Communities and Consequences:
An Inquiry Into Ideology and
Practice in Teachers' Professional Work

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This article challenges vague and underconceptualized notions of teacher professional community prevalent in both the theoretical and policy-oriented reform literatures. The findings from a close examination of two schools' teacher professional communities suggest that current models obscure significant differences in beliefs and practices. Whereas one school's professional community emphasizes teachers' individual autonomy, rights, and responsibilities to colleagues, the other's is driven by a strong collective mission. A provisional model for examining teacher professional communities, which distinguishes between liberal and collective commitments, is presented.

A high school principal whom I have known for many years recently asked the teachers at his school what aspect of teaching they would most like to change. A surprising number of them, he told me, said that teaching is too isolating. "Why is the work in our classrooms so secluded?" one asked. "We see each other too seldom." "Teaching is a labor of love, certainly," another said, "but why can't we labor in some way connected to other adults?" In the period of renewed emphasis on educational reform that has characterized the last decade, many school reformers have posed these same questions. Indeed, teachers' professional relationships in schools have been the target of dozens of school reorganization efforts, such as smaller schools, cluster teaching, and site-based management (see also Barth, 1990; Lieberman, 1990;

McLaughlin, 1993; Raywid, 1995). Teacher professional communities are seen as a promising solution to a profession wrought with isolation. But, although inroads have been made under the rubric of teacher professionalization, many reform efforts aimed at fostering teacher community have met with resistance. And others have vanished amid the intractability of traditional school culture and organization.

Maxine Greene (1985) speaks of a "new camaraderie" needed among teachers and calls for teacher participation in fostering democratic communities for themselves and their students. Milbrey McLaughlin and Sylvia Yee (1988) echo the findings of numerous researchers that successful schools "are differentiated from less successful ones by the norms of interaction" (p. 35; McLaughlin, 1993). And President Clinton's adoption of the former Bush Administration's "America 2000: An Education Strategy" calls for more teacher involvement in decision making and professes support for the professional, more autonomous teacher (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). There are dozens of others: supporters in academia, in practice, and in government, all of whom call for some vision of teacher collegiality and collaboration (see, for example, J. Goodlad, 1990; Kruse & Louis, 1997; Meier, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1994; Zeichner, 1991).

I do not group this diverse list of collegiality advocates in an effort to gloss over their significant differences in perspective. Maxine Greene's understanding of the forces at work on schools and their personnel have little in common with those of Lamar Alexander, former secretary of education under the Bush Administration. It is notable, however, that calls for transforming the workplace of teachers to make it more professional, more collegial, and more communal come from a very disparate group of reformers (for further review, see also Merz & Furman, 1997). Few argue against enhancing teacher communities in schools. Why, then, does the task of achieving the type of collegial setting suggested by so many school reformers seem so elusive? Because there are no agreed-on models: These reformers are talking about very different types of professional community.

This article is a response to the growing interest among researchers, policy analysts, and practitioners in the development and maintenance of teacher professional communities in schools. Whereas many reformers have called for stronger school-based teacher communities, their efforts have often been driven by a variety of underconceptualized visions of professional community. In an ethnographic study, I set out to examine teacher communities in two schools known by local educators for their strong teacher communities. My plan was to describe in detail these communities, their evolution, and the processes that make them work. I knew that the terms social theorists, policy analysts, and school reformers use to describe communities were vague, and

I hoped to clarify them. But soon into my research, I was surprised to find that not only were the terms vague in the sense of their limitations in adequately describing the communities and what they are like, but, more important, they masked enormous differences in the goals, structures, processes, and beliefs of these communities. I found that the criteria most commonly used by social theorists to describe communities and to guide in their development—like shared beliefs, participation, interdependence, dissent, and attention to relationships—tended to hide significant differences in the schools I studied. Both teacher communities could be described similarly by these criteria, yet, the dominance of reform rhetoric around professional community camouflages important distinctions.

In what follows, I first provide an overview of the ways social theorists have described communities and of recent school reform efforts designed to promote teacher professional community in schools. I then describe a study and offer brief portraits of the teacher professional communities in two middle schools, which I call Louis Brandeis and C. Wright Mills; I spent a year and a half in these schools observing and documenting teachers' activities and interviewing teachers and administrators. Next, I point out similarities in the rhetoric that describes these two communities while exposing the ways ideological differences in professional communities in practice are obscured by current research and analysis. Finally, through a close examination of Mills's and Brandeis's competing notions of professionalism, curriculum, and approaches to classroom management, I suggest a model to differentiate between the variety of underlying values and goals that drive efforts to build teacher professional communities in schools.

ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

I draw from two primary areas of inquiry: the social theory of community and school restructuring literature that privileges notions of teacher professional community, collaboration, and control. As one might expect, the conceptual literature on community is not entirely applicable to schools. Moreover, the work that does address school communities focuses primarily on students and the importance of nurturing in them a sense of purpose and affiliation (Newmann & Oliver, 1967; Raywid, 1988). Notions of teacher community have received little scrutiny. On the other hand, school restructuring literature, which honors teachers as central players, alludes to teacher community frequently while rarely attempting to conceptualize it with any rigor.

The Social Theory of Community

"The idea of community is . . . elusive," writes Philip Selznick (1992), "There appears to be no clear consensus as to its central meaning" (p. 357). There is an enormous body of conceptual literature devoted to understanding the hows and whys of various notions of community, dating back centuries. I offer here a brief overview of the five most common features of community identified by contemporary theorists.

Shared beliefs. Most theorists agree that community must be built on a foundation of shared understandings. "Certain essentials are required in any community," writes Scherer (1972). These include "a 'core of commonness' or communality that includes a collective perspective, agreed-upon definitions, and some agreement about values" (pp. 122-123). Similarly, Selznick (1992) argues that the bonds of community are strongest when they rely on "shared history and culture" (p. 361). These can derive from a common language, ideology, or purpose and be developed by projects that engage members of the community in the type of meaningful interactions described above (Barber, 1984; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Bender, 1978; Hillary, 1955; Tönnies, 1887/1957). The early Israeli kibbutzim and American settlement houses, such as Jane Addams's Hull House, both founded by members who shared common ideals and political convictions, serve as fine examples of Scherer's core of commonness (Addams, 1910/1990; Quarter, 1982). It is important to note that many theorists point out the dangers of communities based solely on shared beliefs (Bellah et al., 1985; Noddings, 1996; Raywid, 1988). Although cults such as the one led by the infamous Jim Jones or, more recently, David Koresh's Branch Davidians clearly boast collective beliefs, few would call them healthy communities.

Interaction and participation. A community without interaction and participation among its members, social analysts agree, is a contradiction. "A flourishing community has high levels of participation," Selznick (1992) asserts. "People are appropriately present and expected to be present, on many different occasions and in many different roles and aspects" (p. 364). It is through association and interaction, psychologists note, that human beings satisfy their need for attachment and social bonds (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fromm, 1941). Similarly, sociologists and political scientists emphasize the sense of identity and commitment that result from participation in community. Voting, speaking in public meetings, tutoring, or inculcating a sense of community responsibility in children enlists individuals in the collective

quest for mutual engagement and commitment (Barber, 1984; Gardner, 1991). Human experience, notes Dewey (1938), is inherently social and, therefore, depends on interpersonal contact and communication within community.

Interdependence. In *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah and his co-authors (1985) define community, in part, as "a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision-making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it" (p. 333). Interdependence and shared practices that foster reciprocity and mutual need are cited often as essential components of community (Raywid, 1988; Scherer, 1972; Selznick, 1992).

Concern for individual and minority views. Members of a community, while sharing interests and a commitment to one another, don't always agree. Such ideas date back at least to the pluralist doctrines of Aristotle (who excluded women and slaves from his considerations of a good society) and are found in writings from de Tocqueville to Dewey and beyond. More recently, philosophers have challenged hegemonic notions of value and worth in an effort to "de-marginalize" those traditionally left out of community discourse (hooks, 1994; West, 1990). Individual differences, theorists argue, are not only inevitable but also can foster growth within the community (Furman, 1998; Gardner, 1991; Greene, 1985; Selznick, 1992). The capacity for critical reflection, therefore, is essential (Newmann & Oliver, 1967). Ideally, communities provide forums for exchange, which lead to growth as new perspectives are considered.

Meaningful relationships. Included in the social theory of community is a relatively small body of work that sets out to clarify the meaning of community as it relates to schooling. Schools, they argue, must provide a sense of connection and purpose because traditional sources for connectedness have broken down (Gardner, 1991; Raywid, 1988; Strike, 1991; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1988). Because schools are often characterized as alienating and isolating institutions, these theorists highlight the social nature of interactions within school communities. As J. I. Goodlad (1984) writes, in *A Place Called School*, "The most important thing about school for the children and youth who go there is the living out of their daily personal and social lives" (p. 92). The inherently relational basis for school communities is a common emphasis among many writers (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Gardner, 1991; Noddings, 1988).

School Reform Efforts to Build Teacher Professional Communities

A second body of work emerged in the mid 1980s, spurred by a series of influential reports on teacher leadership, collegiality, and school restructuring—what some call the "second wave" of educational reform (Carnegie Task Force, 1986; Education Commission of the States, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986). Unlike earlier reports, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), for example, this literature focused attention on teachers' professional culture, their empowerment, and the school contexts within which teachers spend their day (Barth, 1990; Lieberman, 1988; McLaughlin, Talbert, & Bascia, 1990). Specifically, this literature focuses on four overlapping approaches.

Smaller schools. By designing smaller, more intimate schools (to increase personalization) or segmenting existing schools into smaller, independent programs (school-within-a-school), reformers hope that teachers will interact more, participate more in designing curriculum and running the school, and develop a greater sense of connection and commitment (Meier, 1995; Ratzki, 1988).

Magnet programs. By coupling schools with a particular theme or educational focus, reformers hope that teachers will self-select schools with philosophies and beliefs similar to their own and be drawn together through the development of common beliefs (Meier, 1995; Metz, 1986).

Site-based management. By giving teachers greater decision-making control over their workplace (teacher empowerment), reformers expect that teachers will increase participation in and commitment to the community (Barth, 1990; J. Goodlad, 1990; Lieberman, 1995).

Collegiality and collaboration. By encouraging teachers to share ideas, discuss teaching strategies, and work together in planning, teaching, and advising (related strategies include team teaching, peer coaching, action research), reformers hope to reduce teacher isolation and facilitate stronger professional connections (Kruse & Louis, 1997; Lieberman, 1995; McLaughlin, 1993).

Vague Conceptions of Teacher Community in School Reforms

The visions of teacher professional community implicit in school reform literature are numerous and diverse. There is little material here in this gener-

ation of reformers and researchers that clarifies or reconciles ambiguous (and sometimes contradictory) visions of teacher professional community. Although there is some recent research that demonstrates the importance of professional community for teachers (Louis, Kruse, & Bryk, 1995; McLaughlin, 1993), policy makers and practitioners rarely characterize the nature of such communities, focusing instead on the conditions necessary for their growth. Considering the ambiguity in conceptions of teacher professional community, it is not surprising that research demonstrates that implementation of reforms aimed at fostering teacher community are often received with a mix of confusion, mild concern, and doubt (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Little, 1990; Merz & Furman, 1997; Smylie, 1992).

METHOD

I conducted case studies of groups of teachers in two California middle schools in which teachers and administrators were explicit about their commitments to fostering teacher professional communities. Case studies allow for the gathering of "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) of working groups of teachers and their relationship to the school and to each other. Qualitative case studies can be ethnographic, historical, psychological, or sociological (Merriam, 1988). This research, although not an ethnography, used ethnographic techniques (Wolcott, 1994), including participant observation and interviewing. Ethnographic case studies differ from the other disciplinary categories primarily through a concern for cultural context (Merriam, 1988). Understanding this context is essential in understanding the nature of teacher professional communities.

Criteria for Site Selection

Two concerns—an expressed commitment to teacher professional community and recognition by local educators for having strong teacher professional community—guided the choice of schools for this study. Informal discussions with principals, teachers, district administrators, and researchers provided a sense of various schools' commitment to teacher professional community. I also read reports, research profiles, newspaper articles, and school or district bulletins and newsletters, and I visited schools to determine the emphasis on teacher community.

Middle schools proved ideal settings for studying teacher professional communities. Through the use of teams of teachers and students, flexible scheduling, and collaboration among faculty and administration, middle

schools emphasize familiarity and personalization. As Paul George (1983) writes, in a report for the National Middle School Association, middle school teachers

> find themselves involved in a professional community of shared concerns, rather than being isolated in self-contained classrooms or assigned to departments where their common concerns may be limited to the scope and sequence of a single subject area . . . the entire school experience for teachers becomes more unified and connected. (p. 77)

In addition, studies indicate that teachers working in middle schools share stronger collegial relationships, have higher job satisfaction, and are more committed to teaching than those in traditionally organized junior high schools (Ashton, Doda, Webb, Olejnik, & McAuliffe, 1981; Pook, 1981). I chose two schools in the state of California to diminish variation across the sites due to dramatically different state policy climates.

The entire organization of the C. Wright Mills school reflected these criteria but, at Brandeis, the sixth grade faculty was the focus for the study. Whereas the seventh and eighth grade faculties at Brandeis are split into subject matter departments (math, social studies, etc.), the sixth grade faculty—administratively and organizationally distinct from the rest of the school—is treated as its own department, working in teams and as a group almost as though it were a separate school-within-a-school.

Data Collection

Data collection took place over a 15-month period in which I spent most days in one school or the other. In addition to observations within the school schedule, data were collected before and after school, in between classes, and during other nonclass time (for example, teacher interviews before and after school). Several days of follow-up observations and interviews took place 1 and 2 years after the initial study.

Permission to recruit participants for the study was first obtained from the principal of each school. In an introductory meeting arranged with the help of the principal of each school, I asked teachers for their permission to conduct the research and solicited their cooperation. I had planned to interview only teachers who gave their voluntary, written consent. No teacher, however, declined to give written consent to be interviewed. Subjects' identities were kept confidential through code names and school pseudonyms. Preliminary interviews explored the organization, beliefs, and practices that characterize

the school workplace. Subsequent interviews explored teachers' and administrators' understanding of specific events, beliefs, practices, norms, and behaviors that had contributed to or impeded the formation and maintenance of professional relationships at their school. Additional open-ended interviews took place after significant events during the data collection period. I also interviewed target teachers and administrators to develop accounts of their ideal working environment and past professional or nonprofessional experiences that they believe influenced their thinking about professional relationships.

In addition, I observed staff meetings, planning committees, staff development sessions, retreats, schoolwide educational events, and informal get-togethers among teachers during lunchtime, preparatory periods, and field trips. I took written fieldnotes and, at times, tape-recorded the sessions (with the verbal permission of all those present).

Data collection also involved gathering school- and district-level documents, including planning strategies, brochures, newsletters, memos, and meeting agendas. These documents allowed me to further corroborate findings and refine earlier interpretations.

Data Analysis

The process of data collection and data analysis was recursive, cycling "between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new—often better quality—data" (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The analysis occurred throughout data collection as well as after data collection was complete and followed the process described by Strauss (1990) as the "constant comparative method." This iterative process occurred through reflective and analytical journal keeping as well as the ongoing coding of fieldnotes. I asked teachers to reflect on my observations, not only to test the accuracy of my statements but also to re-examine perceptions and conclusions, drawing on the insider knowledge of teachers, making them critics and interpreters.

All descriptions and vignettes that follow were captured from fieldnotes and audiotapes. The quotations are verbatim. Names of schools, teachers, administrators, and geographical references are pseudonyms. Whereas earlier research has focused on school structures best suited for the formation of teacher professional communities, this study assumed that teacher professional communities must be considered in the context of teachers' collective beliefs, experiences, and understandings, as well as their working conditions.

BRANDEIS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Brandeis Middle School is part of the Bayland Unified School District in California. A generally white, upper middle-class suburb, the changing demographics of Bayland is reflected in an increasingly diverse student body in which 5.5% of the population now lives below the poverty line and 1 in 10 students is designated as limited-English speaking, representing some 17 different languages. Brandeis students—on average—continue to score in the top percentiles of most state and national standardized tests. In the past 5 years, Brandeis has twice been designated a California Distinguished School and has been awarded the California Sustained Achievement Award.

Local principals, teachers, district administrators, and researchers with whom I spoke to locate schools for this study all agreed that Brandeis's sixth-grade faculty—who work in teams, attend weekly sixth-grade faculty meetings, and share common preparatory periods—are an exemplary professional community. Many of Brandeis's sixth-grade teachers report having colleagues committed to their profession and interested in sharing ideas. The teachers enjoy teaching at Brandeis, and they care about one another both professionally and personally. Judy, who taught in two other schools before coming to Brandeis, put it this way:

> I really feel like this is a blessed place to work, a bit of a utopia. You're treated much more like a professional. And that has all of these residual affects on the way you teach and how you interact with your colleagues. . . . When you're treated like a professional, you act like a professional and then you treat other people like professionals. I feel a real mutual respect.

Rather than focusing on a shared philosophy, Brandeis's sixth-grade teachers endeavor to respect each other's diligence and commitment. The appreciation for this kind of professionalism, which the teachers (and dozens of studies of teaching and schools) agree is all too rare, is indicated in statements like Jim's:

> It's great to work here. I don't think I've ever worked with as large a group of people who worked so hard and were so dedicated to doing the right thing. We might disagree about what the right thing is but everybody is searching and trying to do their best.

This respect for individual differences in approach to the "right thing" is echoed by Beth: "You're not going to be punished because you didn't do what you were supposed to [what the group decided]. There's room to disagree and

there's room to do it differently. So that's a comfortable feeling." Similarly, the school counselor observed that the faculty "each has their own style, and they're happy to say 'You do it that way, and I'll do it this way.' They have an easy-going attitude."

Brandeis teachers believe that to be a professional community of teachers means to be committed to children, to respect and support colleagues in their individual classroom endeavors, and to have some degree of control over decisions that affect teaching. If education has a mission larger than the classroom for Brandeis teachers, it is less about pursuing a specific educational philosophy or agenda for social change than about spending meaningful time with children and helping them to learn. Teachers' interactions emphasize helping each teacher to pursue good teaching and learning.

Professional community at Brandeis is somewhat synonymous with professional autonomy. Just as a professional community of doctors or a professional community of lawyers maintains autonomy over their practice while sharing strategies and approaches at conferences and in formal and informal meetings, teachers at Brandeis come together to reflect on and plan individual classroom practice. The belief in professional autonomy is also reflected in schoolwide staff development, which tends to focus on specific subject-area concerns or on personal growth. The former tends to emphasize the individual teacher in an individual classroom, and the latter consistently embodies an individualist orientation to personal growth privileging individual rights and responsibilities over growth through relations with others.

In a staff development day on stress management, for example, an outside facilitator spoke forcefully and eloquently on the need for teachers to take care of themselves—and not, that is to say, one another. "Each of us has to care for ourselves," the facilitator summarized half way through the workshop. "We can't expect it from our coworkers. . . . We need to hang in there with ourselves as our own closest ally." Because the workshop focus was on internal psychological and emotional causes of stress, community-based causes of stress such as issues of power, politics, hierarchy, or the shared stresses of teaching were left unexamined. "We need to keep a strong boundary around our sense of self," the facilitator cautioned. "Teachers tend to have dotted lines as a boundary where others can get in."

The Brandeis faculty's belief in allowing for different educational and pedagogical goals leads to a particular form of inclusivity, namely "getting along."

The teacher community's philosophy might best be described by a sign posted on one teacher's door titled the "KEYS TO COOPERATION." Underneath are three classroom rules:

1. You have the right to ask someone for help.
2. You have the duty to assist when someone asks you for help.
3. Everyone must help.

Brandeis's teacher community is one with a professional commitment to mutual support and autonomy but without a shared commitment to collective work or a finely specified collective mission. In contrast to so many faculties characterized by isolation, anonymity, and sometimes hostility, the Brandeis teachers have achieved a peaceful and supportive workplace. Conflicts arise at times, but, most teachers agree, they "never get out of hand." To the contrary, at faculty meetings, in department meetings, and in other official decision-making settings, there is very little expressed conflict.

How could Brandeis be described by the five features of community identified by social theorists that I describe earlier? First, the sixth-grade faculty at Brandeis share certain broad *beliefs* about education and about the ideal teachers' workplace. The most salient shared belief is in the right of individual teachers to teach what they want in the way that they want and to offer and expect support from colleagues. Second, faculty *participation* in the sixth-grade professional community ranges from above-ground participation (at meetings) to underground participation (casual conversations) to nonparticipation (silence). Similarly, participation in designing and implementing the sixth-grade curriculum focuses almost exclusively on individual classroom practice and includes occasional collaboration. There is frequent exchange of ideas, advice, and reflection, and an effort is made to publicly acknowledge individual endeavors. Third, *interdependence* is reflected in a kind of curriculum sharing and occasional collaborative planning. Teachers depend on one another for ideas and for reflection. Fourth, when beliefs differ among the faculty, resulting in the potential for dissent, teachers are often allowed and encouraged to pursue their own ideas through individual classroom practice or to adjust their ideas to broadly defined shared norms. Breaking from group decisions is rarely frowned upon. Finally, *meaningful relationships* take place outside of school, and there is general concern for individual teachers' well-being; the personal and professional relationships, however, are more or less distinct.

C. WRIGHT MILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

C. Wright Mills is an urban, public middle school with a student population typical of big city schools (Anyon, 1997): 38% Spanish surnamed, 20% "other" White, 14% Chinese, 9% African American, and 6% Filipino. Ten

years ago, as the result of a desegregation lawsuit, the school was closed and reopened with an almost entirely new staff. After ranking near the bottom of district middle schools on average standardized test scores, Mills now ranks near the top. It has won numerous awards and attracts students from all over the city who apply—although there are no special entrance requirements— for a place in the sixth grade.

From the first day I spent at Mills, roaming the hallways, the classrooms, the lunchroom, and the offices, talking informally with teachers, students, and administrators, one message was clear: The faculty and staff are characterized, for the most part, by friendliness, a high degree of participation and engagement, and a love of place and colleagues. The events I witnessed at Mills are exceptional, not because they are unusual in this school setting, but because of their marked contrast to research that has consistently demonstrated the persistence of an ethic of privacy, autonomy, and lack of unity among faculty in many similarly organized schools (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Little, 1990).

Mark, a seventh-grade language arts teacher, echoes many staff members when he talks about the sense of common mission he experiences at Mills:

> I've worked in places before where there was a small number of us who always wanted to come to work, where there was a strong *esprit de corps*, but the rest of the school was often jealous and obstacles were always placed before us. Never have I felt that there was a full school movement together with a common goal until I came to Mills.

Through working on a variety of collective projects and sharing basic educational goals and values, the Mills faculty sustains a professional culture in which individual teachers' successes and failures, hopes and fears, and visions and constraints are all intertwined. As a new teacher described it after one of the first faculty meetings,

> You may be used to other schools and just taking a back seat and responding to others' ideas, or not saying anything, but when you enter this building, there's like a creative electricity in the air, and you feel mysteriously compelled to plug yourself in.

Teachers at Mills work within "families" of 100 students and 4 teachers (language arts, math, science, and social studies). They are involved in an impressively high number of projects within the school, typically sit on three or four committees, plan complex interdisciplinary curriculum, and attend (and actively participate in) faculty meetings, "family" meetings, de-

partment meetings, and community council meetings. Teachers often spend long hours at the school, and several are regular weekend attendees. The number of opportunities for both professional and interpersonal interaction is quite striking.

There are also conspicuous and significant tensions: perceptions of an "in" group and an "out" group, for example, or differences of opinions over decision-making processes or the degree to which parents should be involved in determining curricular content. As in many schools (and many organizations, associations, and communities), disagreements, disputes, and conflicts are talked about in the usual hallway conversations, emerge subtly and sometimes explosively in occasional altercations, and are manifest in gossip. Although these typical underground forms of verbalizing conflicts are all present at Mills as they are at Brandeis, Mills teachers are more likely to negotiate conflicts openly in faculty meetings and other forums.

The collective mission present since Mills's inception is described by Lena, an eighth-grade Language Arts teacher. The principal, she remembers, put a blank piece of paper on the table and said "OK, what do you guys want?" Each member of the new staff was encouraged to state what was important to him or her. Lena remembers insisting that all children have equal access to the resources at the school, that tracking not be used to limit resources to certain populations in the school, a concern that became a central Mills conviction. Another teacher remembers talking about the needs of Chinese bilingual students, while a paraprofessional at the time recalls her request to minimize class size in as many creative ways as possible. During this process, Mark recalls, it became "immediately clear [to the staff] that, everything was a piece of the puzzle. Everything was not a thing to itself. You put your bit in and you understood it was a piece of something bigger."

The ideal vision for teaching is described differently by Mills teachers than by those at Brandeis. Eran, the sixth-grade social studies teacher, described his ideal vision for teaching this way:

> I loved the idea of waking up in the middle of the night with an idea and being able to get real excited and call up somebody else and go, "What do you think of this?" and not have them be really angry that you called them at 3 o'clock in the morning.

Teachers also share specific beliefs. One science teacher reflected on the process of curriculum planning:

> A lot of the people here are very political. And I think that's significant, like when we plan Awareness Month activities, we know that if you're going to

teach this stuff, the families have to talk about how you teach about racism, we have to discuss that among ourselves. Through planning for Awareness Month or [other interdisciplinary curriculum units], our team has had a lot of really intense discussions around big issues and have come to realize the ways we all agree on certain basic principles.

These collective beliefs fuel activities at the school. A sixth-grade teacher said,

There's a very strong commitment to providing a good quality education for kids who don't generally have access to good education, kids who come from either economically disadvantaged or otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds and are at risk of checking out entirely. Most of us think that the country can't ignore these kids, that we need them. That is a really, really powerful underlying commitment in this school. You find little, if any, evidence that there are people who don't believe in it. And the people who do believe in it, believe in it so passionately, [they] have enough energy to cover three or four people [who don't].

The beliefs that Mills teachers share are also reflected in a sign posted in a teacher's classroom. It is quite different from the one posted in the Brandeis teacher's classroom:

Three Essential Questions
1. What is social responsibility?
2. What are human rights? When and how have they been violated?
3. What has been the role and form of social protest in history?

Mills's teacher professional community emphasizes community ideals of participation, inclusiveness, and egalitarian democracy. Strong ideological commitments bond the faculty and staff at Mills and allow for joint work toward common goals. Recall again the five commonly invoked features of community: Mills teachers share beliefs in education as a means for social change. They participate in many levels of community affairs. They foster interdependent relationships both through interdisciplinary curriculum planning and implementation and also through the collective enterprise of teaching a common vision. Within a self-selected population of teachers, specific activities and structures encourage hearing of dissenting opinions. Finally, relationships among Mills teachers and staff merge the lives of community members outside of school (including participation in other communities) with their professional lives inside.

Mills's professional community is quite different from that of Brandeis.

HOW TEACHER COMMUNITIES DIFFER

In accordance with the social theory of teacher communities, teachers in a teacher professional community share beliefs, traditions, and forums in which anyone can participate. The community allows for dissenting views and promotes tolerance and critical understanding of differing opinions. Teacher communities engender strong and multidimensional relationships among members and, as Mary Ann Raywid (1988) calls it, "an ethic of individual concern and sympathy" (p. 9). These are the characteristic features of community with which I began this inquiry, watchful of the ambiguity that arises when examining communities in practice.

Although the teacher communities at both Brandeis and Mills could be described by these criteria, they are, in fact, as different from one another as their respective goal statements imply. From *School Goals*, Brandeis,

> All students [should have] a challenging learning environment . . . that fosters independence and personal responsibility.

From *School Goals*, Mills,

> All students should learn to live and work in a world that is characterized by interdependence and cultural diversity.

Whereas Brandeis's professional community emphasizes teachers' individual autonomy, rights, and responsibilities to colleagues, Mills's is driven by a strong collective mission and collective values. Whereas Brandeis's mission is broad-minded and liberal in its notion of the individual separate from the community, Mills's is specific-minded and communal in its notion of the individual in relation to the community. Brandeis's teachers seek support from one another. Mills's seek solidarity.

The dominance of current rhetoric around professional community camouflages these distinctions. Teachers in both schools are dependent on one another for curricular and emotional support and maintain mechanisms for managing dissent. In both schools, teachers care about one another and are seen as individuals who extend beyond their role as school teacher. Yet, these features of community take significantly different forms in these two schools. The evidence of these differences is summarized in Figure 1. Note the specific comparisons between Brandeis and Mills for each of the bulleted items. The curriculum at Brandeis, for example, tends to be "individualized, varying depending on teacher's choice," whereas at Mills, curriculum is "collectivized, interdisciplinary, and project based."

Brandeis	*Mills*
Shared Beliefs	
. . . in the purpose of schooling:	. . . in the purpose of schooling:
To educate citizens who will obey constituted authority and respect the rights and property of others	To educate citizens who will be informed and participating members in a democratic society
To promote self-esteem for all students	To promote respect and dignity for all students
To have each student learn at his or her maximum level	To critically examine local and global social issues
. . . in teaching strategies and curriculum:	. . . in teaching strategies and curriculum:
Teachers meet and discuss individual classroom teaching practices and strategies	Teachers meet and discuss shared educational principles and collective practices and strategies
Individualized curriculum; varies by teacher's choice	Collectivized curriculum; interdisciplinary, project-based
Participation	
Institutional policies allow participation	Institutional structures demand participation
Teachers attend meetings and staff development days	Teachers plan meetings and staff development days
Administrators make decisions without input from teachers	Teachers make decisions and set school policies
Professional and personal commitments are often in conflict	Professional work engages personal and social commitments
New teachers seek autonomy and enforce boundaries between personal and professional life	New teachers drawn into climate of participation and blur personal and professional boundaries
Interdependence	
Teachers support one another's individual classroom work and occasionally team-teach	Teachers intertwine classroom work through collective curriculum design and implementation
Primary curricular goals are subject-area defined (and therefore limited to subject-area teachers)	Primary curricular goals are interdisciplinary, defined by ideals of social justice and participation
Dissent	
Broad, generalized beliefs allow many objectives to coexist; participation in public forums is limited and selective	Openly specified beliefs result in self-selection; some teachers leave; among those who remain, participation is widespread and extensive
Dissent is rarely voiced in public forums	Dissent is voiced in public legitimated spaces
Relationships	
Teachers care for one another; professional and personal commitments are often in conflict	Professional and personal relationships are intertwined; work engages both personal and social commitments

The discussion below is divided into categories where these differences are especially noticeable, specifically: professionalism, work and play, curriculum, and classroom management. I then offer a stronger model for conceptualizing teacher professional community in a way that can capture these differences, emphasizing the hidden distinctions that escape the most common criteria.

Professionalism

Brandeis is a professional community. The community is defined primarily in terms of rights and responsibilities. Teachers share ideas, have strong commitments to teaching and to children. They work hard to get along, emphasizing common ground and sometimes quashing voices of dissent. Teachers are generally content and see themselves as blessed with hard-working and committed colleagues. Because most schools cannot boast much of a professional community, Brandeis's accomplishments are notable. In most schools, teachers feel isolated in their classrooms, and have little opportunity to come together with other teachers (J. Goodlad, 1990; Louis et al., 1995; McLaughlin, 1993). At Brandeis, teachers feel generally supported, and they feel cared for (when there is a death in the family for example, or illness). They are not "alone."

Mills is also a professional community. Teachers manage the curricular, organizational, and budgetary workings of the school. They decide on the composition of committees, sit on these committees, and make decisions that affect the school and their work. Rather than a common contracted responsibility to one another, Mills's teachers share a collective responsibility for the school and its students and a commitment to a collective mission and ideology that transcends the vicissitudes of daily practice. Dissenting voices are drawn out in legitimate spaces, such as meetings and planning sessions, where they carry weight, rather than in hallways or individual classrooms, where they have less public impact.

Brandeis's professional community is a means for improving support for faculty and curriculum for students. At Mills, making communal connections, encouraging participation, and recognizing members of the school, local, and global community as interconnected is itself an educational mission for teachers and students. Brandeis's teachers come together to form what Bellah et al. (1985) called a "community of interest." For Mills's teachers, the coming together (and bringing students together in the school and in their community) is an important act in its own right.

The names the two schools use to describe their respective organizational structures offer additional clues to the differences between their conceptions

of professionalism and community. Brandeis's teachers work in *teams* and Mills's work in *families*. Whereas a team denotes an instrumental assemblage in which individuals come together to accomplish a task, a family indicates that individuals are part of a collective. In teams, individuals can accomplish goals together that may be unattainable alone. In families—ideally—individuals gain a sense of connection, belonging, and affinity. These differences reflect Ferdinand Tönnies's (1887/1957) oft-cited distinction between *gesellschaft* (society in the formal, contractual sense) and *gemeinschaft* (loosely translated as community).

Work and Play

At Brandeis, as in many schools and perhaps other occupations, there is tension between the personal and the professional. At times, they are in conflict, as when "having a life" means time for a life outside of school. Teachers share commitments to broadly accepted aphorisms about schooling, such as "All children can learn" and "To grow, we must take risks" but not to any coherent or potentially contentious ideological belief system that extends beyond their work in school.

Mills, on the other hand, merges the personal and the professional into a community in which professional relationships draw on individual experiences, commitments, and stories in the service of the community. Teachers' relationships are defined less by rights and responsibilities and more by caring. Because the Mills teacher community is based on shared ideological commitments about education and about the world, their interactions are around joint work, joint ideas, and the merging of their own identities outside of work with their professional and vocational identities in work. At Mills, the common mission blurs the lines between social, personal, and professional activities. Some teachers attend each other's writing groups, plays, and concerts. Others see their colleagues at political rallies. Still others do not socialize with teachers outside of school but engage in common pursuits. These activities outside of the school are extensions of their professional and ideological commitments in school. Mutual commitments to a transformative view of education promote bonds that transcend teachers' vocational (professional) and avocational (activities in addition to one's vocation) lives. Social bonds also form as a result of common worldviews, and therefore private and public, professional and social, are difficult to distinguish.

Social gatherings at each school differ as well. At Brandeis, they are exclusively social—intentional celebrations of connections to one another. They include winter holiday parties, end-of-year farewell dinners, and faculty lunches. Within the Mills faculty community, on the other hand, social

celebrations tend to be organized around shared goals and beliefs. Beyond simply a social gathering and a "time to unwind," the Mills faculty celebrates the advancement of each other's convictions: schoolwide faculty parties celebrating the successful implementation of interdisciplinary units on violence or homelessness, for example. These celebrations make more fluid the connections between teachers' vocational and social lives.

Curriculum

The most obvious example of the different impact these two types of community have on the school is in the curriculum. Brandeis's sixth-grade curriculum is almost entirely individualized. To the extent that it is interdisciplinary, one teacher is teaching more than one subject rather than two or more teachers coming together. There are few joint curricular projects. The Mills curriculum is intertwined, interdependent, and interdisciplinary. Brandeis's many curricula reflect the varied interests and commitments of individual teachers. The curriculum development process engenders sharing and reflection on individual (and occasionally team-taught) units. The collective curriculum development at Mills reflects teachers' shared beliefs about inclusivity, participation, education, and community (both the process by which they develop curriculum and the pedagogy and content of the curriculum they develop).

In the classroom, the differences are also notable. On the back wall of each sixth-grade classroom at Brandeis, for example, is a chart showing the cumulative number of pages each student in the class has read this year. Each student's achievement is marked with his or her name on the chart. On the fifth week of school, in Jim's classroom, for example, an enormous cut-out of a staircase shows that one student has already read 2,300 pages, another has read 1,400, and the rest are near the bottom of the chart. In a self-paced computer class, students work individually, advancing to new lessons when they have mastered current ones. On several occasions, I witnessed Brandeis teachers spend half a class period on questions about individual grades, test scoring, and relative class rankings.

At Mills, the curriculum reflects collective beliefs in the importance of community as an end in its own right, and not necessarily because students will learn more (an instrumental goal of community). In the sixth-grade family's roof-top garden project, for example, students come together in their immediate community to work on a joint project of relevance to the outside community (rather than simply for private interests). Just as teachers bridge their work within the school to their political and social commitments outside, students studied hunger in their local community (neighborhood) and

related their research to issues of world hunger, or the global community. What is at play in teachers' interactions is mirrored in the curriculum they design for their students. The curriculum reflects strong beliefs in community problem solving, critical analysis, democratic participation, and inclusiveness.

Classroom Management

Classroom management and discipline is a familiar middle school headache for teachers in both schools. Teachers at Mills, however, speak about discipline problems as a collective nuisance, whereas Brandeis teachers (and especially new teachers) report personal frustration and exasperation. The terminology is significant as each school constructs differently the connection between adolescent mischief and adult responsibility. When a new teacher at Brandeis has discipline problems, for example, veteran teachers come into the classroom to help, observing, making suggestions on classroom management, and occasionally using their own experience to regain and pass on classroom control. The adult culture at Mills and its relationship to student culture makes classroom management problems into collective impediments to learning and, therefore, matters of shared concern. Discipline problems at Mills are typically dealt with, not by a more experienced teacher helping a new teacher (although this happens too), but rather by changing the culture of teaching entirely to one in which teachers are not primarily dependent on children for their sense of professional competence. Rather, they garner their professional respect from their colleagues while collectively addressing the classroom management needs of children. At Brandeis, teachers are always ready to offer technical assistance to individual teachers having trouble. At Mills, private problems become public responsibilities.

What Willard Waller (1932) called teacher dignity is a collective enterprise at Mills. At Brandeis, teachers are supported, professionally and instrumentally, in their occasional loss of dignity ("That happens to all of us. Here's how you can have better control over your classroom"), but nothing fundamental has changed about the culture of teaching, namely, that it is something you do alone. Teachers sympathize with one another and offer suggestions on how to gain better control of the classroom, but dignity continues to depend on adolescent whimsy. At Mills, teachers gain dignity from their colleagues, and students and teachers alike recognize this unity. When one teacher says to her class "I can't believe how you kids are acting out today," and then—in front of the students—to another teacher, "Mr. Schwartz, I think we may have to bring the four of us together [the four family teachers] to talk about the kids'

behavior and their responsibilities," the incident has become collectively annoying without becoming individually humiliating for either teacher.

COMMUNITIES AND CONSEQUENCES: A MODEL FOR DISTINGUISHING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES

Current social theories about teacher professional community do not adequately capture the differences between these communities in practice. Indeed, the word *professional*, which demands attention to technical expertise rather than to ideological commitments, obscures enormous variation in the beliefs *and the consequences* of these beliefs for teacher professional communities in practice. Analyzing, on a variety of different dimensions, data from the teacher communities in two schools that I have been calling Louis Brandeis and C. Wright Mills makes it possible to distinguish between Brandeis and Mills (and other schools) along a continuum of certain characteristics and beliefs. This exploratory continuum identifies ideology, structures, and processes in both schools that are connected to a more complex and detailed conceptualization of a professional community.

I will use the terms *liberal* and *collective* to describe two types of communities illustrated by the Brandeis and Mills faculties. A liberal community (and I borrow the term liberal from political theory) emphasizes individual rights and responsibilities. Members in a liberal community maintain individualized goals and pursue them independently. In a liberal professional community, teachers function autonomously with different goals, strategies, and practices, coming together primarily for mutual support. The guarantee of individual pursuits, argues former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis (1934), "must come mainly through a recognition of the rights of the individual" (p. 315). In a collective community, members maintain shared goals. Their tasks are intertwined, and member participation in the life of the community is seen as important. In a collective community, there is a strong social contract that draws people into community life, and, as C. Wright Mills (1963) describes, promotes "the free ebb and flow of discussion" (p. 356). The work that teachers pursue in a collective professional community is interdependent and collaborative, and "virtually as many people express opinions as receive them" (p. 355).

Contrasting liberal teacher communities with collective teacher communities, 11 characteristics are evident. The first 8 characteristics describe features of liberal and collective teacher communities (see Figure 2).

	Liberal		*Collective*	
1. ←	Community relations are increasingly defined by rights and responsibilities	———	Community relations are increasingly defined by caring and interdependence	→
2. ←	Individual work and responsibility for students, curriculum, and discipline	———	Joint work and responsibility for students, curriculum, and discipline	→
3. ←	Teacher discourse is limited to students, problems,and curriculum ideas and strategies	———	Teacher discourse includes purposes, principles, and philosphies of education	→
4. ←	School management hierarchical; leadership through ascribed title	———	School management diffuse; leadership through talent recognition	→
5. ←	Private (classroom) problems elicit advice and sympathy	———	Private problems are public responsibilites	→
6. ←	Few voices heard in public forums; dissent submerged and when expressed, marginalized	———	Many voices heard in public forums; dissent drawn out, at times cause for leaving	→
7. ←	Sense of instrumental worth of the community	———	Sense of intrinsic worth of the community	→
8. ←	Sense of homogeneity, and conformity within the community	———	Sense of individuality and identity within the community	→
9. ←	Loose hiring criteria based on broad commitments to children and to teaching	———	Selective hiring criteria based on shared beliefs about collaboration and joint work	→
10. ←	Perfunctory faculty activities allow but do not require participation	———	Structured faculty activities ensure and promote a climate of participation	→
11. ←	Curricular goals emphasize personal initiative and individual rights and responsibilities for both teachers and students	———	Curricular goals emphasize interdependence and collective action among teachers and students	→

Figure 2: Characteristic Features of Teacher Communities

1. Professional relationships in liberal teacher communities like Brandeis's emphasize rights and responsibilities to colleagues. Most Brandeis teachers cooperate with their team partners because of a liberal commitment to support one another in individual practice. Relationships in collective

communities like Mills—with its shared commitment to ideals of participation and community—are characterized by affinity, solidarity, and caring. Most Mills teachers work together out of collective commitments to common values and a community-oriented spirit.

2. Brandeis's professional community emphasizes personal responsibility, both among teachers and in the curriculum for students. "There's room to disagree and there's room to do it differently." Individual responsibility for individual students rather than collective responsibility for the student community is the norm in Brandeis's liberal teacher community. Joint work is emphasized at Brandeis only to the extent that it facilitates individual teachers in achieving individual goals. The collective professional community at Mills is characterized by joint responsibility for many aspects of teaching. Teachers emphasize joint work and collective projects, not only because joint work can accomplish some tasks that solitary work cannot, but also because joint work is a community ideal that engenders participation, interaction, and interdependent relationships.

3. Discussion among Brandeis teachers centers around issues of practice and pedagogy. Teachers share ideas and stories about their teaching and about students. Since the educational principles that guide Brandeis teachers vary substantially, public conversation and exchange focuses on noncontroversial adaptations of curricular ideas and strategies rather than on purposes and principles, or philosophies of education. Discussion among teachers at Mills is frequently filled with exchanges that explore principles and philosophies of education. Mills's teachers engaged in discourse on educational purposes and principles from their first day together, when the first principal after reconstitution asked new teachers to write down what was important to them for a school. Philosophical discussions about education take place at many faculty, family, and department meetings as well as in informal conversation. Whereas both communities were 3 years old at the time of this study, Mills teachers talked frequently about the purpose of schooling and educational principles that guide them, whereas Brandeis teachers did so much less.

4. At Brandeis, school management positions are appointed and hierarchical. At Mills, stronger relationships of affinity and a greater number of opportunities for teachers to know each other's strengths result in hierarchies defined more by abilities and less by ascribed titles. Through ample collective work, individuals are known for their talents rather than their positions.

5. Private problems among Brandeis teachers result in advice seeking. Individual teachers offer sympathy and guidance to other individual teachers in need—a cornerstone of liberal commitments. At Mills, private problems are public and collective responsibilities. If a Mills teacher is having a

discipline problem with students, for example, the family of teachers takes up the issue collectively.

6. Brandeis teachers talk relatively little in public forums. Disagreements, especially, are voiced much less often in public contexts, such as meetings or staff development days, and more often in private, informal conversations in classrooms or hallways. Mills teachers participate in all levels of community decision making and planning, and dissenting opinions are frequently voiced. Schools such as Mills are more likely to foster participation and less likely to result in the marginalization or silencing of dissenting views. Individuals with dissenting opinions at Mills either transform the community, are transformed to better match the community, are tolerated, or depart from the community. No teachers have left Brandeis over disagreements in principles or values. It is easier for Brandeis teachers to maintain disparate beliefs because work is more autonomous. Mills, however, demonstrates greater exclusivity in member (teacher) selection.

7. Whereas individuals in a liberal teacher community have an instrumental understanding of community commitments, teachers in a collective community emphasize—at times instinctively—the intrinsic importance of communal attachments and bonds. Whereas Brandeis teachers see community as a means, Mills teachers see it as an end. The Mills teacher community is characterized by a sense of intrinsic worth. The focus on the intrinsic rather than the instrumental value of community places schools like Mills at odds with current policy and reform rhetoric (see Westheimer, Kahne, & Gerstein, 1992).

8. At Brandeis, conformity to norms of professionalism and individual autonomy provides few opportunities for individuals to establish a unique identity through participation in community affairs. Individual expression is less likely to emerge within the teacher community at Brandeis than at Mills. Contrary to the common fear of loss of individuality within community, Mills's teachers gain a sense of individual identity specifically through their participation in community affairs.

Like these 8 features of communities, 9 through 11 also characterize the differences between liberal and collective teacher professional communities. These next three features of community, however, not only describe what the community looks like, but, at the same time, how it got to be that way. They are both features *of* and processes *to* community. I will call these *contributing features* to emphasize that they both describe the community and give clues to its formation (see Figure 2).[1]

9. Brandeis teachers are hired under loose criteria based on broad educational commitments. Although the criteria could be considered selective (almost all the teachers came from within the Bayland district), they have

little to do with teachers' philosophy of teaching or any shared outlook or convictions. Mills is characterized by a selective hiring process. Mills teachers either were screened for beliefs about collaboration, participation, and joint work by the hiring committee ("I was really strongly committed to the idea of working as a team") or they self-screened ("I had my fingers in the pie with a lot of schools [but] I decided to go here because of the entrenched collective atmosphere").

A selective process of hiring that might be employed by schools seeking to become collective communities like Mills also has implications for the forms of administration and leadership it makes possible. Studies of leadership have found that leaders successful in bringing groups together around a common mission often begin with a clear vision and purpose at the same time that they encourage participation (Immegart, 1988). It is notable that, at Brandeis, the principal arranged for the superintendent to come to the first faculty meeting to "deliver" a vision for the new sixth grade. Such a top-down approach to vision setting provides a clear vision at the expense of participation. At Mills, on the other hand, the founding principal of the reconstituted Mills provided new teachers with a blank piece of paper on which they constructed their vision. At first glance, one might conclude that no vision was provided by the administration. In reality, the Mills principal had a clear enough vision to hire faculty who, when presented with a blank piece of paper, would agree on certain basic premises of his vision, whereas Brandeis's hiring process did not tend to screen for a particular educational vision. Moreover, when the Mills faculty's vision later strayed from the one the principal had in mind, he stepped in to guide it, having already gained their trust.

10. The Brandeis faculty community is marked by perfunctory activities and structures that allow but do not require participation. In a liberal community, participation is allowed but not required. The Mills faculty community sustains institutional structures, activities, and traditions that explicitly promote a climate of participation. Balancing tradition and structure with innovation and latitude, the Mills teacher community succeeds in breaking expectations of autonomy and solitary work (Little, 1990), providing instead a professional culture characterized by participation and mutual engagement.

11. Brandeis's educational mission and curricular goals for students reflect the faculty's focus on personal initiative and individual rights and responsibilities for teachers. Conversely, the Mills faculty commitment to collaborative work is reflected in the emphasis on collaboration in the student curriculum. Curriculum at Mills is characterized by explicit emphasis on building a schoolwide collective community that underscores interdependent relationships, collective action and reflection, and belonging (for both teachers and students).

Points on the Continuum

A professional community oriented around liberal individualist priorities is clearly quite different from one organized around collective goals. Each represents distinct working cultures for faculty and staff and results in distinctive educational climates for students. Above, I specified these differences and constructed a provisional model to capture the structures, processes, and beliefs associated with liberal and collective manifestations of teacher professional communities.

Brandeis and Mills would fall on different points along the continuum for each characteristic. They would not necessarily be polar opposites in all cases. Brandeis is not a community purely defined by liberal individualist tendencies across all the features of a liberal community; nor is Mills purely collective. These binary endpoints are not either/or but rather constitute the playing field of conceptual space on which the teachers in each school make their organizational and interpersonal decisions. Although it is hard to imagine teachers in a school that resembles current school organization to be engaged in any more joint work than Mills teachers, (see feature 2 in Figure 2), for example, one does not have to look far for a school in which teachers are more isolated in their work than at Brandeis. The Mills teacher community falls on the collective side of the joint work continuum. Brandeis's teacher community falls somewhere in between Mills and the traditional one-room schoolhouse or a comprehensive high school in which teachers teach their own subject in their own classroom five periods per day with little collegial contact. By forcing the distinction between liberal and collective communities, the consequences of various stances become clearer.

Ideology Matters

That members of communities share beliefs seems to be somewhat of a truism in current philosophical debates. Of the various characteristics and features of community described in social theory, shared beliefs is by far the condition of community most often mentioned.[2] Accordingly, in a growing body of school reform literature, shared beliefs play a prominent role in the various recipes and guidelines that surround efforts to build teacher professional communities in schools. Surprisingly, however, what beliefs should be shared is a thorny question almost always avoided. We can all agree that schools must have a common purpose. But the purpose matters, not just the act of having one, and here is where so many guidelines for building communities end and the truly difficult work of community building begins.

In the everyday life of schools, the beliefs and the ideology count, as well as how they are elicited. Embracing a liberal individualist instead of a collective community ideal is an ideological choice that has implications for teachers' practice. The two signs I described in each school, for example, reflect commitments to very different ideals. Having the "right to ask for help" and the "duty to help" differ from notions of collective action and identity. Teachers and administrators could choose many other ideological commitments uncharted here, and there would be consequences to those choices as well. Communities are not neutral. There are philosophical, political, and social commitments that allow people to make relationships priorities, to create spaces that are inclusive, and to build a school culture that is community oriented. These commitments are sometimes incompatible with, for example, a belief that the major books of one culture represented in the school community are less important for the curriculum than those of another, or support of a law that denies one group of children of the community education or health services.

The 11 characteristics of teacher community illustrate these differences along a liberal-collective continuum. Whereas Brandeis's teachers are hard working and deeply committed to teaching, they are committed to the individual development of their students and their classroom autonomy as professionals. They are not committed to a collective pedagogy or community-building processes. As a result, opportunities for continuing participation and interaction occur far less at Brandeis than at Mills and, when they do, they are instrumentally aimed at enhancing individualism. Participation is diminished at Brandeis, and tensions are hidden. Mills's beliefs, on the other hand, are ideologically predisposed to collective work, to inclusion, to change, and to an emphasis on interdependent relationships.

Similarly, whereas Brandeis teachers share beliefs in the importance of collaboration for student learning and professional growth, Mills teachers share beliefs in the importance of community as an end. At Brandeis, the teacher community serves instrumental purposes. At Mills, it serves intrinsic commitments. Policy rhetoric has had a distinctly instrumental flavor, making Brandeis more consistent with many current reformers' visions of the purposes and practices of teacher professional community: Stronger teacher communities will reduce absenteeism and increase professionalism; stronger school communities will raise student test scores and reduce student dropout rates. Barth (1990), Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1995), and McLaughlin (1993) all point to the need to connect teacher community to student learning. Reformers have failed to confront whether community is outcome-oriented or a significant goal in its own right and what it would mean not to sidestep the latter.

"The structure can be seen as helping kids," one Brandeis teacher explained, "or it can be seen as just helping teachers, for their convenience." In comparison, a new Mills teacher observed,

> I think the families do tremendous good for the kids, but the first year I couldn't even focus on that. I was only focusing on how the family related to me, and I found it very supportive. The second and third year I was able to think about what a great structure the families were for kids.

The beliefs that Mills teachers share engender community ideals. They are fundamentally different from shared beliefs that work at cross-purposes to building community.

Furthermore, the Brandeis curriculum emphasizes individual rights and ability tracking to the exclusion of certain members of the community. Ability tracking at Mills is seen as conflicting with community norms of inclusiveness. At one Mills faculty meeting, for example, Tom Connor, the principal, was explaining a possible process for nominating students for participation in before-school classes for the upcoming Educational Testing Service's PSAT exams. Lena asked how students would be nominated for the PSAT list. When Tom responded that students would be eligible through voluntary recommendations from teachers or parents, Pasqual nominated the entire list of students on detention that week: "I'd like to recommend the Tuesday/Thursday detention class for PSATs, Mr. Connor." A round of critique of tracking followed, including comments such as, "These opportunities should be available to all of our students," and, "This kind of ability grouping is divisive for the student body."

The notion of the individual at Brandeis is characterized by an announcement I heard over the school's public address system. A student, broadcasting schedule information to all the classrooms, closed with, "And now the thought for the day: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. Keep smiling." The notion of the individual at Mills, on the other hand, is community defined. Rather than the individual in isolation, individuals are defined in their relationships with others.

C. Wright Mills (1963) highlights some of these differences in distinguishing between what he calls a *public* and a *mass*:

> In a *public* as I understand the term, virtually as many people express opinions as receive them; public communications are so organized that there is a chance immediately and effectively to answer back to any opinion expressed in public. . . . When these conditions prevail, we have [a model that] fits pretty closely the several assumptions of classic democratic theory. (p. 355)

In a *mass*, conversely, "far fewer people express opinions than receive them; for the community . . . becomes an abstracted collectivity of individuals" (p. 355). In both C. Wright Mills (the person's) conception of the public and C. Wright Mills (the school's) conception of collective work lies a common understanding of the strength and possibilities that can come from connection and affiliation. The content of the beliefs matter.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONGER
MODELS FOR TEACHER COMMUNITY

The lessons learned from two California middle schools strengthen current conceptualizations of community, which have remained vague and estranged from the complexities of professional communities in practice. My claim is that the absence of empirical research in the school workplace that distinguishes between different conceptions of teacher professional community may have caused both researchers and practitioners to overlook significant individual and organizational factors contributing to the survival or dissolution of these communities. By making these distinctions clearer, the paths to creating and maintaining teacher professional communities in schools become easier to follow and the obstacles easier to avoid.

Beliefs matter—not just that they are shared, but also that they embody commitments to ideals of community. For Mills, these ideals include participation by all members of the community, equity, and inclusiveness; for Brandeis, different ideals emphasized autonomy and responsibility.[3] Researchers, policy makers, and practitioners will need to acknowledge the relative differences in various beliefs about working together, working with students, and curricular aims and methods. Rather than fearing ideological commitments to one stance or another, school personnel and policy makers would do well to recognize that different beliefs engender very different professional communities.

Is one system of beliefs better than another? This is a very difficult question that one researcher cannot answer. However, are certain beliefs more likely to result in participation by a diverse membership than others? Are certain beliefs more likely to inculcate a recognition of the importance of dissent in communal associations? Or the importance of equity among community members? Yes. Communities may need to pay particular attention to individual members, to opportunities for inclusion and interaction, and to a studied and thoughtful consideration of the dangers of insularity (Noddings, 1996).

The implications for schools are as follows: If teachers are to form professional communities in schools like Brandeis, it will be useful to acknowledge

norms of professional autonomy and collegial—but independent—work. Participation and the expression of dissent would not be likely features of such professional communities.

If, on the other hand, reformers and practitioners prefer that teachers work in professional communities like the one found at Mills, teachers will need opportunities for common experiences that foster attachments, commitment, and participation. Specific participatory structures may break norms and expectations of privacy, and these structures may need to be based in a clear and community-oriented vision. As Ann Lieberman (1988) writes, teachers must be "organized, mobilized [and] led" in order to overcome the norms of autonomy that pervade the school. Bonds form between teachers as they work together toward common goals (McLaughlin, 1993). Just as members of a close-knit drama group or political campaign develop attachments to each other and commitment to the group, teachers working in schools may need opportunities for interaction, mutual dependence, and identity. Building professional communities such as this one would mean "rendering more coherent those values that . . . uphold democratic participation and cooperation" (Kantor & Lowe, 1989, p. 138).

Further Concerns of Underconceptualized Theories of Community

Why should we care about conceptualizing teacher community and examining communities in practice? Why do beliefs and structures matter? Without richer and more careful conceptualizations and explorations, school reform efforts end up rudderless, and the rhetoric of community is rendered ubiquitous and shallow. I conclude this article with three further concerns I have about the use of the term *community* that merit attention: First, the term community is often misused as a way to avoid the thornier issues of school funding. It is not clear that urban schools exhibit greater alienation than their suburban counterparts, and community cannot mitigate the fiscal poverty schools now find themselves in. The schools described in Jonathan Kozol's (1991) *Savage Inequalities* and many other works do not need talk about getting along; they need money: generous and just funding.

Second, community can be used as a way to ignore issues of power, race, and gender, in an insidious effort to just "have everyone try to get along." Many scholars raise attention to these concerns. Community, however, is not a remedy for conflict. Conflict, in fact, may be one sign that the community is beginning to address the diverse needs of its members (Achinstein, 1998).

Finally, those using the term community to describe democratic and egalitarian forms of school organization and values must clearly distinguish

themselves from those seeking a return to traditional communities as a salve for social ills without addressing issues of inequity and injustice.

Virtually everyone is in favor of community, and in this head-nodding agreement lies the obfuscation of consequences that come from ideological choices. Both Brandeis and Mills schools represent strong ideological choices that privilege liberal or collective concerns (respectively). If we want teacher professional communities that look like the one at Brandeis, we would need to emphasize different types of collaborative relationships than if we want the type of community found at Mills. Thus, it is critically important to articulate the differences in these visions for the purposes and qualities of community or risk undermining the goals we have. I have argued that researchers need stronger conceptualizations of the kinds of communities they are examining. Teachers and administrators need stronger visions of the type of community they are trying to build. And policy analysts need the wherewithal to point out the differences and pursue strategies that truly represent a clear vision of what teacher community involves. Community is not a universally defined outcome. It is a way of traveling with a new view. Carefully and rigorously debating what that view should be is the task we now face.

NOTES

1. See Westheimer (1998, pp. 17-23) for more on this distinction.

2. There are exceptions, but they are few. Joseph Maxwell (1994), for example, argues that what is important is not shared beliefs but "contiguity" or continuous and reliable interaction and participation.

3. The rhetoric of both communities, however, included participation, equity, and inclusiveness.

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