher unions such as tenure and permanency were responsible for destroying public education. This is another effect of the neoliberal agenda, which pits individuals against individuals. Instead of seeing themselves in solidarity with other teachers, the teachers at HCS rejected the ideals of traditional unions and created a union that they felt met the needs and goals of the charter school movement, the HCS governing board, therefore leaving the teaching force unprotected and untenured.

The union at Hope Charter School did not have achieve parity with the administration. Teachers did not participate in the decision making process and the union leadership held no power. This lack of authority gave teachers who were not members of the union more reason to not join it, and furthered the apathy amongst the teaching force at the school. The lack of participation broadened the power of the management because they continued to keep teachers divided and disempowered. The fact that teachers' unions in charter schools had not gained the power, parity, and notoriety that other

teachers' unions in public schools have gained, speaks to the challenges created by the neoliberal agenda which has destroyed the public role of teachers.

Summary of Discussion

The voices of teachers who work in a charter school mediated by a teachers' union provide an insight into a collaborative culture that lures young teachers in and into the challenges of an exhaustive environment. The work of charter school teachers exists within a culture of choice which permits them autonomy in their teaching yet limits their rights as workers as they labor for a business-like, non-elected, non-educational governing board.

Charter school teachers were discouraged to seek unionization as the administration presented this basic labor right as an attack on the students and their families. In this case study, teachers at Hope Charter School decided to unionize even when they were accused of disloyalty as they intended to achieve true professionalism for teachers. As public perception continued to intimidate teachers from seeking the job protections granted to them through 40 years of hard work, teachers will need to continue fighting for their profession or they will lose the rights gained.

Implications of this Study

Implications for Hope Charter School (HCS)

As a charter school, HCS stands to lose if they cannot attract and retain teachers that seek to create a community at HCS. It has taken the school 10 years to be recognized by parents and the community as a successful school model. Yet when teachers continue to leave year after year, parents lose trust in the HCS school and

management. The school will continue to face difficult transitions such as the opening of new schools and the turnover of leadership. These difficult transitions have affected teacher turnover and have divided the teachers from different sites. The challenges that teachers face will increase when the solidarity and collaboration that naturally exists in the teaching profession is further replaced by individualism and competition. As teachers who founded the school continue to leave, the school will lose its history and any sense of institutional memory.

In order to keep teachers at HCS, the school needs to reduce the workload for their teachers and create a space where solidarity and participation in the decision making process emerges. This can be done by actively working towards retaining teachers. Professional development, social networking, salary increases, and support for the teachers' union may help to reduce the teachers' attrition rate at HCS.

Hope Charter School needs to have a vision that includes valuing the teaching profession and seeing teachers as valuable components and partners in running the school. This includes giving teachers true parity in the decision-making processes of the school and not just calling the union when it needs teacher support to take over more public schools. This means investing in teachers as leaders and leveraging their leadership skills as union leaders to develop them as school leaders. This means hiring teachers who care about the school's mission and who can evoke the social justice theme that was an important tenet in the founding of the school. This means giving teachers a salary that is beyond a living wage and that values the additional work that teachers

commit to when working at HCS. This means creating a calendar that values teachers with families and values the time teachers need to truly collaborate professionally.

Implications for the Teachers' Union at HCS

The Hope Charter School Teachers Association faces a difficult challenge to establish its power within the school and within the larger union community. First, it needs to create unity and solidarity among the HCS teachers or this union will be decertified. In order to maintain the percentage of teachers that the union needs to stay alive, this young union needs to actively reach out to all teachers and recruit members. The union leadership needs to be invested in working towards a collective voice, one that can represent the teachers professionally despite their diverse experiences at the different sites. The union leadership needs to be fostered and built at each site. Teachers need to know the history of the union and experience the accomplishments of the union. They need to know the contract and seek to negotiate some of the basic tenets of teacher professionalism into the contract such as due process and job security. The union also needs to look beyond the contract in order to re-focus its role from a reactive role to a proactive agent of change. It needs to be visible in the schools and in the community. It needs to reach out to parents and other organizations that support the rights of workers. It needs to create a space within the educational spectrum so that other charter schools can mobilize their teachers and find value in unionization. Ultimately, HCSTA needs to be a leader in creating sustainability and security for teachers in the charter schools of the Los Angeles area.

Implications for Charter Schools

The charter school movement seeks to reform education by creating schools that provide choice for parents and students. Charter schools in the inner city take away seats from the traditional public schools and create a two-tiered system of education. Within this system, the families who do not send their children to the charter school end up losing to those who do. For the parents who do attend the charter school, there is little choice and voice that is provided within the schools. The charter schools are more concerned with maintaining flexibility and choice as their governance model. They are also least concerned about retaining teachers, often those that founded the schools, to continue the trajectory and create continuity for the organization.

Furthermore, teachers continue to romanticize charter schools and the experience of serving inner city students. Teachers then come to charter schools and find that although they enjoy working with like-minded individuals and the students, charter schools are not prioritizing job security, or sustainable working conditions. Many times these teachers, who do believe in social justice ideals, leave the profession when they encounter social justice ideals often being put on hold when they seek their rights as workers.

Charter schools need to see their work in schools as a piece of a larger puzzle. The lives of students will not magically improve if their teachers are overworked, paid insufficiently, and not included in the decision-making of the school. In addition, charter schools will continue to exist as isolated enclaves that fail to be part of the neighborhood because their boards are non-elected and the local community cannot participate in the

governing of the school. Charter schools need to work on establishing themselves as partners with the local residents and other schools, and not as enemies. The initial vision of charter schools was to create competition for public education. Yet charter schools continue to be isolated islands of reforms that have not reached out to the local communities or instigated widespread educational changes.

Implications for Teacher Unions

Teacher unions are under attack due to the public's perception of the failure of public education. The neoliberal agenda has skillfully blamed public schools, and the teachers' unions for protecting and keeping incompetent teachers. Despite the attacks, teacher unions remain focused on their role in protecting educators and affecting policy through lobbying and campaigning. Teacher unions have preserved a mainstream approach to their organization and have not made the impact that they should have on the teaching profession. Accusations of corruption, larger bureaucracies, and disinterest in the goals of public education have increased the public perceptions that they are responsible for the low quality education of some inner city schools. Teacher unions have been at the forefront of maintaining the status quo in an effort to keep the protections they have earned in the last 40 years of collective bargaining rights. By not addressing the concerns of the public, they have lost the publics' trust and the trust of teachers entering the profession.

Therefore unions should work with student teachers, to establish the value of unions even before they become teachers. Teacher education programs should educate teachers on the history of teaching and contextualize the political, economical, and social

conditions, which led teachers to seek rights. Unions need to re-establish the values of professionalism for educators and focus on meeting the needs of different teachers. Unions need to focus on fostering collaboration and solidarity amongst teachers. They need to work on reconnecting with their membership especially when they have thousands of members who all have different interests and needs. There should be a specific focus on targeting younger teachers who often feel disconnected from the union.

Unions need to involve students and families in the struggle so that all can benefit from a union. Communities need to buy-in to the idea that if everyone had good pay and job security there would be less wealth disparity. Teacher unions should be leading the way in reforms for workers in all places. In order to address the accusations against them, unions need to communicate that students are their focus. They can do this by supporting a fair evaluation process for teachers and striving to support effective teachers. Rather than being on the defensive, they should come out with solutions that are grounded in student achievement and remain accountable to the families they serve.

Future Research

Teacher Retention in Charter Schools

This year the PACE Institute out of UC Berkeley (Newton et al., 2012) published a quantitative study on teacher retention in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The study found that teachers in charter schools were more likely to leave the profession than teachers in the district schools. It provided a breakdown of who leaves and why. Younger teachers were likely to leave the classroom while Hispanic teachers were more likely to stay in the classroom if they worked in largely Hispanic-serving schools.

In all of the studies on charter schools, this was the first one that looked at the demographics of teachers and how that affected their retention in charter schools. Therefore, for future studies, it is important to look at the demographics of teachers including race, class, and teacher training program to uncover the how these factors affect teacher retention in charter schools. A future study should look at the background of these teachers and ask if they come from working class or pro-union backgrounds. For example, the study should investigate why the Hispanic teachers would be more likely to stay in their positions. In addition, this study did not follow the teachers to uncover where they went after they left the charter schools. Therefore there should be a longitudinal study of charter school teachers who leave the charter schools to find out whether they stay in the field of education or where they go afterwards. Following teachers, who leave charter schools, would provide an insight into the true effects of charter schools on the teaching profession.

Charter Expansion

This study provided a glimpse into the experiences of teachers within one charter school organization. This charter organization is relatively small, yet the expansions have caused great stress to the teaching force at the school. Therefore, future research needs to examine the role of charter school expansion on a teaching force. This includes the impact of charter management organizations (CMO) and other consortium models on the teaching force. Research questions for a future study could be: Can charter schools be as successful as district schools if they build a bureaucracy similar to that of a district?

As charter schools expand, what will happen to unions? As charter schools are open for longer periods of time, will staff seek unionization?

In addition, there exists a need to re-define the success of charter schools in a qualitative manner. Success needs to be measured based on the community that builds, the voice that gives to its parents and students, and the sustainability of their teaching force. Studying the success of charters through test scores and surveys will continue to provide a faint picture of what is actually occurring in schools. In addition, the quantitative findings fail to demonstrate the true impact of the movement on the stakeholders that matter in public education.

Models of Unionism

There exists limited research on teachers who have created alternative models of unionism at their schools. There should be more research on schools that are working collaboratively with their teachers and providing opportunities for teachers to keep the rights they have been granted through traditional unionism. It is important that the research follow the teachers and capture their voices rather than providing the perspective of the management or of researchers from disconnected foundations who have a school choice agenda. The research needs to share the voices of teachers and their experiences working within the specific model of unionism.

Policy Recommendations

Charter schools were founded as a response to the voucher movement in California. They were created as an attempt to maintain public education in the hands of the public, yet they were exempt from major educational laws and became a movement to

further privatize education. Charter school design, and governance allow too many flexibilities for charter school operators. Although districts authorize charter schools and oversee them, many loopholes give charter school operators an unlimited amount of power and control over their employees. The states need to adhere to policies and laws that protect public employees from abuses by their employers. In addition, public employee unions should cover all charter school employees if the charter school is funded through state funds.

Conclusion

I have spent the last 10 years working at Hope Charter School. I came to this school by choice. I wanted to work in a school that served the community where I grew up and where I could become a leader. I am reminded of that choice by the level of commitment that is required and necessary to complete the work that I do everyday. Everyone who came to HCS was committed to the same choice, a choice that is defined by interest and investment in teaching and in the families and students of HCS. I believe I made the right choice.

The choice to unionize and create a collective bargaining agreement was a very difficult decision that teachers made in 2005. We battled with the ideals of how a union could function within a charter organization. I can still remember the urgency that we felt in making sure that our students would have the most prepared and committed educators in charge of their learning. I remember the heated discussions between teachers who believed that there were other ways to achieve the same means. I believe we made the right choice. Every year, Hope Charter School continues to make huge

strides. Every year, more HCS students are accepted into and attend four-year universities. At different campuses, teachers pursue pedagogical advances to create a learning environment that meets the needs of the student population. In unionizing, we did not compromise the collegiality between teachers and leaders. In fact, having a union created a presence and voice for teachers at HCS and created more transparent communication processes between teachers and their leaders. Having a union has given teachers a voice and a presence in the organization, yet it has not created the structural changes necessary to keep teachers at HCS.

The role of the teacher is integral to the development of a school. We are at the frontlines of change on a daily basis. It takes herculean efforts to get kids motivated and on track. We work daily not just to teach high-level rigorous curriculum, but to invest kids in their futures and planning for their careers. We work to track their language levels, reading levels, math levels, critical thinking skills, their social and emotional stability, and ultimately their achievement on state standards. We work to train kids for marathons, tutor them after school, fundraise for field trips, and discipline them in study hall and detention on a daily basis. We work with their parents, in partnership, to advance students academically, socially, and emotionally. The role of the teacher cannot be reduced to that of a martyr or missionary who commits to doing all of the above without the basic protections that have marked the teaching profession for the last 40 years. The role of the teacher cannot be reduced to entering a community for 2 years, raising the students' test scores, and then returning to their life in middle America.

Hope Charter School was founded through a community need to create a school where Latino students and families could experience an education different from the one provided in the neighborhood district schools. At some point, those ideals were trumped by the need to please funders instead of the community. HCS remains a relatively small organization, with 5 campuses, focused on less than 3,000 students. Yet the workers' flexibility demanded by the management of the school has created a challenge to the unity of teachers who work at HCS. The management has continuously kept teachers divided and using the ideals of the union to maintain the disunity. There is a missing community factor that existed before unionization. There exists a need for teachers across the campuses to see each other as colleagues and not as competitors. Teachers do not want HCS to feel like a district, but they want to maintain autonomy and create community. The business model of the school has not provided teachers and families the community that they seek. This can be done through the work of teachers in the union. The union can bring families, and employees together to strengthen the voice of the people that are the true stakeholders of this school.

Hope Charter School has the potential to still be a community school that focuses on keeping teachers and providing them with dignity in their working conditions. There are different reasons that teachers come to HCS, yet I would like to believe that teachers want to create change. The contract should reflect this desire and allow teachers to flourish as professionals. Yes it is a choice, a choice we are willing to make. We should not have to do that at the expense of our professionalism. We should not have to do that at the expense of our families and personal lives.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Teacher Informed Consent Form

Loyola Marymount University

Prepared: May 1, 2011

1) I hereby authorize Elizabeth Montaño, doctoral candidate, to include me in the following research study: Becoming unionized in a charter school: How charter school teachers navigate the culture of choice.

2) I have been asked to participate on a research project which is designed to understand the working conditions of charter school teachers who work with the mediation of a teachers union which will last for approximately 6-8 months.

3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is that I am a current or former teacher in the organization.

4) I understand that if I am a subject, I will be asked to answer questions in an interview, and/or participate in focus groups.

   The investigator(s) will maintain recordings and notes in a safe place and maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants.

   These procedures have been explained to me by Elizabeth Montaño, doctoral candidate, at Loyola Marymount University.

5) I understand that I may be audiotaped in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these tapes will be used for teaching and/or research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the tapes will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

6) I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: there are no risks other than possible discomfort in having teachers share the challenges in the work environment. Therefore, although they will still be asked to be as candid as possible, the participants will be assured full anonymity and confidentiality in this study.

7) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are that through sharing my perspective, I may be able to shed light on how the charter movement is impacting the teaching profession.

8) I understand that the following alternative procedures (and/or drugs) are available. The reason these are not being used is: N/A.

9) I understand that Elizabeth Montaño who can be reached at emontan1@lion.lmu.edu will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.

10) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained.

11) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice to (e.g., my future medical care at LMU.)

12) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.

13) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

14) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

Subject's Signature _____ Date _____

Witness _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights

Pursuant to California Health and Safety Code §24172, I understand that I have the following rights as a participant in a research study:

1. I will be informed of the nature and purpose of the experiment.

2. I will be given an explanation of the procedures to be followed in the medical experiment, and any drug or device to be utilized.

3. I will be given a description of any attendant discomforts and risks to be reasonably expected from the study.

4. I will be given an explanation of any benefits to be expected from the study, if applicable.

5. I will be given a disclosure of any appropriate alternative procedures, drugs or devices that might be advantageous and their relative risks and benefits.

6. I will be informed of the avenues of medical treatment, if any, available after the study is completed if complications should arise.

7. I will be given an opportunity to ask any questions concerning the study or the procedures involved.

8. I will be instructed that consent to participate in the research study may be withdrawn at any time and that I may discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

9. I will be given a copy of the signed and dated written consent form.

10. I will be given the opportunity to decide to consent or not to consent to the study without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, coercion, or undue influence on my decision.

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