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Published online: 28 Apr 2017.

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When cultures clash: the story of one school's journey from acculturation to understanding

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examines the conflicts and challenges that one American junior high school experienced when a substantial number of African-American families migrated to the community from Chicago to secure Section 8 housing; their housing projects had recently been felled through the auspices of HOPE VI (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere), a federally-funded bi-partisan initiative that sought to decentralize poverty in America. The study's findings highlight the conflicts and tensions this in-migration caused, the school's initial efforts to mediate them through a process of acculturation, and the progress it made once it recognized cultural difference and refused to let it function as an on-going source of cultural conflict.

Introduction

This qualitative case study examines the conflicts and challenges that one American junior high school experienced when a substantial number of African-American families migrated to the community because their federal housing projects were demolished through the auspices of Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE VI). Driven by the US government's efforts to decentralize poverty and offer residents a "better" way of life, HOPE VI succeeded in its quest to bring down dilapidated and in some cases uninhabitable units; however, it failed in its promise to replace them with new units to ensure an adequate supply of public housing. The result was the geographic displacement of thousands of urban poor families (a process referred to herein as "in-migration") who were given the choice of homelessness or forced relocation to an unfamiliar and often distant community. This study examines the collective conflicts, tensions, successes and failures that Richmond Junior High School (pseudonym) experienced as it sought to negotiate the unforeseen and unique challenges it faced when these displaced families moved to the district to fundamentally transform the school's culture.

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Poverty and politics: HOPE VI and the decentralization of poverty in America

Over the past three decades, the US government, along with enthusiastic cooperation from some of America's largest cities, has sought to decentralize poverty in urban areas. Guided by the ideology that poverty produces a range of social problems including "school delinquency, school dropout, teenage pregnancy, out-of-wedlock childbirth, violent crime, and drug abuse" (Goetz 2003), the US government systematically revised its federal housing policy by establishing the National Commission on Severely Distressed Housing in 1989. Driven by the belief that overcrowding and centralization of poverty in these developments greatly increased the likelihood of crime, the agency systematically dispersed and transplanted urban poor families to middle-income neighborhoods. Concern also centered, however, upon the deteriorating physical and social conditions of these developments, for critics had long alleged that these conditions augmented drug activity, gang violence and the subsequent crime they invariably birthed (Bennett et al. 2015; Goetz 2003, 2004; Hackworth 2007). The manifestation of these concerns realized the federal initiative HOPE VI (1993) which sought to decentralize poverty by relocating the urban poor from major metropolitan areas to smaller communities across the country.

To this end, HOPE VI's initial legislation (1993) proposed the demolition, modernization and redevelopment of public housing across the nation to decentralize poverty and offer residents a "better" way of life. The program was reauthorized 14 years later by both the US House and Senate, and in this 2007 Reauthorization Hearing, Senator Barbara Mikulski justified the program's political ideology and extolled what its legislative parents deemed an unprecedented social and political success:

> HOPE VI sought to lower the concentration of poverty, which … created zip codes of poverty and other social pathology – crime, low graduation rates, high rates of illegitimacy … . [It] has been one of the most important Federal programs created for HUD [Housing and Urban Development] for the revitalization of communities, lowering the concentration of poverty, and creating a self-help, self-sufficiency momentum for people who have lived in public housing. HOPE VI has offered real opportunity for public housing residents and new hope for the communities around the public housing. (Senate Hearing 2007)

Such esteemed political patronage ensured that an additional 4.8 billion dollars were funneled into HOPE VI's coffers for the purposes of awarding Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grants to 166 US cities, and an additional 7.6 billion dollars was quickly leveraged from state and local governments (US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2016). In material terms, this translated into the demolition of over 235,000 units. However, as Keene and Geronimus (2011) point out, the program was problematic from the start because it failed in its promise to replace the demolished units, for only half had been replaced as of 2011, thus displacing over 50% of America's public housing population or approximately 148,399 residents. Although the majority of these displaced families were given Section 8 vouchers to secure private housing, the widespread demolitions flooded a private housing market that was unable to keep up with the demand. The result was the forced relocation of thousands of families who had no choice but to leave their family and friends and begin life in a new community not of their own choosing.

For these reasons, HOPE VI, despite its altruistic cloak, has been controversial from the start, drawing fire from both displaced tenants and critics who consider its narrative, which situates the program as "progressive" in nature, manipulative in tone and deed (Hackworth 2005; Lipman 2009, 2011). For instance, Hackworth (2005) argues that even though

HOPE VI justified its federal intervention on the grounds that it was "empowering tenants," its rhetoric obscured the forced displacement of thousands of residents, most of whom were African-American, by constructing any who contested it as "resistant to change" (38). Lipman (2009) problematizes its underlying assumption that "intractable poverty is the result of social isolation and the pathologies it breeds" (218). It is an assumption, critics allege (Bennett et al. 2015; Hackworth 2005, 2007; Lipman 2009, 2011; Smith 2000), that has forged solidarity among federal, state and local policy-makers for the purposes of advancing a neo-liberal agenda that legitimates the displacement of urban poor communities of color, a political communion Imbroscio (2008) terms the "deconcentration consensus."

Hence, even though they are cloaked in the politics of progressivism, these initiatives, Lipman argues (2009), are little more than "racially-coded cultural politics" that legitimate the "displacement Keene and discipline of low-income students of color and their families" and destroy "communities of color while furthering the neo-liberal urban agenda" (216). She considers HOPE VI a dismal social and economic failure that has produced the "displacement, gentrification, and privatization of public education and housing on the premise of social betterment" (216). She is further troubled by the assumption that informs the model and that is vital to its success – namely that the displaced poor's new middle class neighbors will mentor and equip them with the "middle-class values, social networks, and resources they lack" (215). Such modes of thinking are, she argues, inherently problematic because they leave out the history of racism and racial segregation that originally impoverished African-Americans. Keene and Geronimus' study (2011) of the program's efficacy suggests that it failed on three levels: it did little to improve the living conditions or economic positioning of the relocated residents; it denied the residents the "health-protective, community-based social resources they relied upon in public housing"; and its discourse reinforced "health-demoting stereotypes of African-Americans" (1). The reality, they argue, is that HOPE VI and its driving legislation failed to account for a very important consideration – namely that poor people live in networks upon which they depend for their economic, social and psychological wellbeing.

A further criticism of HOPE VI's agenda points to a darker motive – profit, for critics allege that city leaders have been motivated by profit rather than any sincere desire to provide a better way of life for their urban poor (Hackworth 2005; Keene and Geronimus 2011; Lipman 2009, 2011). The majority of urban housing projects were strategically-placed in downtown areas, and land that once drew little interest now held widespread appeal for its potential market-value. Furthermore, their susceptibility to eminent domain rendered them easy targets, and so major cities across the nation strategically enacted a neoliberal agenda to displace the poor who lived in these projects to develop the land for more profitable ventures. Across America, then, HOPE VI augmented the systematic demolition of public housing units, paving the way for gentrification as upscale townhouses, sports stadiums and entertainment venues appeared on the scene.

Political rhetoric justified this eminent domain with promises of "hope" and "opportunity" to the displaced families, but it is important to note that choice was never an option. Still, many families welcomed the move to safer communities that offered a better educational system, housing, employment, and safety. Yet such relocations, despite their promise, meant that a family must fracture its existing networks that provided emotional, financial and physical support. Keene et al. (2010) recount the challenges that many displaced residents face upon relocation. The participants in their study voiced anxieties about being "accepted" by

their new neighbors; nor was it lost upon them that their relocation from Chicago was inherently problematic as it subjected them to stereotypes that conjured images of drugs, welfare and crime. The reality was that separation from the social networks that had sustained these families in Chicago, coupled with the real and/or perceived animosity of their new neighbors, translated into social isolation for many of these displaced families (Keene et al. 2010).

Cultural capital, social reproduction and America's public schools

America has long considered itself a meritocracy that affords opportunity to all, a mandate consecrated in politically-hallowed documents such as the *Declaration of Independence* and the *US Constitution* and one that assures its citizens that hard work is the most assured path out of poverty. Capitalism and *laissez-faire* economics have repeatedly clouded this ideal, however, for Americans who lack the financial and social capital needed to succeed. In short, these economically-disadvantaged citizens lack what their middle-class neighbors take for granted – the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to succeed in the dominant culture.

Bourdieu (1984) terms such knowledge "habitus" which he defines as the structure "which organises practices and the perception of practices" (170); comprised of our beliefs and understanding of the world, habitus is formed as we interact with family members, society and institutional education. According to Bourdieu (1984) habitus affords the individual "social capital," defined as our personal relationships and social networks, and "cultural capital," the knowledge, skills, dispositions and experiences needed to achieve success in the dominant culture. Bourdieu (1977) argues that "cultural capital" is transmitted in middle-class homes but largely absent in low-income ones. Middle-class parents, he contends, equip their children with cultural capital that yields economic and social advantage; low-income parents, in contrast, are unable to extend similar privileges to their children because they typically do not possess the knowledge in the first place, a dichotomy that perpetuates a process of social reproduction that maintains the *status quo* by perpetuating class inequalities.

The process plays itself out in school in that middle-class students employ their cultural capital to their advantage whereas their low-income peers experience a very different reality, one that is often marked by confusion, frustration and failure. Bourdieu (1977) contends that students in the latter group typically do not succeed in school for two reasons: they do not understand what is expected of them, and they do not possess the skills, knowledge and dispositions needed to succeed:

> the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture. (Bourdieu 1977, 494)

Bourdieu faults the educational system for not only assuming that low-income students possess this familiarity but also for failing to equip them with it, for in doing so, they become complicitous in the process of social reproduction.

The bipartisan federal legislation *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) sought to address and even equalize such inequities by making "economically disadvantaged" a category of interest. Bomer et al. (2008) point out that in doing so, the government set forth an important claim

– namely that poor children are "members of a legitimate category and that those children share features that are related to their experience in school" (1). Policy was deeply-impacted as federal law now required schools to show improvement in the test scores of "poor" children and include this newly-created subgroup as part of their "adequate yearly progress"; in essence, the *No Child Left Behind Act* required schools to improve the performance of these students or suffer sanction.

For legal, financial and moral reasons, schools across the nation implemented professional development programs to achieve this end, the most efficacious being that marketed by Dr Ruby Payne (2005). Like Bourdieu (1977, 1984), Payne contends that poor children often lack the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in an institutional school system that functions according to middle-class norms and beliefs. Her practitioner-based orientation has rendered her work particularly appealing to public school teachers, administrators and social workers who consistently battle time constraints and crushing workloads, and so it is not surprising that her framework provided the impetus for Principal Lisa Webb and her teachers at Richmond Junior High (the school that is the focus of this study) as they sought to negotiate the conflicts and tensions their school experienced due to in-migration. At the time, the district had no professional training or support mechanisms in place to help Richmond mediate the conflicts and tensions born of in-migration, and so Richmond was forced to fly solo. Webb had heard about Payne's framework and decided to form a reading group of five teachers to determine its relevancy. What follows then is a brief overview of this framework; however, in offering it, I have mindfully restrained from either advocacy or critique, attempting to provide an objective summary of its theory and practice along with a discussion of the criticisms it has elicited from those who have found it problematic in nature.

Payne (2005) argues that culture is invisible to its users, and so conflict occurs when we encounter a culture that differs from our own. She is particularly concerned with what she calls "hidden rules" of conduct that regulate schooling in America because poor students may not understand these rules that their middle-class peers take for granted. She defines "hidden rules" as the "unspoken cuing system that individuals use to indicate membership in a group" (3). Members of that group understand these rules intuitively, but those outside do not and are thus severely-disadvantaged. Payne contends that students raised in generational poverty may have little, if any, understanding of these hidden rules, and so their school conduct may conflict with the school's expectations. For example, middle-class decorum expects students to respect authority and show remorse when their actions displease an authority figure, but poverty, Payne argues, typically demands a very different response, one that requires defiance to salvage reputation in the peer milieu. Whereas a middle-class student may not lose peer respect by deferring to the teacher's authority, a poor student may believe that blatant defiance, even though susceptible to punishment, merits the risk. The rationale is simple – in the harsh world of poverty, respect is given to those who can defend themselves, and so any surrender to teacher authority, although it may avoid punishment, would do much to jeopardize reputation and wellbeing.

Confusion or ignorance of hidden rules leads to other types of conflict in the classroom as well. For instance, Payne (2005) argues that in poverty, the ability to entertain is often highly valued, yet this skill celebrated in the home and among one's friends may invite rebuke in a classroom where silence and structure are valued. Although constructivist pedagogy in K-12 public education has opened the door for greater student engagement and voice, the majority of America's classrooms expect students to be quiet, raise their hand, control their

emotions and impulses, and defer to the teacher's authority at all times. Such a structure rarely provides time or space for entertainment. Perhaps the greatest conflict occurs, however, when poor students are repeatedly disciplined for behaviors the school expects them to change. Here too, according to Payne, is the difference between middle-class and poverty norms, for in a culture of poverty, discipline involves penance and forgiveness rather than change. This paradigmatic difference may cause conflict for both students and the school system as the former may not see any need to alter their behavior and the latter might not understand why the students are not learning the intended lessons the punishments are meant to convey. For this reason, students from generational poverty must have the opportunity to learn these rules, even though they may choose to ignore them: "Students from poverty are no less capable or intelligent. They simply have not been mediated in the strategies or hidden rules that contribute to success in school" (Payne 2005, 4). Payne argues that schools marginalize poor students when they fail to render these rules visible because the students will be judged by them; consequently, any ignorance or confusion of these rules puts poor students at a distinct academic, social and personal disadvantage.

Payne's work has garnered criticism, however, from those who accuse her of "essentializing" the very students she endeavors to help and of championing hegemonic middle-class norms. Critics contend that her framework promotes unhealthy and damaging stereotypes that can bias teachers against poor students, the majority of whom are students of color. Equally problematic, they argue, is its pedagogy, which promotes a "deficit thinking" model (Bomer et al. 2008; Gorski 2006; Ng and Rury 2006). Bomer et al. (2008) allege that the model marginalizes poor students by advocating an inferior pedagogy that lowers teacher expectations and relegates poor students to lower academic tracks, the result being a low-level educational experience that offers little more that "rote drill and practice" in comparison to the higher-order thinking skills imparted to their middle-class peers (1).

Still Payne's framework offered a useful starting point for Principal Lisa Webb and her teachers as they struggled to negotiate the rapidly changing demographics that were occurring in their school; as mentioned earlier, the district had no resources or support mechanisms in place to help them understand and support the diverse needs of these poor, urban students of color who were moving into the district, and it was a difficult time for everyone involved. HOPE VI had displaced the in-migration students and their families, and so they had no choice but to move from Chicago to Richmond because it had Section 8 housing available. This qualitative case study offers insight into this in-migration process and Richmond's efforts to negotiate it. The process began with the formation of an initial reading group of five teachers, strategically-selected by Principal Lisa Webb because she considered them potential change agents. The group met on a weekly basis over the course of a semester to read and discuss Payne's text *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2005), and they also completed a two day professional workshop based upon this framework. Webb's thought was that if she could equip these teachers with some fundamental background knowledge and professional training then they could function as peer mentors and agents of change for the entire faculty as they sought to mediate the challenges born of in-migration. This qualitative study examines those challenges and the collective conflicts and tensions they engendered by addressing the following research question:

> How did the process of in-migration fundamentally transform Richmond's school culture and what might teachers, administrators and policy-makers learn from this journey that was fraught with so much frustration and reward, failure and success?

What follows then is an analysis of that process that caused such widespread frustration, anger and concern among the teachers, students and parents, and, that in the end, fundamentally transformed the school culture.

Methodology

Research setting

The research setting for this study was Richmond Junior High School (pseudonym), home to approximately 700 students in a midwestern university town of approximately 72,000 residents. Situated in a largely agricultural state comprised primarily of White middle- and working-class residents, Richmond differed in that it housed a geographically-diverse population that had been sculpted by the professional needs of a major research university. The community proudly resisted social stratification along economic lines, and community members voiced pride in what they considered two laudable accomplishments – that their public schools provided an outstanding education and that everyone was valued in this community, regardless of what he or she did for a living or claimed as a racial, ethnic or religious identity.

Such factors meant that Richmond had always experienced and valued diversity, but it was a staunchly middle-class diversity, and so the community had little experience with urban and generational poverty. That all changed in 2000, however, when Richmond experienced its first wave of in-migration. HOPE VI had just realized the demolition of 16,000 public housing units in Chicago at a cost of 1.5 billion dollars; however, only 30% of those units were replaced, thus displacing numerous families who had no choice but to relocate to downstate Illinois or neighboring states (Hackworth 2005). Richmond proved a viable relocation option because it was in a neighboring state that had Section 8 housing available; although there were three junior high schools in town, the Section 8 housing was located almost exclusively in Richmond's boundary, and so the school was initially overwhelmed by events over which it had little cognizance or understanding. The school's increasing free and reduced lunch percentage speaks to the impact in-migration was having upon its rapidly-changing demographics, for the percentage was 15.6% in 2000 but had increased to 39.8% by 2013 (Educate Iowa 2016). In-migration had caused Richmond to change almost overnight, and its teachers and administration had no idea how to accommodate the very different academic, social and personal needs of these new students. All they knew was that they were facing a crisis that needed immediate resolution, and so what follows is an analysis of Richmond's efforts to do just that.

Research design

Data collection spanned the course of one year and included individual, in-person interviews and email correspondence with three key informants. The informants were chosen because they represented three important and distinct areas of the school's institutional structure, the administration, the classroom and the resource center; furthermore, they had worked closely with the in-migration students and thus had unique insight into their idiosyncratic positioning. Finally, they were members of the initial reading group and had thus functioned as key change agents in the school's efforts to understand and mediate the conflicts and

tensions born of in-migration. Principal Lisa Webb served as the key informant and was thus interviewed on three separate occasions for a total of six hours; John and Meghan were interviewed individually on two separate occasions, with each interview lasting approximately 90 minutes. Interview questions were crafted to address the central research question and thus scripted in advance; however, a semi-structured protocol was employed to pursue additional queries and to probe deeper meaning into responses to the interview queries (Robson 1993). Interviews were conducted in-person, tape-recorded (with consent) and transcribed, and thoughts and impressions were recorded in the form of written research notes after each interview. Data collection continued over the course of the year through personal conversations and email correspondence to gather additional and clarify existing information. As a final measure of trustworthiness, the informants reviewed and audited the study's findings to confirm accuracy and to ensure validity (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Data analysis was iterative, and content analysis was employed to closely examine the data and "to identify core consistencies and meanings" (Patton 2001, 453). An inductive qualitative analysis approach was used, and so specific categories and themes were not named at the beginning of the study but identified through the process of data analysis and review. A hybrid coding method was used to analyze the data that assigned codes and constructed themes and categories drawn from prior literature and theory (Miles and Huberman 1994), specifically drawing from Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) discussion of "habitus" and "social" and "cultural capital." This analysis led to the identification of four primary themes: "norms of timeliness," "fight or flight," "power struggles," and "acculturation," each of which will be analyzed in the Findings section.

Research perspective

This study's ontological view positions knowledge as socially-constructed, and so the primary aim was to understand this in-migration experience as perceived and interpreted by three key and representative school personnel – the school's principal, Lisa Webb, the seventh grade Welcome & Success resource teacher, Meghan Braxton, and the seventh grade math teacher who had taught many of the in-migration students, John Welch. Consequently, an interpretivist stance was utilized to "make sense of … and interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 3); essentially, interpretivism provided the research lens needed to understand the social and cultural contexts in which these events were unfolding.

To this end, this study chronicles Richmond's efforts to make sense of the demographic changes that were fundamentally transforming its school culture, and so it examines the individual and shared meanings the three key informants constructed, as well as their behaviors and actions in response to what they deemed a "crisis" situation. The aim was to understand this in-migration experience as perceived and interpreted by these key school personnel, and so it is their voices that are included in this analysis. An emic researcher role was employed to elicit those voices as personal connection was needed to foster trust and facilitate open and honest communication. However, such intimacy also effected a certain level of researcher bias, for it fueled my assumption that the Richmond faculty were committed, caring educators who only wanted what was best for their students, an assumption that in turn influenced my interpretation of the school's efforts to mediate the challenges born of in-migration. This study is also somewhat limited in that it does not include student

perspectives, and so a subsequent analysis would yield additional insight into the conflicts and challenges in-migration posed from the student vantage point.

Findings

Cultural capital, cultural difference and crisis in the halls of Richmond

Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet. (Rudyard Kipling 1889)

As mentioned, the key informants, Lisa, John and Meghan, represented three important and distinct areas of the school's institutional structure – the administration, the classroom and the resource center. Their views were aligned in that they recognized the school was failing to meet the needs of the in-migration students; however, as conflicts escalated, they began to differ about how they might best mediate them. As they gained familiarity with the in-migration students' diverse needs and perspectives, Lisa and Meghan advocated for a change in policy and practice, but John continued to resist this notion because he saw no need to change "what had always worked before" to accommodate what he considered a small minority of students. As a teacher managing over 160 students per day, John's perspective was somewhat constrained by the logistical demands of daily classroom life, and so he understandably had more limited access to the in-migration students' worldview. As the students' resource teacher, Meghan, in contrast, functioned as mentor and confidant and thus understood their positioning as cultural outsiders trying to negotiate unfamiliar terrain. Lisa's role as school principal, although inherently ambiguous in that she had to delicately balance the in-migration students' needs with those of her teachers', yielded unique insight into each group's interpretation of the conflicts that divided them.

Initially, though, the three held communion in their belief that the in-migration students could be successful at Richmond if they would only change the attitudes and behaviors the school deemed so "inappropriate"; however, it is important to note that the students never considered the behaviors as such, as evidenced in their repeated complaints to both Meghan and Lisa that "they had never gotten into trouble at their old school for doing nothing wrong." The impasse seemed insurmountable as the two groups remained situationally and ideologically polarized. One camp quartered the teachers whose continual rebuke functioned to fracture an already fragile relationship built upon the misguided assumption that the students were being deliberately disrespectful, in the other the students whose view of their teachers as purposefully pedantic and callous undermined any possibility of accord.

As the seventh grade at-risk teacher, Meghan Braxton was the person officially charged with facilitating the in-migration students' transition, and she attributes their "initial 'failure' to the fact that 'they just didn't know how to do school here.'" The students, who had recently migrated from Chicago when their housing projects were felled by HOPE VI, were African-American and poor whereas the Richmond faculty were White and middle-class, and so the students likely lacked what Bourdieu (1977) terms cultural capital – namely the "linguistic and cultural competence and … familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing" (494). Essentially, they did not possess what their Richmond peers took for granted – an intuitive understanding of what the school expected. As John pointed out, the faculty had no experience in working with urban, poor students of color, and they mistakenly assumed the students would both understand and readily comply with their classroom expectations:

> John: We expected them [the in-migration students] to know how things were done at Richmond … to understand and go by the rules … that seemed fair to us and so when they didn't, we would get really angry. We also felt that to be fair we had to discipline them for their behaviors because that was the only way we could teach them, help them I mean, and that's what caused the problem.

The "problem" John was referring to was that the in-migration students were being disciplined for attitudes and behaviors the teachers deemed "disrespectful" but the students considered completely "normal"; as they were routinely "called out" in the classroom and hallway and sent to the office for "inappropriate behavior," office referrals increased by 40%, with the in-migration students being represented in disproportionately high numbers. The problem, according to both Lisa and Meghan, was a "total disconnect," for the teachers assumed the students understood the "inappropriateness" of their behavior whereas the students felt they were being punished for "doing nothing wrong." Meghan, who was quartered part-time in the office at this time, explained that it was a difficult time for everyone: "It was hard because we couldn't ignore the fact that they [the in-migration students] were 90% of the students being sent to the office. The teachers felt the students were being disrespectful on purpose but the students felt they were picked on because they were Black and from Chicago." Meghan's comments suggest that the in-migration students lacked the cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977, 1984) Richmond expected them to know. Bourdieu (1977, 1984) argues that educational systems assume that all students possess the cultural capital needed to succeed in school when in reality they do not; it is not surprising, then, that the Richmond faculty expected the in-migration students to possess the cultural capital, that is the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to succeed in their school environment, when they most likely did not. In the midst of this disconnect, conflicts continued to unfold to disrupt the school culture, and the battle lines quickly formed; in one camp stood the teachers who simply could not understand why "the students acted this way," in the other the in-migration students who were convinced the teachers were "picking on them" because "they were Black and from Chicago." What they both failed to recognize, however, was that it was cultural difference rather than any intentional disrespect for each other that was fueling the conflicts. What follows is a thematic analysis of how these differences, as individually and collectively experienced and recounted and interpreted by Lisa, John and Meghan, manifested themselves in the halls of Richmond.

Cultural conflict # 1: "Why can't they just get to class on-time?"

One of the first things that complicated student–faculty relationships was their differing regards for timeliness. Timeliness had always been a sign of respect at Richmond, and so when the in-migration students were habitually late to class, their tardiness was contributed to apathy and disrespect. John explained that he initially considered the behavior a sign of blatant disregard for his authority: "I was really bothered by it, not just because it was disruptive but because it didn't seem to bother them. I don't know, I guess I took it as sign that my class really didn't matter to them." Principal Lisa Webb explained that John's sentiments were shared by his colleagues who sought to remedy the problem with continual detentions, a strategy that caused things to quickly "get out of control." These measures augmented tensions because the students and their parents resented what they considered "ridiculous" punishments for relatively minor transgressions. The situation quickly escalated as Lisa was

bombarded with complaints from both frustrated teachers and disgruntled parents and students who simply could not "see eye to eye" on the issue. She explained that things began to improve, however, once they freed themselves from the need to impose punitive measures and instead begin a dialogue with the students; what they learned was that the students were driven by a very different set of experiences and sensibilities that had been firmly etched by their time in the Chicago public school system: "We learned that they had never changed classrooms so they had no systems in place to get to class on time, and then you just exacerbate that with eight periods a day and the fact that the schools they came from typically didn't utilize our same structure." Lisa and her teachers soon realized that the students were habitually tardy because they had no experience with an institutional structure that afforded freedom coupled with personal responsibility. Whereas their Richmond peers understood the logistics of switching classrooms and the cultural nuances of timeliness, the in-migration students lacked the schema to ensure similar success. However, candid, non-confrontational conversations helped them to understand the students' positioning, facilitate their transition, and greatly reduce the number of tardies, thereby diffusing a situation that had initially created so much conflict and anger among students, parents and teachers.

Cultural conflict # 2: Fight or flight

Dispositions that enacted violence and aggression also caused unprecedented conflict and contention in the halls of Richmond. Lisa explained that "some of kids (*sic*) who came were very violent" and that she and her staff had little expertise or experience in dealing with this type of aggression. She soon realized that many of the in-migration students were guided by a paradigm that, no matter how inappropriate for their present, had rendered them status and protection in their past: "I realized that for many of them, all they understood was fight or flight, and that fight was the strategy that had most often been modeled for them. It was effective and so they continued to use it." Toughness and aggression were proven means of survival for these students, and so school became the stage whereby they might display these qualities for all to see. The display of aggression communicated to the peer milieu an important message – that you "weren't to be messed with." It was a message of great import in the urban public schools these students had come of age in and one they were not likely to forget because, as Lisa put it, "their very survival had depended upon it."

As greater numbers of in-migration students enrolled, Lisa and her teachers knew they had to come to terms with these polarizing paradigms, yet the district's "No Tolerance" policy that mandated police notification and immediate suspension for any type of aggression seriously undermined the possibility of finding common ground. Fighting and acts of aggression meant the in-migration students were being suspended at alarming rates, something that intensified parental discontent, negative media attention, and, most troubling, charges of racism. This latter charge was particularly painful for a faculty and administration that had always strived to honor diversity. However, the reality was that the safety and wellbeing of all students were being compromised by the aggression that was unfolding in the hallways, and the tendency was to "blame it all on the Chicago kids." Lisa knew that an action plan had to be put into place, and so she developed a strategy based upon two fundamental principles. One, they must stop blaming the in-migration students for everything that was now "going wrong" at Richmond, and two, they must do what they could to understand them.

She began by learning everything she could about the culture the students had left behind, and what she found explained much about why they would fight in school, even though it meant suspension and possible expulsion:

Lisa: I learned a lot about the schools these students came from that market themselves as "charter schools." They take in kids when they're suspended or expelled. They're private but are paid by the Chicago public schools to take these students because they don't want to lose funding for the students. However, many of these charter schools were just about containment because they didn't serve the kids. They just warehoused them, and some of the kids we got came from this warehouse structure and that's all they knew.

Interviewer: So when you say "fighting had worked for them," do you mean they weren't worried about the consequences because they would just be outsourced to these charter schools?

Lisa: Yes, that was their paradigm. It's no big deal if I fight because I'll just be outsourced to this other school and so fighting allowed them to flee a situation … to avoid something they didn't want to deal with.

It was this mentality, in Lisa's view, that prompted the students to strategically-employ aggression as a means of avoiding unpleasant situations they now faced at Richmond. Fighting, despite its punitive consequences, served a dual purpose – it established reputation in the peer milieu and provided escape from a potentially-embarrassing situation. The display of physical toughness on such a public stage sent a clear message – that you were not to be "messed with." Furthermore, it offered a convenient, and sometimes preferred, escape from situations students would rather avoid, and so such thinking, although poorly-suited to their new school environment, had proven useful in their previous one.

More troubling, however, was Lisa's belief that many of these students courted suspension to escape the intimidating academic environment they now inhabited: "So many came in as non-readers, but they had no identified special education needs, and they were now placed with highly capable learners." In terms of academic aptitude and skills, they were typically several grade levels behind their peers; their need to disguise this fact from teachers and peers is more than understandable, and Lisa theorized that "fighting and suspension too often became the means to escape these intimidating and embarrassing situations." Growing cognizance of these motives did little to mitigate mounting tensions though because the school's "No Tolerance Policy" required police notification any time there was a fight or serious verbal altercation in the building. It was this mandate in particular that invited the media scrutiny that was about to descend upon Richmond and seriously compromise its reputation in the community.

Cultural conflict # 3: Power struggles – "You can't tell me what to do!"

As the number of in-migration students increased, so did the volume in the classroom, the halls and the lunchroom, something that launched on-going power struggles between teachers and students. Meghan Braxton, the seventh grade at-risk teacher who worked with many of the in-migration students, witnessed these conflicts on a daily basis. She explained that the teachers had always considered quiet a sign of mutual respect and an assurance of safety. What they failed to understand though was that this was an idiosyncratic cultural disposition, something they and most of their students intuitively understood but many of the in-migration students did not. Consequently, whereas the teachers demanded quiet

because they deemed it necessary to classroom order and school safety, the in-migration students felt marginalized when repeatedly told to "be quiet" and sent to the office when "they weren't doing anything wrong":

> Meghan: Richmond had always been a quiet building and so the sheer volume would cause a teacher to say "be quiet" not meaning to be disrespectful, the student wasn't in trouble or anything, but the response right away would be "you can't tell me what to do" and "I'm not doing anything wrong" because to them they weren't doing anything wrong … they weren't being loud. That was just how they were used to communicating.

Lisa, Meghan and John recounted how power struggles erupted throughout the building, pitting the in-migration students and their parents against the Richmond faculty and administration. As principal, Lisa struggled to bring the two sides together; the teachers, she explained, were frustrated because the pedagogical practices that had served them for so long simply were not working anymore and the in-migration students and their parents because they perceived the school and the teachers as "uncaring" and "racist." Meghan acknowledged that this latter perspective, no matter how disconcerting, was somewhat justified, for in-migration students were being referred to the office in disproportionately-high numbers, and their contradictory report of "what had happened" said much about how differently they viewed things:

> Meghan: The teachers saw them as disrespectful but what the students had to say was completely different … they really felt they weren't doing anything wrong. The teachers would say things like "they're being loud" or "they're working on something they weren't supposed to." The teachers had asked them to stop or be quiet and it turned into a power struggle. Then the students would say things like "why did the teacher care when I was doodling on my paper" or "I wasn't doing anything wrong … I wasn't bothering anybody."

This contradictory perception of events was indicative, in both John and Meghan's opinion, of the teachers' and in-migration students' polarizing views of what was "appropriate" and "inappropriate" conduct in school. The school's *Zero Tolerance Policy* which categorized verbal aggression as "violence" fueled further discontent when Lisa was forced to suspend several in-migration girls for verbal altercations in the halls: "The volume level was so disruptive that I treated it as violence. That's why this one mom got so upset because she felt we didn't understand it." Outraged by the suspension, the mother accused Lisa of being a "racist" because she did not understand why her daughter had been severely punished when all she had done "was be loud at school." Although Lisa empathized with the parent's anger, she had no choice but to enforce the district's policy which treated verbal altercation as violence and thus suspend her daughter.

At the time, the Richmond faculty considered all of these behaviors detrimental to both the in-migration students and the Richmond school culture, and so they believed they were "doing the right thing" by demanding change; as Lisa put it "our thought was 'they need to be like us … to follow our rules and to perform like we want them to perform.'" However, the realization that "things just couldn't go on this way" prompted a more unsettling suspicion – namely, that theirs might be a path of acculturation in that it equated the in-migration students' success in school with their ability to "be just like them."

Discussion

Putting the pieces into place: "We didn't understand because we didn't ask."

> We finally started to understand but it took us a long time … and in that time period you prob-
> ably read about us in the paper where we had this expulsion, and there was a gun, and there
> were multiple fights. It was sad that all of those things were happening but they also created a
> readiness because nobody who lived and worked here wanted that perception. Yet these were
> the catalysts, and so we asked what were we going to do to change that? (Lisa Webb, Principal)

Richmond was changing, as evidenced in its rapidly changing demographics; in 1998, the
school's minority population was 18% but had increased to 40% by 2006 primarily because
of in-migration (Educate Iowa). Lisa explained that the "tremendous learning and social
needs" of the in-migration students initially overwhelmed the school, a pressure that was
compounded by unprecedented media attention and community concern. This intense
pressure prompted the teachers to initially blame the students because, as Lisa put it, "they
[the teachers] didn't know what to do when everything … that had worked before simply
wasn't working with these kids." Continued in-migration forced a paradigmatic shift, however:
"As we were getting more and more of these transfer students, we had to stop ourselves as
adults and say it's not on the kids – it's on us. We simply couldn't place the blame on 'those
kids' anymore but had to ask 'what can we do differently?'" Lisa explained that this was easier
said than done though because the teachers' fears somewhat clouded their vision: "There
was fear because the numbers of in-migration students were increasing … because there
was increasing violence … and because we had never done training with staff about safety."
Fear had become pervasive among the student body as well, for as Meghan explained, the
results of a state-administered anonymous survey distributed to the entire eighth grade
class yielded sobering responses: "When you've got 50% of your student population saying
they don't feel safe at school … that they don't think their teachers care about them, then
it's pretty hard to look at that and not say that a change needs to happen. It was a real turning
point for us." As the building principal, Lisa was particularly disturbed by the events unfolding
in her school and the impact they were having: "I wondered whether I could keep my kids
safe, and that was really hard for me." Both she and her teachers knew they had to find a way
to fix this problem, and it was their commitment to do so that prompted them to make what
she now considered a major misstep – one that sought to remedy the problem through
acculturation.

> Lisa: Early on we tried to fix them. We weren't trying to be disrespectful but only wanted to do
> what we thought was best for these students. We thought we were helping them when
> what we said was that they needed to be like us … to follow our rules and perform like
> we wanted them to perform.

Giroux (1992) argues that school administrators often lack the knowledge, skills and
training needed to negotiate sociopolitical and sociocultural issues; the result is that they
struggle when confronted with complex issues related to race, class and gender and are
thus unable to effectively lead and enact meaningful change. Certainly this was the case at
Richmond when Lisa found herself in a "crisis" situation for which she had no professional
expertise or training. Furthermore, she was facing fire from all fronts. Her teachers, the
in-migration students and their parents were all frustrated, angry and confused as to what
to do next, the local media relentless in its coverage, and the community concerned about
the unsettling, albeit somewhat exaggerated, rumors that were making their way through

the grapevine. Yet Lisa and her teachers held fast to their belief that they could "help" the in-migration students, and the means to do that, they believed, was to provide them the cultural capital needed to succeed, for as Bourdieu (1977) cogently argues, low-income students often lack the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to succeed in school. In theory, this meant the teachers would facilitate the in-migration students' amalgamation to their new school culture; in practice, however, it meant they imposed a process of acculturation that expected them to appropriate the attitudes and dispositions of their Richmond peers at the expense of personal identity. Personal connection afforded perspective, though, as the Richmond faculty began to see that the attitudes and behaviors they had once considered so "inappropriate" and "insolent" were rarely intended as such.

> Lisa: I think we learned how to respectfully help them. When the few became a critical mass, they brought wisdom to us. There was no choice. Now I have a critical mass and if I am not thoughtful about what I do, it could compromise the learning needs of everyone else. Wisdom came from failure, some successes, not being afraid to ask questions and ask for help … to understand this is bigger than us.

Lisa credits Richmond's willingness to ask for help and acknowledge that "the problem was bigger than us" as the impetus for change. Still, school pride and reputation, negative media attention, and notions of self-reliance made it initially difficult for them to admit they could not manage this problem, especially since the other two junior high schools in town had experienced virtually no in-migration and were conducting business as usual. The scrutiny that descended upon the school at the hands of a concerned community and a local media always on the lookout for a "good" story meant that Richmond had lost control of the narrative. Essentially, the portrait being painted was of a school that could no longer offer a safe and satisfying educational experience, for both the media and the community grapevine suggested that all that was "bad" in the community was reflected in the halls of Richmond. Proud of a reputation it had taken years to forge and understandably concerned what parents and alumni would now think, Richmond was initially reluctant to publicly acknowledge its struggles. Yet the problem had to be named before it had any hope of being resolved, and it was Richmond's willingness to do so, to free itself from the hold of public perception, that set it on the path that would enlighten them all.

The first step was to form an action plan which began with an assessment of current resources, for the district had no structures in place to accommodate these students other than special education; however, the vast majority, despite their academic gaps, were not "special education," and so Richmond explored avenues for additional funding. The school employed one full-time at-risk teacher and was able to secure "drop-out funds" for a second position; limited though they were, these resources led to the formalized establishment of a Welcome & Success Center that would acclimate the in-migration students to their new school environment and provide on-going support to non-special education students who were identified as "at risk." The Center offered a time and space for the in-migration students to establish meaningful relationships with adult mentors. As the seventh grade instructor, Meghan provided this mentoring; experienced in working with at-risk students and cognizant of the power that personal connection could afford, she displayed an ethic of care and provided on-going support to ease their transition. Furthermore, she was highly respected by the Richmond faculty who heeded her insights and recommendations, even those who resisted the notion of "changing" what had always worked for them to accommodate these new students. Previously, in-migration students went directly into the classroom, but the

arrangement had proven highly problematic. The Welcome & Success Center, in contrast, facilitated the students' transition by rendering the invisible visible. It was a place where they could discuss school rules, expectations and ways of being that were unfamiliar to them, get help with homework and not feel embarrassed "about being behind," and, perhaps most importantly, build meaningful relationships with peers, who were experiencing similar challenges, and an adult authority figure who displayed empathy and did not judge them. Hence, the Welcome & Success Center sought to fulfill two key aims: to foster personally-meaningful relationships with an adult mentor who provided on-going academic, social and personal support and to promote positive communication between the in-migration students and their teachers.

A second fundamental shift occurred when Richmond faculty realized that change must be collectively embraced to prevent the continued marginalization of the in-migration students at the hands of an institutional school structure that expected conformity to middle-class values and rules. This cognizance helped the Richmond faculty understand the inherent fault with any approach that sought to facilitate the students' transition through acculturation. Having no experience with urban poor students of color, the teachers initially deemed the students' behaviors and dispositions "disrespectful." What they came to understand, however, was that these behaviors and dispositions were simply different, and so in judging them, they had imposed their own cultural expectations upon the students, assuming they could "fix" them if they could only "make them like them." This paradigmatic shift was key to understanding the students' positioning, for what Lisa and her teachers came to realize was that many of the middle-class rules that regulated school life remained "invisible" to the in-migration students.

However, when these events were first unfolding, Lisa explained that she and her staff had minimal experience and no professional training in dealing with students from generational poverty. Deeply concerned about the events rapidly unfolding in her school and action-oriented, Lisa knew they had to "start somewhere," yet her instincts told her that a top-down management approach, one that denied teachers voice or ownership in the process, would invariably fail. A veteran principal, Lisa understood the need to carefully court her teachers if she had any hopes of enacting systematic change to classroom policy and practice. Fullan (2002) speaks to the key role a principal plays in developing a school's capacity to manage change; an effective school leader, he argues, must display "palpable energy, enthusiasm, and hope" to lead and energize; equally important, though, is the need to be a "sophisticated conceptual thinker" who can transform an "organization through people and teams" (17). As principal, Lisa engendered this change by providing hope and leadership to her teachers at a time when they were feeling completely overwhelmed and ineffective. Meghan credited Lisa's "can-do attitude" for calming the faculty and reassuring them that they could "handle this situation" even though "nothing seemed to be working at the time." John, although he initially disagreed with Lisa about how to best mediate the student conflicts, echoed Meghan's sentiments: "Lisa kept telling us that we could do this, that we had to do this and I think it was her belief in us, in the students, that made everyone think it was possible." In the beginning, however, Lisa confessed that "she had no idea where to begin," and so she formed a small leadership team of five teachers to attend a two day professional workshop that would introduce them to Ruby Payne's framework for understanding poverty (Payne 2005).

> Lisa: At the time, none of us had any background or training in this whole idea of generational poverty and hidden rules. I know there have been criticisms of her work since then … that her framework might in some ways stereotype students and not account for individual differences. You have to understand though that at the time we had no idea what to do or where to go and we were being completely overwhelmed by the situation. Payne's work helped us to understand what might be going on at our school and to make a plan to deal with it.

Not surprising, teacher resistance surfaced from the beginning, especially from some of the veteran teachers who fundamentally disagreed with an approach that tolerated differing behaviors and dispositions from certain students; they argued that it was both "unfair" and contrary to the students' best interests, a type of enabling that would continue to disadvantage them in school and in life. Lisa recalled one seasoned teacher's protest, "Why are we doing this when what they really need to succeed is to be more like us." Sentiments began to change though as the faculty leadership team introduced Payne's framework to the entire faculty, a process Lisa metaphorically likened to "the light bulbs going off." Lisa recounted her strategy: "I purposely asked teachers who had power to join a reading group based on Payne's work because I knew they had influence with the rest of the faculty." She shared the story of one veteran teacher who had worked with many of the in-migration students in his remedial class. Aware of his resistance, Lisa purposely courted him for the initial reading group, knowing he would be an influential ally with his colleagues if she could persuade him to become an agent for change. Although he and Lisa experienced some "knock-down, drag-out arguments about both how to effectively manage these students," he eventually "came around"; the turning point occurred at the Payne workshop the faculty group attended in a nearby city:

> Lisa: We were all so excited and were thinking of ways we could use this stuff with our kids, but he was still resistant. I remember we went out to dinner and we just kept talking and by the end of the second day he said "I give up … there's more of you than me so I must need to do something to change." Boy did it tell me the power of that … He became one of the best voices of all and he's still an agent of change, and one of the most powerful advocates of these kids.

Fullan (2002) argues that effective leaders must be "coherence makers," people who help others "assess and find collective meaning and commitment to new ideas" (17); it was Lisa's ability to find such meaning, garner commitment to institutional change and bring her faculty together that guided Richmond through this crisis. The process began with the collective recognition that the school's initial construction of the in-migration students was inherently problematic, and it ended with an institutional commitment to change. It was this institutional commitment to change that allowed the Richmond teachers, students and community to see that culture change is not culture loss but rather an inevitable and even empowering force in life.

Although meaningful change was set into motion, the conflicts and tensions created by in-migration continued for several years, and Richmond, as Lisa pointed out, continued to experience many "growing pains along the way." However, she believes they succeeded because they collectively owned the problem: "I told them we have to do this as a faculty." Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) consider such collaboration prerequisite for principals who hope to "reculture" their schools, a process that can only be realized though when teachers' needs are delicately balanced with those of the organization to achieve a "collaborative school culture" that redefines professional relationships and improves educational practice

(105). Datnow and Stringfield (2000) argue that teachers must be active agents and principals capable leaders to facilitate this type of meaningful change. Equally important is the need for educators, policy-makers and design teams to work together to "co-construct reform" that will allow school cultures to change along with school structures (3). Lisa seemed to intuitively understand these prerequisites, for even though the ownership for this process began with her, she quickly transferred it to teacher leaders who in turn mentored their colleagues. Hence, the comradery and shared ownership Lisa's approach engendered ensured its institutional success whereas a top down management approach, as educational leadership theory suggests (Datnow and Stringfield 2000; Fullan 1993, 2002), would almost certainly have been resisted and perhaps even undermined by her teachers.

Conclusion

At present, Richmond continues to experience in-migration, but the school now has structures in place to support the students' transition, and teachers have on-going professional training and support to accommodate the students' diverse academic, social and personal needs. Most importantly, the various stakeholders, including the Richmond administration, teachers and students, have learned the importance of recognizing and respecting cultural difference so that it no longer functions as a source of conflict and division but rather as an impetus for change. The journey has been both long and arduous and the path fraught with fear and frustration; however, the Richmond teachers and administration set upon it because it was their duty to do so, even though it meant abandoning some of their most fundamental pedagogical beliefs and practices that had served them so well in the past. I would argue that there is much, then, for teachers, administrators and policy-makers to learn from Richmond's story.

Yet it is a story, as Lisa, Meghan and John all readily admitted, of resistance and advocacy, success and failure, and mistakes were made along the way, the foremost being their initial belief that the "best" way to help the in-migration students was through a process of acculturation, one that expected them to "be just like us." Such sentiments, as Lisa Delpit (2006) cogently points out, can render even the most well-intentioned teachers susceptible to the allure of acculturation; driven by empathy and the sincere desire to "help" their students by equipping them with the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to succeed in the dominant culture, teachers can, albeit unintentionally, intimate to students that their ways of being are "less than." Although Delpit's analysis concerns itself more with linguistic acculturation, her message saliently speaks to educators of all disciplines in its assertion that any and all forms of student rebuke, even when sounded through the auspices of care and concern, invoke the personal: "they [teachers] should recognize that the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity. To suggest that this form is "wrong," or even worse, "ignorant," is to suggest that something is wrong with the student and his or her family" (53). Yet Delpit, like Bourdieu (1977, 1984), expresses equal concern for those students who suffer disadvantage in a school system that expects cultural and linguistic competencies they may lack: "On the other hand, it is equally important to understand that students who do not have access to the politically popular dialect from this country, that is Standard English, are less likely to succeed economically than their peers … . How can both realities be embraced?" (2006, 53). Delpit's

answer echoes Bourdieu's calls for educators to equip their students with the linguistic, social and cultural competencies needed to succeed in the hegemonic culture; however, in doing so, they must mindfully and sincerely assure them that who they are and where they come from is never "less than" and thus worthy of respect.

For the Richmond faculty and administration, this realization was forged through the auspices of on-going conflict, multiple missteps and, most importantly, brutal honesty; it was a professionally and personally painful process yet prerequisite for them to see that the "problem" was not the in-migration students but a culturally-hegemonic perspective that constructed the students as "other." However, once freed from the belief that they needed to "fix" these students by expecting them to appropriate the behaviors and dispositions long privileged in the halls of Richmond, Lisa and her teachers were uniquely positioned to help them. They achieved this by talking to the students and learning what they could about the world they had left behind, by putting structures into place that would help them make sense of all that was now unfamiliar and confusing, by expanding their pedagogical theory and practice, and, most importantly, by building personally-meaningful relationships with the students. In doing so, they no longer allowed cultural difference to function as a source of cultural conflict, and so the dispositions, attitudes and behaviors which had once caused so much conflict and tension now became a force of cultural cohesion. Equally important was Richmond's willingness "to admit it had a problem it couldn't fix," for it was only in naming the problem that they were able to mediate it. Although it was initially difficult for these accomplished and veteran educators to admit that "what they had done for years simply wasn't working anymore," they expanded their professional paradigm and repertoire of management techniques to accommodate the diverse needs of the in-migration students.

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, Richmond realized that culture change was not culture loss. HOPE VI changed Richmond in ways the faculty, administration, students and community might never have imagined, yet it was a change they learned to embrace and even celebrate. Four years into her retirement, Lisa reflected upon what she deemed the essence of this journey:

> Lisa: Wisdom came from failure and wisdom came from success. I think one of our former students, Mick Jensen, who has since become our Mayor and who worked with us through this difficult transition, said it best when he visited me right before I retired. As we talked about all of the challenges Richmond had experienced over the past several years, he smiled and said: "You know, this is not the school I went to. We've moved on, and we've gotten better."

Perhaps Richmond's story, then, is one that speaks most saliently to the power of change, for when called upon to do so, the Richmond faculty and administration collectively embraced and owned it, despite its inherent difficulties. In doing so, they fulfilled the socio-civic mandate upon which American education is premised – namely the belief that schools must fulfill the needs of the society they serve, no matter how daunting those needs might be.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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