

# Marginalization in Rural White Schools

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EAD 822

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April 29, 2014

# Background

- Mason County Eastern Schools (MCE) is located in the Village of Custer, Michigan
- MCE is part of West Shore Educational Service District (ESD)
- MCE is one of three districts in Mason County, Michigan

# Background

- MCE serves students from the eastern portion of Mason County. Most students are bussed into the district from other small towns, villages, and surrounding rural areas.
- MCE is a small district:
  - Paul Shoup serves as the Superintendent and Principal for all buildings
  - High School and Middle School are one building
  - One 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade building on the same campus as HS and MS
  - HS/MS share Gyms and Lunchrooms, many staff members, and other integral parts of school functions
  - One separate Early Childhood Center currently renting from St. Mary's Church in Custer

# Research Background

- Interview with Superintendent/Principal Paul Shoup
- Analyzing MCE MEAP scores
- Analyzing MCE Free and Reduced Lunch data
- Knowledge from being a member of the MCE teaching community (Elementary Teacher at MCE since 2010)
- Conversations with MCE staff members and parents

# Demographics

- According to GreatSchools.org, of the 263 students enrolled in grades K-6 at MCE, 90% of these students are white.

# Question

How can I conclude that a school district in rural West Michigan - that has one elementary school where 90% of the students are white faces marginalization similar to more urban, racially diverse school districts?

# MCE Data

- Class struggles:
  - In meeting with Mr. Shoup, about 80% of MCE's students are eligible for free and reduced lunch
  - GreatSchools.org claims that 77% of MCE's K-6 students are eligible for free and reduced lunch
  - Free and reduced lunch numbers are climbing each year at MCE

# MCE Data

- Class struggles:
  - According to Mr. Shoup, the majority of MCE students are “At-Risk”, 31-a Fund
  - In determining “At-Risk” students, factors such as achievement, history, drug or alcohol issues, or teen pregnancy are considered



# MCE Data

- Class Struggles:
  - Large number of students come from poverty vs. large number of staff did not come from poverty
  - According to Mr. Shoup, parents do not always have the tools to support their students at MCE. This does not mean parents do not want to.

# MCE Theoretical Issues

- There are challenges between staff and students at MCE:
  - Paul Shoup points out that staff have a difficult time setting expectations for learning perceptions.
  - Staff do not understand the poverty students come from.
  - Staff may not understand what MCE families value and the reasons for this due to class differences.

# Lareau

- Annette Lareau's research explains many of the observations at MCE.
  - Lareau points out how schools are set up to reflect more middle-class societies than working-class societies.
  - Lareau explains that parents of lower-class families may not be able to help their children in the same ways middle-class families can...

# Lareau

“The working-class parents had poor educational skills, relatively lower occupational prestige than teachers, and limited time and disposable income to supplement and intervene in their children’s schooling (p. 81).”

- Just as Mr. Shoup explained, parents at MCE often want to help their children and want their children to succeed in school, but do not have the tools to do so. From Lareau, it can also be concluded that many parents of MCE students do not have the resources to support their students in school like middle-class parents do.

# Lareau

- Lareau also explains that teachers and parents of working-class children have different points of view.
  - Teachers often think working-class parents are more complacent to their children's education than middle-class parents are. According to Lareau, this is not necessarily true...

# Lareau

“Parents in both communities valued educational success; all wanted their children to do well in school, and all saw themselves as supporting and helping their children achieve success at school. Middle- and working-class parents’ aspirations differed only in the level of achievement they hoped their children would obtain (p. 81).”

- Mr. Shoup discussed that many people view the parents of MCE as valuing the wrong things (for example, may live in a rundown trailer but have multiple televisions or nice vehicles). But Mr. Shoup pointed out that many parents only feel they need those things to show their worth. If their children had an opportunity, such as traveling overseas for school, don't assume they don't want their children to go because of lack of finances. People would be surprised how important something like that would be to the families and what they would do to support their children.

# Flessa

- Flessa reiterates that schools are often designed to reflect the middle-class.
- School leaders focus on what they cannot do and point the finger for schools failing at parents and students.
- “...school leaders miss opportunities to work with parents in ways that would be mutually beneficial. But by focusing on narrow definitions of leadership, we narrow our ability and willingness to examine how other kinds of investments-community and family life, neighborhoods, broader social and economic policies-might make more likely improvement in educational outcomes we seek.”

# Flessa

- It is easy for school leaders at MCE to focus on marginality. It is easy to see issues that students bring into the schools instead of focusing on what opportunities for enrichment they bring. It is easy to want to fix their issues while in school yet not get involved in their communities outside of school.
  - For example, when the school gets involved, they usually want parents and students to come to the school for events instead of going out into the community.



# What's Next

- Teachers at MCE need more education about the community in which they serve.
  - Many teachers do not live in the same community and class as MCE.
  - Teachers struggle to relate to students and families because they do not understand the values of the community. Instead, teachers have misconceptions.

# What's Next

- Theories show schools are not designed for the majority of MCE's working-class families.
  - MCE should take time to identify ways in which it cater to the middle-class. MCE should design an environment that embraces all students, regardless of class.

# What's Next

- Staff need further education.
  - According to Flessa, little education is provided for educators in parental engagement. This is especially important for MCE where teachers and parents may belong to different communities.

# What's Next

- Community Visibility
  - MCE staff members need to be visible in the community.
  - Staff cannot expect parents to always come to MCE.
  - Mr. Shoup gave this example: When he goes to Bonser's, the local grocery store in Custer, to get a gallon of milk, he may be in there for 20 minutes due to the fact that so many community members want to talk to him.
  - Would this be the case if he asked the same people to stop into his office at MCE?

# What's Next

- Providing Tools
  - Theories and Mr. Shoup pointed out that working-class families do not always have the tools they need to help their children be successful in school.
  - MCE needs to find ways to help parents receive these tools and educate parents on how to use these tools.
  - Elementary staff at MCE suggested having a night to help parents understand the Common Core curriculum as many parents do not understand the methods and skills to help their children be successful with the Common Core.

# Personal Reflections

When reading the course materials, I was struck by the many similarities between urban schools and rural schools in terms of oppression. Each school faces its own struggle(s), but many have similar roots. People/systems in power keep people in oppression, especially in terms of oppression in schools. It is hard for schools to overcome systemic oppression. The more knowledge people have about systemic oppression, the more power they will gain in possible overcoming it.

# References

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