

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: A JOURNEY INTO THE HEART'S CORE: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF
TEACHING THE CORE KNOWLEDGE
CURRICULUM

Margarete C. Grove, Doctor of Philosophy, 2005

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This dissertation is a hermeneutic phenomenological study of the Core Knowledge curriculum. The question I am called by is what is the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher? I orient myself to life by being a teacher, and I seek to know more about this phenomenon of being a Core Knowledge teacher. In what ways do teachers live out their “core” beliefs in the Core Knowledge curriculum?

The foundation of this research is philosophically grounded in the work of Ted Aoki, Edward Casey, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Martin Heidegger, and Parker Palmer, among others. I am called by the philosophical idea of exploring “being.” To explore “being” requires a movement beyond conceptual meaning, to the place of what living the experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher is like. Philosophers provide a more complete picture of the journey into knowing and being.

Van Manen’s (1990) methodological guide, *Researching Lived Experience*, provides the research framework that I followed while pursuing this phenomenological

project. Working within van Manen's framework, I involved seven teachers who were invited to participate in conversations with me about their experience of teaching Core Knowledge. These conversations provided text for further study and thematizing. Core Knowledge as the appearance of choice; being defined by the choice of Core Knowledge; and the experience of regarding curriculum as "thing" were themes uncovered and explored more deeply to open up the experience of teaching Core Knowledge.

Hearing these teachers speak about their work with Core Knowledge adds more voices to the conversation about this curriculum and provides more questions to explore. What might be heard from other Core Knowledge teachers as they work with this curriculum? In what ways might the conversations about Core Knowledge be open and deepened by hearing all who journey on this path? This journey into the heart's core provides a place to hear these Core Knowledge teachers as they share their experiences with the curriculum and, in turn, teach others how to listen more thoughtfully.

A JOURNEY INTO THE HEART'S CORE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
EXPLORATION OF TEACHING THE CORE KNOWLEDGE CURRIUCLUM

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

To David, who holds the other half of my heart,

You have always held me up during this work, and you have had nothing but support and love for me during my journey. Thank you.

To Marguerite Amelia Keller Henry,

I am named for you. Even though you are no longer with me here, you will always be in my heart. You were an educator and a lover of academia, and I dedicate this work to you.

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**CHAPTER ONE:
TURNING TO THE HEART OF BEING A CORE KNOWLEDGE TEACHER**

Understanding Curriculum as *Currere*: The Heart of Learning

Pinar (1975) writes about a conceptualization of curriculum that brought about a transformative return to its root derivation:

I propose yet another meaning of the word, one stemming from its Latin root, *currere*. The distinction of this: current usage of the term appears to me to focus on the observable, the external, the public. The study of *currere*, as Latin infinitive suggests, involves the investigation of the nature of the individual experience of the public: of artifacts, actors, operations, of the educational journey or pilgrimage. (p. 400)

Curriculum in this view is a guide for the journey of learning as it is experienced in schools. Which curriculum is being taught may be the mandate of the state, the developed framework in schools, or it may be as simple as a teacher's choice of material in a classroom to provide teaching and learning for students. As I think about Pinar's words in relation to a curriculum reform with which I have been involved, called Core Knowledge®, I begin to reflect on my experiences with that curriculum and questions begin to surface: How does the curriculum transform students and teachers? Are teachers' hearts in their teaching? Are students' hearts in their learning? If not, are teaching and learning truly happening? How might teaching and learning be resuscitated in the classroom? Might Core Knowledge offer the possibility for such resuscitation? Thinking about Core Knowledge in my educational journey provides a way of thinking about this curriculum.

In this first section, I explore Core Knowledge as the heart of a school reform movement and begin to ponder the questions that arise in my mind about this curriculum. I begin by reflecting on my initial work with Core Knowledge, continue by introducing

this curriculum, and end by posing some of the more vexing questions that I have about teachers and Core Knowledge. There are many ways to begin this journey, and I begin with my first experience with Core Knowledge.

My Initial Resuscitation through the Core Knowledge Curriculum

I smell the dust from the chalkboard as I turn to tell 2nd graders from an inner city school that we will be studying Ancient Greece for the next few weeks. The thoughts that I have about teaching the upcoming unit to these students are mixed. What is the point of teaching ancient history to these young students, some of whom have never been outside this city? Why would they need to know about Ancient Greece? How will this help them? Other questions linger, but excitement begins to take over. I am excited to talk with them about this ancient country. I see excitement in their eyes to learn about a civilization they had no idea existed. I am eager to share with them the ancient myths, help them locate Greece on the map, and learn about the people. Maybe, one day, they will get to visit Athens. Will they remember these stories they have heard? Am I helping at least one of them dream of going to college to learn more about these ancient cultures? What do these ancient cultures help to teach about their own cultures and understanding of humankind? These questions engulf me, arising from a unit of study I am about to teach from the Core Knowledge curriculum. The voices inside me are questioning the Core Knowledge curriculum. They chime together to remind me that I have concerns, but I also have triumphs and success stories.

Listening to the questions inside may provide insight never provided before, or never listened to before. Those voices inside ask questions, urging me forward to look more deeply. What can I see when I look with my heart? What can I hear when I listen to

these voices with my heart? Or is it the heart that is speaking here? Just as I was called to hear my “heart questions” when I began to teach Core Knowledge, so, too, have those teachers who have participated in this program. I am now called by their voices to understand what their lived experience with Core Knowledge has been like for them. The Core Knowledge curriculum has affected teachers and students in different ways. To begin to understand Core Knowledge requires an introduction to the tenets of the curriculum.

Getting to the Heart of Core Knowledge: What is this Program?

For ten years, I have been working with and teaching the Core Knowledge curriculum. This content has been part of my teaching career for as long as I have been in the classroom and beyond. When I began teaching as an intern in a public school, I wrote lesson plans and field-tested this content. I experienced Core Knowledge in the form of curriculum as plan. Core Knowledge became a map for my teaching, and I spent long hours with teachers who wanted to work with Core Knowledge and planned units of study with them. When I became a teacher in my own classroom, I became a trainer of teachers. I started traveling around the country to help teachers in other schools learn about Core Knowledge and write lesson plans. Now that I have been away from the classroom, pursuing doctoral studies, I have worked with entire state curricula and aligned them with Core Knowledge. What happens during this alignment? Is there room for detour in alignment? My roles have changed within the Core Knowledge world, but I still have many questions about what I have done and what I will continue to do. What is Core Knowledge? What does Core Knowledge mean? When does curriculum as planned become curriculum as lived?

Mackley, a superintendent of schools in Ohio, and the author of *Uncommon*

Sense: Core Knowledge in the Classroom (1999), describes Core Knowledge this way:

Core Knowledge is not a method of teaching, although it has been linked by some to rigid, teacher-directed instruction and labeled as a traditional, back-to-basics approach to teaching and learning. It has often been portrayed as an approach to education that depends exclusively on lecture and is accompanied by student memorization of names, dates, and facts. Core Knowledge has nothing to do with any of these things: It is a curriculum, not a teaching method . . . The *Core Knowledge Sequence* is intended to be only half a school's curriculum content, so there is time for a teacher to guide students into other topics. (pp. 13-14)

Mackley uses the word “guide” to describe teachers. Is Core Knowledge an educational journey that needs a guide? What is the difference between “curriculum” and “method”?

If curriculum is a journey, will not “method” be a way of getting from one place to another?

The Core Knowledge curriculum originated from the ideas of E. D. Hirsch Jr., who is the Founder and Chairman of the Board of the Core Knowledge Foundation, located in Charlottesville, Virginia. The Foundation is the organization responsible for providing information about the *Core Knowledge Sequence*. Hirsch (1993) explains the curriculum in the following way: “Our aim in providing specific grade-by-grade guidelines—developed after several years of research, consultation, consensus-building, and field- testing—is *not* to claim that the content we recommend is better than some other well- thought out core. No specific guidelines could plausibly claim to be the Platonic ideal” (p. 24). What is the “well-thought out core”? Can the heart of something be “well-thought out”? Are affairs of the heart different from affairs of the head? Hirsch continues, “To get beyond the talking stage, we created the best specific guidelines we could” (p. 24).

After writing *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Should Know*, Hirsch decided to explore the possibility of developing a school curriculum. Hirsch's book became a best seller, because it spoke clearly to Americans about deficiencies in cultural knowledge. "Combining theoretical analysis with entertaining anecdotes about illiteracy and a list of 5,000 things that 'culturally literate' Americans need to know, Hirsch's book climbed to the top of the *New York Times* best-selling list" (Peterson, 1995, p. 75). Although the Core Knowledge curriculum was not based on this list in Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*, the book provided some background to the birth of the Core Knowledge curriculum. Hirsch received criticism for *Cultural Literacy*, as well as popularity. Lindsay (2001) writes, "Though *Cultural Literacy* vaulted onto the bestseller lists, reviewers savaged Hirsch as a cultural aristocrat eager to foist on schools the Western canon and a narrow, elitist curriculum" (p. 26). Hirsch's book brought him attention as he worked with school curriculum. In what ways does culture, the heart of society, affect curriculum, the heart of schools?

In the early nineties, Hirsch invited a group of teachers and educational administrators to a National Conference to begin discussing curriculum for schools. This group of professionals developed the teaching topics that now encompass the *Core Knowledge Sequence*. To work on this list of topics, those at the meeting consulted International curricula of France, Japan, Sweden, and Germany and also consulted national reports from many agencies, such as the Standards of the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics and the National Standards for History, among others. State and district guidelines provided some of the background for developing the *Core Knowledge Sequence*.

What might happen if curriculum writers would consult students and teachers as well as documents? What information do documents provide? Where is the background for heart-felt curriculum? An advisory board on multiculturalism was convened for the development and revision of the *Core Knowledge Sequence*, and included such noted thinkers as Henry Louis Gates of Harvard, and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese of Emory University (Core Knowledge Background Information, 2000, p. 39). Consultation with these noted thinkers aided in the formulation of the *Core Knowledge Sequence*.

The Core Knowledge Sequence: A Prescription for Ailing Schools

The *Sequence* is a book that lists topics organized by grade level and subject to teach at each grade level, from pre-school to the eighth grade. The *Sequence* recently has been bound into a book called *The Core Knowledge Sequence: Content Guidelines for Grades K-8*. When I refer to the *Sequence*, this is the book I reference. The areas of study in each grade level are Language Arts, World History and Geography, American History and Geography, Visual Arts, Music, Mathematics, and Science. Core Knowledge is highly specific in each subject area, so the teachers know exactly what area of that content they are to address. For example, the second grade content section of the *Sequence* book contains the guidelines for American History and the Civil War. In second grade, the students study Harriet Tubman, Ulysses S. Grant, and Robert E. Lee among other topics. In fifth grade, those students build on previous knowledge by studying Fort Sumter, the Confederacy, Yankees and Rebels, and The Emancipation Proclamation. The *Sequence* is specific and prescribed, but designers of Core Knowledge have the intent to let teachers design lessons and activities to teach the Core Knowledge

topics. Are these teacher created units and topics the heart of this curriculum reform?
How do teachers respond to curriculum and to reform?

Teachers use Core Knowledge to sequence topics for teaching from grade to grade, seemingly to lower the instance of “gaps and repetitions” in learning, while providing a “common bond” for all students. This flexibility allows teachers to keep units they love to teach that might not be included in Core Knowledge. Does this flexibility soothe the hearts of teachers? Is this time really used for what the teachers need or want to do in the classroom?

The Core Knowledge Foundation publicizes that Core Knowledge was not the product of one person, Hirsch, but rather it was the product of many talented and intelligent players in the field of education. These professionals determined the content of Core Knowledge, but it is left up to the teachers to use the teaching methods to ensure success. Core Knowledge does not provide the “how,” but only the “what.”

Does “curriculum as plan” change when handed over from the developers to the teachers? Does the original message behind the curriculum stay the same, or do teachers change the heart of this program once it is in their classrooms? How do teachers cope with teaching a specific program of curriculum? Trying to determine how to teach all of the Core Knowledge topics and what materials to use is a source of stress and frustration. Although the Core Knowledge Foundation expects the entire sequence of Core Knowledge to be taught at each grade level in a Core Knowledge school, it may take years for the teachers at each grade level to work units of study into existing plans. Core Knowledge teachers have to make sure they are teaching the topics from Core Knowledge, as well as any other required items from their state or district. Not only does

Core Knowledge provide structure and curriculum to classrooms, but teachers also may have to deal with state requirements. Where is the room for the voice of the teacher? Where is the room for the voice of the student? Where do the hearts of those actually engaged in instruction and learning have a chance to beat freely?

Hirsch states, “If you don’t have specificity, you can’t have commonality. Leaving things vague, which is what most curriculum documents do, prevents us from making sure that children experience some essential, common content, and it also produces these gaps and repetitions as children move through the grades” (as cited in O’Neil, 1999, p. 28). Teachers with whom I have visited seem to like the specificity of the Core Knowledge curriculum. They still are able to be creative, but they know exactly what is to be taught at each grade level. This seems to be exhilarating for teachers, instead of constricting. If a curriculum is vague, does that mean that it has lost its heart, or is the heart found by the life that teachers give it? Does the Core Knowledge curriculum give heart back to the curriculum and teachers? Is it the life of the lived curriculum? Where does lived curriculum get its “life”?

The Spark That Provides the Charge

I recall a time when I led a workshop for a school in Core Knowledge. The excitement was electric as the teachers gathered together as a community to work on their Core Knowledge plans for the upcoming school year. Ideas, comments, and shouts like, “I have a book on the Roman Empire in my classroom storage closet, if you want to use it!” floated around the room like excited fireflies on the first night of summer. I felt the energy of people who love what they do charging all of us in the room. It is this charge that keeps me working with Core Knowledge. However, does Core Knowledge produce

this charge, or is it the teachers? What is this charge and what is it doing to invigorate the teachers with whom I work, and myself as well? Having returned to this question many times, I am seeking to understand what this curriculum means to those teachers who have taught it.

As I have worked with the materials from the Core Knowledge Foundation, I continue to marvel at the teachers who love having the opportunity to work together. Core Knowledge has provided a time for them to sit down and share expertise and materials, in a professional way that they have not had the opportunity to do before. The first time that I led a workshop, I wondered what this experience was like for the teachers. I could see the deepness of their emotions regarding this curriculum and wanted to know more about this transformation.

I write about the tension in this curriculum, and I must write about the tension within my heart while I have worked with Core Knowledge. I have read some of the works that Hirsch has written, as well as others who are critical of Hirsch (Apple, 2001; Applebee, 1996; Grumet, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Peterson, 1995). In reading these texts, I search for an understanding of this curriculum, the experience of teachers who use it, as well as my own experience in teaching teachers to live this journey. Gadamer (1960/2000) writes about the understanding of text: “Similarly, a person who ‘understands’ a text (or even a law) has not only projected himself understandingly toward a meaning—in the effort of understanding—but the accomplished understanding constitutes a state of new intellectual freedom . . . all such understanding is ultimately self-understanding” (p. 260).

My most fulfilling experience with Core Knowledge has been my work with teachers in schools across the country. I have worked with faculties from Nevada to New York. My role is to orient teachers to the *Core Knowledge Sequence* and guide them in aligning the curriculum with what they already teach. The Core Knowledge curriculum is only supposed to be 50% of what is taught at a school, leaving time for teachers to teach local topics or their favorite units. Often, teachers are the ones who have to explore and make Core Knowledge fit with what they are doing. What is the implication of such a specific curriculum having to “fit” each school district? This process often can be difficult for teachers. One teacher, Jeanne Storm (1993) explains this process at her elementary school:

In the beginning, we formed a committee of teachers and administrators to discuss how we could integrate Core Knowledge into our curriculum. We met through the 1990 spring semester, and the following summer. Even for our young staff, change wasn't easy: many of us were already comfortable with the teacher's editions and the units we had taught in the past. But as we delved into Core Knowledge, we realized that the content proposed was the “good stuff” that we all ought to be teaching. (p. 26)

Does this mean that the “journey” of *currere*, cited from Pinar (1975), is over, or is it perhaps the call of the journey? Do teachers feel challenged by something that is uncomfortable? Is there more teaching going on when there is tension? What is it like to live in the space between being comfortable and being challenged?

Mackley (1999) describes the reaction that he received from the teachers when he introduced Core Knowledge at his school:

We did get a mixed reaction from our teachers at the initial meeting. Some teachers thought that it sounded like a great idea . . . Other teachers were intimidated and threatened by the idea and were worried about the amount of new work that might be required. Teachers who perceive their daily schedule to be fully loaded don't enthusiastically embrace a proposal that adds more to their job

description. These teachers have trouble listening because they are so busy thinking of compelling arguments against any proposed change. (p. 27)

Why is it that the teachers are characterized as being “threatened” or “intimidated”?

What is this “thingness” of curriculum that creates such resistance? How might teachers hear more what their hearts want to tell them? If teachers had more time for contemplation, would they be able to hear more openly? As this first section concludes, I only begin to reveal my heart and the question within. Beginning to explore Core Knowledge as a reform and realize the criticism of Core Knowledge opens the door to this research. In what ways do I begin to ponder these initial questions? These and other questions lead me to the heart of the phenomenon I am called to explore.

Voices in My Heart that Guide Me: Turning to the Phenomenon

Van Manen (1990) says, “In order to make a beginning, the phenomenologist must ask: What human experience do I feel called upon to make topical for my investigation?” (p. 41). I have had many rich conversations with teachers around the country regarding their work with Core Knowledge and its practice. The question I am called by is **what is the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher?** To answer that question, I also am called by phenomenology. I begin to explore this question through preliminary conversations with Core Knowledge teachers. Like van Manen, I orient myself to life by being a teacher. I want to know more about this phenomenon of being a Core Knowledge teacher and in what ways the Core might be reflected in teachers’ “core” beliefs. Before beginning to explore these conversations, I turn to one of the earliest phenomenological thinkers.

“To the Things Themselves”: The Heart, *Cor*

Husserl, the “father” of phenomenology, was one of the earliest phenomenological thinkers. Husserl recognized how lifeworld experiences were not accessible through the prevailing positivist paradigm, so he sought a way to describe those experiences more fully (Husserl 1913/1970). Moran (2000) describes Husserl’s early experiences with research: “The failure of traditional epistemology to illuminate the issues he was addressing led him to embark on a new investigation of logic and epistemology” (p. 74). By embarking on this new journey, Husserl (1913/1970) began to explore the world around him by a return “. . . to the things themselves,” (p. 252) through which phenomenology was born. Exploring the heart of a phenomenon means to look for the very essence of the phenomenon, which I am pursuing in my search for the heart or essence of being a Core Knowledge teacher. I heed Husserl’s words of advice by beginning with the things themselves. I begin at the “core” and pursue the heart metaphor to find my way to the center.

The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2003) defines “core” as “the central or innermost part, the ‘heart’ of anything” (<http://www.oed.com>). The dictionary identifies “core” with *cor*, which is Latin for “heart.” What is at the heart of this issue? Do teachers wonder about what they teach and why? Does the idea of Core Knowledge threaten the “heart” of what they know is right with instruction, or does it threaten a core that they have been afraid to change? What is this idea of “core”? What are the core issues about this content that touch people’s hearts?

From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching—questioning—theorizing is the intentional act

of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better to become the world. (van Manen, 1990, p. 5)

I was drawn to phenomenology because I was looking for a way to help teachers tell their stories of living in the world as Core Knowledge teachers. And, in pursuing their stories, I am able to attach myself to this phenomenon and tell the story of my heart, as well. I must examine myself before I can make observations about others. In addition to these wonderings (or wanderings), I knew the Core Knowledge curriculum that I wanted to study was one that I had questioned before. How could I possibly study something and not think about my role in the process? How could I not examine my feelings? I have been within this curriculum. How might teaching with the Core Knowledge curriculum be understood from within?

I am interested in getting at the essence of the phenomenon of Core Knowledge teaching in order to develop a more heartfelt pedagogy that is at the core of this Core. This is why phenomenological methodology called to me so strongly. As I remember the investment of my time and heart into the Core Knowledge curriculum already, I am mindful of the gift this exploration might provide. What a gift to explore what all of that emotion might mean! Van Manen (1990) writes, “The phenomenological reduction teaches us that complete reduction is impossible, that full or final descriptions are unattainable. But rather than therefore giving up on human science altogether, we need to pursue its project with extra vigour” (p. 18). That is what I intend to do with the help of the philosophers who laid a foundation for this phenomenological work and with the help of the teachers who have touched my heart with their stories. I begin with the words of the philosopher Husserl, and I end this piece with reference to other writers who may illuminate this phenomenon of being a Core Knowledge teacher.

Detour As Heart Work

I turn to Roderick (1991) who raises an insightful connection for me to explore with the Core Knowledge content. Roderick asks, “Might detour be perceived as context for heart work?” (pp. 104-105):

This seeking meaning, turning to oneself, peeling back the layers to reach the essence of being or the core of self could flourish in a certain sense of time and place encompassed in the notion of detour as turning away from the most direct or shortest route. As one leaves the main road to take a detour of one’s own or another’s choosing, clock time can give way to *kairos*, or the experiencing of unmeasured time, and metered space steps aside for uncharted openness. We can be, we can be experiencing, we can inhale the beauty before us without counting miles and minutes. (pp. 104-105)

Roderick’s words highlight the need to listen to the heart to find the essence of being, one’s core, or the center of self, where meaning lies. Her writing alludes to the heart. The heart is the center of the body and soul. How does Core Knowledge connect with Roderick’s idea of “heart work”?

“Heart work can become the work of students when curriculum is viewed as detour in which we create contexts that invite persons to invent and initiate in visual as well as verbal images” (Roderick, 1991, p. 105). Does the Core Knowledge content inhibit the ability of students and teachers to create in this type of context? Does Core Knowledge hold students and teachers back, or does it open a new door of possibilities? Does Core Knowledge subdue the hearts of students? “Viewing curriculum as detour can also have implications for how persons in schools journey together” (Roderick, 1991, p. 106). I connect with this idea of curriculum as detour. Will this detour lead to the heart?

Does Core Knowledge provide a new road upon which to travel? What kind of knowledge is this? Who are the leaders on this journey? How do persons in a Core Knowledge school journey together? The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2001)

discusses “know” as “to have learnt by committing to memory, more fully, to know by heart” (<http://www.oed.com>). What does it mean to know something “by heart”? What does it take to move heart learning beyond memorization? What does it mean when students or teachers have to learn something by heart that is not right with their hearts or beliefs about education and learning?

I have written about the competing tensions in this curriculum. Within the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2001), there are references to the phrase, “core curriculum,” described as “compulsory, as opposed to that which is optional” (<http://www.oed.com>). Something that is compulsory is planned or is a guideline developed for everyone else to follow. Godwin (2001) writes, “Heart acts are often improvisational detours from point-to-point plans” (p. 6). Both Godwin and Roderick discuss the merits of “detours.”

The *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary Online* defines the prefix “de-“ as having an etymology of Middle English, Old French and partly Latin (<http://www.m-w.com>). The definition of “de-“ is to “do the opposite of,” or “get off of” (<http://www.m-w.com>). The meaning of “tour” has a background in Middle English from Middle French, *tourn* or *tour*, meaning literally “to turn,” or “a journey for business or pleasure or education, often involving a series of stops ending at the starting point” (<http://www.m-w.com>). Putting these two phrases together, “de-tour” could mean to “turn from” the educational journey.

What is learned when teachers do the opposite of what is expected (the series of stops)? Do Core Knowledge teachers allow for such a turn or stop on this educational journey? When something is compulsory, might the educational journey itself stop the heart because of a failed connection with conformity? Might it be a failed attempt to fit

with the “pattern”? One of the early etymologies of “conform” is “to act in accordance with an example or pattern; to yield or show compliance” (<http://www.oed.com>). What might it feel like to be forced into a pattern of compliance? What might this type of forcing do to students and teacher? The language is not kind, and the process does not seem kind either. What might teachers do to avoid the pattern, or to go outside the lines? And yet, how might conformity reveal things “known by heart”? Who makes the decisions about what is compulsory and why do they make those decisions? Can Core Knowledge be a de-tour or only a station on the tour of a student’s educational journey?

Exploring the etymologies of these words closely related to Core Knowledge begins to reveal the deeper meaning beneath the surface. Traveling on a detour from the usual definition of a phrase might reveal the heart and the importance of “heart work”—highlighted by Roderick. Traveling on this detour may lead to a sacred place.

The American Heritage Dictionary (2001) defines “pilgrimage” as a “journey to a sacred place,” or “a long journey or search, especially one of exalted purpose” (p. 639). The word “sacred” is not one commonly used to describe curriculum. Being “sacred” attaches a meaning of spirituality. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2001) has many definitions for the word “sacred,” but one stands out: “devoted to some purpose, not to be lightly intruded upon or handled” (<http://www.oed.com>). Curriculum should not be taken lightly, because it affects the lives of children and teachers every day. Why do teachers, generally, not get to share in the curriculum making in their schools? Pinar’s conception of curriculum denotes its vital role in learning. Ultimately, those things in life that make a difference are “sacred” and take a long time to grow and develop. What

different meaning might curriculum have when described as “sacred”? What does it mean for teachers to be on a sacred journey?

“Teachers have the opportunity to practice a form of pedagogical leadership because they stand foremost and closest in a caring relationship to children. They have the major responsibility for guiding young people academically, socially and spiritually through the world of childhood to adulthood” (Sergiovanni, as cited in Henry, Huntley, McKamey & Harper, 1995, p. xi). This is an awesome responsibility, and it goes to the very heart of teaching. Sergiovanni writes about the importance of “guiding” students. Are “academic, social, and spiritual guides,” as he mentions, “tour” guides or “de-tour” guides or both? What do teachers’ innermost beliefs tell them to do for children? What is in the hearts of teachers? Godwin (2001) says, “The utterances of the heart—unlike those of the discriminating intellect—always relate to the whole. . . . What the heart hears are the great things that span our whole lives, the experiences which we do nothing to arrange but which we ourselves suffer” (p. 12). Do the “utterances of the heart” relate to those awesome relationships between teachers and students?

Some of the original definitions of the word “knowledge” relate back to “acknowledge,” which is related to the word “confession” (<http://www.oed.com>). Who needs to confess and why? What are my doubts about this content that lead me to a “confession” in this writing? What are my concerns? Does the need for confession mean that something is wrong? Does confession in this case mean a cleansing of my conscience? To answer some of these questions means to examine Core Knowledge more closely, and also means to explore the critics of Core Knowledge as well as the champions of this curriculum.

Apprehensive Hearts

There are critics of Core Knowledge who disagree with the content of the Core Knowledge curriculum and highlight some of the tensions with its use. In chapter two, I relate some of the criticism of Core Knowledge to curriculum theory. Curriculum theorists (Applebee, 1996; Grumet, 1989) write about their concerns with Core Knowledge's place in schools. However, there are other criticisms, as well.

Other scholars consider Core Knowledge elitist. The Core Knowledge content is problematic for Ladson-Billings (1994) in her book, *The Dreamkeepers*, where she writes: "Two widely read and quoted books, Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* and Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*, have led the call for a return to a Western civilization tradition that would save 'us' from the 'barbarians at the gate'" (p. 80). Ladson-Billings highlights the tension between classes in society. In their study on "Cultural Literacy in Classroom Settings: Teachers and Students Adapt the Core Knowledge Curriculum," Johnson, Janisch, and Morgan-Fleming (2001) also discuss the tension of class relations in the *Core Knowledge Sequence*. "Sledd and Sledd, for example, claim that Hirsch's ideas are steeped in middle-class rhetoric and are intended to enable those in power to pass over that power to their children" (as cited in Johnson, et al., 2001, p. 260). How do teachers struggle with these issues in the Core Knowledge curriculum? What is happening in schools, and how might it affect their students?

Arvizu and Saravia-Shore argue that Hirsch's Core Knowledge is "monocultural" and therefore harmful to a diverse society; children who do not come from a European American ethnic background or from a middle-class family may not be well served by a Core Knowledge curriculum. Is the content outlined by Hirsch irrelevant for children in a diverse society, or is it part of what schools need to teach all children? (in Johnson, et al., 2001, p. 260)

I think about these questions as I ponder in my heart other critics of Core Knowledge.

The critics mentioned thus far focus their critique on Hirsch and the Core Knowledge content. Peterson (1995), a classroom teacher, writes about Core Knowledge drawing upon his experience with the curriculum in his classroom. His account provides an interesting and thought-provoking piece to the collection of those with apprehension in their hearts. Peterson feels strongly enough to write, “I came away convinced that the project is fundamentally flawed and that, because of its wide notoriety, has the potential to negatively affect education in the United States” (p. 75). He focuses on Hirsch’s idea of a single national culture and what that might mean to students in classrooms. Peterson illustrates Hirsch’s ideas by quoting from *Cultural Literacy*: “We will be able to achieve a just and prosperous society only when our schools ensure that everyone commands enough shared background knowledge to be able to communicate effectively with everyone else” (as cited in Peterson, p. 77). Peterson asks readers to look at what Hirsch is asking children to learn, and I would agree that critics should study the *Core Knowledge Sequence* carefully for themselves. Everyone should have a voice in how curriculum shapes what students learn. Peterson concludes, “To function effectively within future society, students will need much more than what Hirsch suggests. Cultural literacy is far more fluid and complex than his approach outlines” (p. 81).

As a teacher, Peterson obviously is concerned with what students are learning, and he also is concerned with all students’ voices being heard. Can Core Knowledge allow for a symphony of voices to rise in one heartbeat? Peterson’s critique has merit because it is the voice of a teacher wondering aloud about his concerns of Core Knowledge. As a teacher and consultant with the Foundation, I find problems with his article. Many times, he refers to Hirsch’s books as ones that are used in the classroom,

when, in fact, they are not part of the curriculum. He brings forward questions that are important, particularly involving the fate of students in Core Knowledge classes. However, Peterson and other critics miss one of the fundamental pieces in understanding Core Knowledge: the voices of Core Knowledge are teachers and students. Peterson (1995) says, “Rather than adopt Hirsch’s approach, we should establish classrooms where children are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning, to become independent writers, readers, thinkers, speakers, and to take an active role in creating a more just society” (p. 85). I believe that if Peterson had conversations with Core Knowledge teachers, he would find that the majority of them are carrying out all of his requirements for a successful classroom. However, what is vital about Peterson’s story is his personal experience with the Core Knowledge curriculum.

What is at the heart of a teacher’s experience with Core Knowledge? Are not all of Peterson’s tenets for a successful classroom connected to nurturing the hearts of students? The critics of Core Knowledge that I have reviewed have been missing the voices of teachers and students. Criticism and research of the Core Knowledge curriculum needs to be grounded in what is actually occurring in Core Knowledge classrooms. Does Core Knowledge have the potential to help teachers explore the heart of what they feel is important in classrooms? Does Core Knowledge give teachers the chance to share their hearts with one another? The critiques of the Core Knowledge curriculum are vital to understanding inherent problems, but critics also need to study the heart of Core Knowledge teachers and students in these Core Knowledge classrooms.

There are many questions about Core Knowledge in addition to the ones that I carry in my heart. While it is important to understand critical sources and continue to

explore them, I also hope to generate new and different understandings as I focus on my own experience as a Core Knowledge teacher, as well as the experiences of other teachers. Teachers' stories have much to reveal about what happens in classrooms. Teachers' stories have much to tell about what they hold in their hearts. Those heart-felt stories provide a more complete portrait of how teachers and students interact in classrooms where learning happens daily. Stories about these classrooms from a teacher's perspective open up a new way to study Core Knowledge.

The Body Electric

While reading stories from teachers, I find that they often realize the awesome responsibility of imparting life-long knowledge to their students. Where do teachers place themselves in this journey of learning? Do teachers provide the "spark" that shocks students' hearts and minds and keeps them beating strongly? Koerner (1992) writes an insightful and moving essay about teachers' reflections of themselves (p. 44). She draws an analogy to Walt Whitman's volume of poetry, *Leaves of Grass*:

He describes an individual body, while I refer here to the collective body of the classroom society. Like Whitman, I too am talking about feelings of intensity, depth, and possibility. The metaphor of the body electric captures both the idea of the collective body of the students and teachers and the rapport and communication that can flow among them. (p. 47)

Koerner refers to Whitman's poem, "I Sing the Body Electric," in which he describes the intense emotions and feelings that occur when bodies collide with each other. Whitman (1855/1993) writes in the beginning of his poem:

I sing the body electric;
The armies of those I love engirth me, and I engirth them;
They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,
And discorrupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the Soul. (p. 119)

Whitman's words describe the experience of the body, and I have described the essential nature of considering the heart in the study of Core Knowledge. Teachers and students react to each other with intensity. Often, these intense emotions provide the electricity that powers teaching and learning. Without this intensity, students are less likely to commit to their hearts and minds what happens in classrooms. The body electric is a striking image to describe what happens between a Core Knowledge teacher and the classroom. What are the elements of providing this type of atmosphere in a Core Knowledge classroom? If the heart is at the center of the body electric, what must happen when it is charged with the energy of incredible teaching and learning? What can teachers accomplish in such a highly charged atmosphere? What makes the body electric?

Notably, Core Knowledge teachers who are able to establish successful relationships with students in their classrooms primarily create the body electric. Koerner (1992) explains:

There is a feeling of being caught up in the moment of being a part of a single experience that culminates in a light bulb turning on, a click sounding, a bell ringing—what some teachers describe as the “uh-huh” moment. . . The purpose of establishing these societies of developing a “sharing” feeling in the classroom is to get the “teachable” moment. (p. 47)

What is missed in classrooms that concentrate only on plan and not nurturing relationships? What can Core Knowledge provide in a classroom with respect to a plan, but also to nurture relationships? A sense of community is vitally important to the body electric because all of the parts must be acting in concert to produce such energy. Koerner (1992) reveals the experiences of Marge, a classroom teacher:

And I work very hard to make our classroom their school family, and to develop a love between them and myself and between the children, among the children. So that they have a caring for one another, so that hopefully well before the end of the year, they really care what's happened to someone else. . . . (p. 48)

Marge depicts a classroom atmosphere that truly encompasses the heart. Not only does the heart have to be present in instruction and learning, but it also has to provide a sense of caring and love to produce the body electric. In what ways are teachers' stories of caring and compassion told in research? Where are the teacher and students of the body electric in Core Knowledge?

Noddings (1992) writes about the challenge to care in schools:

Surely our responsibility to educate includes attention to matters of the spirit. . . But schools have a way of taking vitally important material—exciting material—and reducing it to mush. Discussion and open exploration must be central to spiritual education . . . We must keep our purposes clear. We study spirituality because it matters to us individually and collectively; it is a center of existential care. (p. 85)

Why are schools afraid of addressing “matters of spirit”? My feelings of care for my students encouraged me to work harder on meaningful lessons. I wanted them to learn more about themselves and how they deal with the world. Both teachers and students are motivated by care. Caring about students motivates Core Knowledge teachers to champion the curriculum and write units. One Core Knowledge teacher shares with me how Core Knowledge adds a spark to her teaching:

Right now, we are doing. . . *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, which is one of our Core Knowledge stories. . . And we are going to do *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* for our spring play, as our closing play for kindergarten. So. . .this is the first year that I have been excited about the play. This year, I am very excited, and they are very excited. . . We did some sequencing activities with the play today, and we are talking about who is the troll, and who is the billygoat. . . it is the most that I have been excited. . .

This teacher radiates the excitement of her class in working with a unit that they have discovered together. She cares for her students and she works hard to provide them with opportunities to shine in the Core Knowledge classroom.

“The structure of care, conceived in full, includes the phenomenon of selfhood. This phenomenon is clarified by interpreting the meaning of care which we defined as the totality of being of Da-sein” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 297). Heidegger highlights care as the thread that connects everyone in the world and also ultimately people to their personal meaning of being. What does the concept of care have to show me about the phenomenon of Core Knowledge experienced by teachers in schools?

Teachers and great philosophers, alike, recognize the importance of care in classrooms. In this section, listening to the voices of teachers highlights the importance of finding those sparks in classrooms that excite students. In some classrooms, Core Knowledge provides that spark. In what ways does Core Knowledge foster those caring relationships between students and teachers? The next section provides the stories of how some teachers keep that spark alive.

Teaching as a Gift from the Heart

Children see through anything, and a child will know if this is something that comes from you. . . from your heart. You set the tempo for your own classroom. Teaching has to become part of your everyday life, and if you don’t experience it, you just don’t have it. Everybody doesn’t have the knack. (Melnick, 1992, p. 89)

Every day in classrooms, teachers are entrusted with the awesome responsibility of educating students. This job is challenging, and it requires a great amount of heart and soul. Students know when teachers are teaching “from the heart.” What are some of the ways that teachers give from their hearts to students? Does Core Knowledge provide a way for teachers to give from their hearts?

One of the ways that teachers show their caring and respect for teaching is to use creativity and imagination in classrooms. Jagla (1992) writes about imagination in the classroom, and she describes teachers’ experiences with imagination:

Rebecca also sees love of subject matter as an important factor in being imaginative in teaching. James speaks of love when defining imagination: “Imagination is letting your love be translated into your classroom. Because imagination really comes from love through loving something, through loving what you do, through loving your subject matter, through loving your students, through loving your profession. So many of us are afraid to be passionate about what we teach or how we feel about it. . . Anybody can prepare a lesson plan and go in and teach a subject.” (p. 65)

The actual feelings behind teaching are important to a successful Core Knowledge classroom. Why are teacher feelings and passions not more a part of the discussion regarding curriculum? Teachers may write about how they must connect with students on a spiritual level in order to ensure success, but such connections are often not reported. If such a practice of heart connections is widespread and successful, why do we not hear more about them?

Another way that teachers successfully teach students is through an ability to apply their creative ideas to curriculum. Teachers most often are successful when they have an opportunity to be creative and spontaneous with curriculum ideas. Jagla (1992) suggests, “Perhaps ‘playing with ideas’ is at the heart of the creative process” (p. 63). When teachers have time to participate in conversations with each other about instruction and to become creative, the most interesting curricular ideas may be born.

To illustrate this point, each year, at the Core Knowledge National Conference, one day is devoted to teacher units. On this day, teachers have the opportunity to present successful and creative Core Knowledge units. Teachers bring materials from their classrooms, post them on the wall, cover the chairs, and begin a wonderful and enlightening conversation with other teachers who attend the conference. This day is always the most popular, and the workshops give teachers a welcome and long overdue opportunity to share their practice. What can the teachers who present these units and the

teachers who attend the sessions gain? In what ways are each group's hearts enriched? On this day at the conference, teachers find a place to share their success with Core Knowledge.

Teaching successfully also means encouraging the students to excel creatively. Being open to and encouraging the many talents of students nurtures the hearts of learners. Successful teachers include the arts as a method to transmit the lifeblood of knowledge to students. Conte (2001) says, "If we view learning as creativity, invention, and experimentation, however, one might venture to say that the arts have always been at the center of the learning process" (p. 78). The arts not always are included or encouraged as modes of teaching and learning. What can happen when students are encouraged to explore their artistic abilities? The arts provide an avenue for creative possibility that can be traveled by students and teachers, enriching learning and instruction. If teachers choose to explore different ways to encourage students to learn, then the hearts of everyone in classrooms can be stimulated.

The arts provide a way to appreciate the gifts of the heart. Palmer (2001) says, "When we honor a person's gifts, we honor that person's soul" (p. 139). In what ways can teaching begin to recognize the hearts and souls of teachers and students? In what ways can study of the Core Knowledge curriculum focus on the core—the heart of instruction as lived—as well as the knowledge—the plan? Perhaps reflecting on the heart will provide a more complete picture of successful teaching. In what ways do teachers express their love of teaching and students while teaching the Core Knowledge curriculum? The second section of this chapter highlights the turning to the phenomenon of being a Core Knowledge teacher. Within the job of teacher, there are many aspects of

the classroom that may add to a deeper understanding of Core Knowledge and being a Core Knowledge teacher. Opening up the expression of care, creativity, and imagination in the lives of Core Knowledge teachers provides another level of understanding. To this point, I focus generally on teaching and Core Knowledge teachers. Now, I write about my experience as an introduction to conversations yet to come with Core Knowledge teachers.

Teaching as Coming Home: Home is Where the Heart Is

Gadamer (1960/2000) says, “In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know” (p. 363). My teaching experiences are an extremely important part of my history. In order for me to begin exploring the experiences of being a Core Knowledge teacher, I also must think about my **own** experiences as a Core Knowledge teacher. Gadamer writes about the importance of history in understanding: “The general structure of understanding is concretized in historical understanding, in that concrete bonds of custom and tradition and the corresponding possibilities of one’s own future become effective in understanding itself” (p. 264). As much as I may want to think about the future of this research and the conversations I will have with teachers, I must remember that my past has “marked me” in ways that I cannot forget. I cannot step outside the tradition of Core Knowledge completely, because I have been a Core Knowledge teacher. These experiences are vital in exploring this phenomenon of being a Core Knowledge teacher more completely. Through this exploration, my pre-understandings are brought forward regarding Core Knowledge. In the third section of this chapter, I explore some of these experiences.

Ironically, my work experiences began at a law firm. While working at this firm, I began to think about teaching. I knew that practicing law was not for me, and I had spent many summers working with children at a summer camp. Although the jump from being a camp counselor to teacher is a long one, it was one that I was willing to take. What called me to be a teacher? “Home, as the old words say, is where the heart is. But where, then, is the heart?” (Morris, 1981, p. 3). I ask, in my exploration of this phenomenon, how might teachers’ hearts respond to the concept of curriculum as home or place? How do I respond?

It is a feeling that is hard to articulate, but the moment that I first stepped into a classroom, I knew I was home. It was the most comfortable and enriching experience I had ever had. I think fondly about those teaching days, and I long to enter that place again. That feeling of home leads me to work with teachers, specifically those teachers in classrooms that teach Core Knowledge. Casey (1993) writes: “. . . it remains the case that where we are—the place we occupy, however briefly—has everything to do with what and who we are (and finally, *that* we are)” (p. xiii). This especially is true of my experiences of teaching, and I have found that teachers profoundly feel connected to the classrooms where they teach. “*A building condenses a culture in one place. . . a building is more densely saturated with culture. . .*” (Casey, 1993, p. 32). This particularly is true in a school building. Teachers are connected to their classroom culture, but also those classrooms make up the tremendously dense culture of a school. How does this culture mark teachers? What is the mark that place makes on teachers’ decisions about curriculum?

I had the fortunate experience of being in a program with a fellow cohort of teachers. We had a wonderful opportunity to experience community within our program, and our professors made sure we got to know the community around the schools in which we worked. Why do teacher education programs not focus more on communities and places? What is lost when the focus is on method at the exclusion of issues of the heart? Would teachers be more prepared for the issues that confront them in classrooms if they had more opportunities to reflect and address issues of the heart? Was I more prepared in this context to go forward and teach Core Knowledge? Was my heart in a different place?

My first teaching experience was in a school and community that were familiar with Core Knowledge. The principal who hired me wanted to implement Core Knowledge, and most teachers were in agreement. What difference did it make that I was interviewing at a school where the principal actually consulted the teachers about a change in curriculum? What happens when the teachers in a school have the ability to make decisions about changes in the curriculum? I already had experience with the Core Knowledge curriculum in my internship in another school. Because of this experience, teachers began talking with me about units of study and resources. What experiences do teachers have while they work together? What is it like for teachers to work together who have never had the time to collaborate as professionals on issues of curriculum?

My early experiences with Core Knowledge were positive. As teachers in a Core Knowledge school, we would decide on units of study that we wanted to pursue and what resources we would need. Our principal gave us the opportunity to meet together and select the resources we would purchase to support units of study for the Core Knowledge curriculum. What does it mean for teachers to be trusted to buy their own resources?

What does it mean for teachers to be trusted by the principal? What is the experience like of having to struggle for such trust and autonomy with curriculum? What happens within this time of tension?

At this time in my teaching career, I found that I did not question what was being taught. It did not seem to be a question I was ready to ask. My principal provided me the freedom to work with units of study from Core Knowledge, and I often worked together with my fellow teachers to organize units and plans. I felt that Core Knowledge provided me with a specific map of what I would be teaching. I was not worried at the time about who provided this map or where it might lead my students and me. I was more preoccupied with how I would seat my students, how I would organize my classroom, or how I would get through the first year of teaching. Upon reflection, I find it intriguing that I was not as focused on curriculum, particularly the Core Knowledge curriculum, as closely as those other issues in my classroom. The curriculum seemed to be on autopilot, and I was just adding my teaching style, trying to make the content interesting and inviting to my students. I was re-assured by this autopilot of Core Knowledge, and it seemed to guide me as I struggled through the other areas of teaching. The specificity provided me with a security blanket to hold onto while I worked. But other teachers do not necessarily experience it that way, and that security blanket did not always comfort me.

These few paragraphs illustrate the emotions that accompany decisions about curriculum. I include them to highlight some of the tensions that teachers feel about curriculum decisions. What should we teach? Where should we start with Core Knowledge? How should we teach? Are we being valued as professionals?

When I was teaching fifth grade, and then as a school principal, I used to hear a statement in the teachers' lounge that infuriated me. We've all heard of four-letter words. This was a four-word statement, predictably uttered every time any of us came up with a new idea: "They'll never let us." Maybe Albert Einstein was right when he said, "Great ideas have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds"! "They'll never let us" was a wet blanket against which we fought in the struggle to maintain our enthusiasm. (Barth, 2001, p. 1)

Teachers struggle to throw off that "wet blanket" at all turns of their careers. What must that be like to struggle against authority to do what is right? How must that feel to be told by others what to teach in a classroom? I share at least one success story of throwing off the "wet blanket." This story is my own. Through this experience of meeting with my fellow teachers in 5th grade, one of my finest teaching units was born. I decided to teach poetry to the 5th graders in our school. The unit began with Core Knowledge poetry, but it grew to be something much bigger and better than I could ever have imagined.

"Reading, Writing, Reciting, Exciting Poetry"

Understanding begins, as we have already said above, when something addresses us. . . . The essence of the question is to open up possibilities and keep them open. (Gadamer, 1960/2000, p. 299)

I begin with this poetry unit because I was able to use poetry to see into the hearts of my students and their lives. This unit, which happened also to be a Core Knowledge unit, was one of my finest collaborations with my students. What do my experiences teaching the Core Knowledge curriculum teach me? What possibilities are opened by my questions? How did my poetry unit change the way I teach Core Knowledge as well as change me? I had a positive experience with this unit of study, but I still ask myself if it was the Core Knowledge unit of study, or was it using poetry to open up my students? Perhaps it was not Core Knowledge at all, but my passion for helping students to find their voice. This is where some of my doubts about Core Knowledge arise. These are the

difficult questions I continue to ask—“moving questions,” as Ellsworth (1997, p. 12) calls them. Moving questions are ones that continue to challenge and perplex educators and researchers. Ellsworth (1997) says, “I’m interested in questions that shift and change what is asked and unasked by theory and practice in curriculum and teaching. Such questions can provoke an event—rather than an answer. . .” (pp. 12-13). What do “moving” questions mean for the heart? Can moving questions move the heart into a new place?

Teachers work with wonderful units of study in Core Knowledge. My success has come with units in language arts, such as this poetry unit, and units in history. Students love to learn about ancient civilizations. Another successful unit was one that I taught about Greece in second grade, referenced earlier in this chapter. Positive experiences with Core Knowledge are found working collaboratively with teachers and students. I do not find myself writing about the positive effects of having students read these specific poems from the *Core Knowledge Sequence* in my classroom, but the positive effects of engaging my students in a poetry experience. The difficult questions that I continue to ask myself challenge me to look deep into my heart for the answers. How does having Core Knowledge in a school open up curriculum for teachers? Does it really encourage collaboration and creativity? Is Core Knowledge just another reform that constricts teachers and makes them worry about how to “fit this material in”? Or does it ease teachers’ minds to have the specificity of the *Core Knowledge Sequence*? Does Core Knowledge help teachers find their core?

Heart-felt questions and debate. To teach poetry to 5th graders was to be uplifted beyond a place I could never have imagined. I decided that I wanted to write a

poetry unit based on the Core Knowledge poetry. How do personal decisions and experiences affect how teachers teach or what decisions they will make about what to teach? Are personal experiences outside the classroom forums for “de-tours” on the journey of curriculum? Can these new units of teaching become de-tours on the journey of education? What do these new units hold for us? Barth (2001) writes:

Part of routine is, of course, about seeking comfort, security, and ease. Human nature seems to gravitate naturally that way. And to be sure, given the overwhelming demands placed on school people, it is impossible to create each activity anew. We must hold constant in some areas in order to find the time and energy to be creative in others. Yet, going on automatic pilot can have a devastating effect on the capacity of school people to be school-based reformers. For if you continue to do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got [*sic*]. (p. 22)

I was inspired to teach a new unit. In my heart, I knew that I wanted to give my students more opportunities to write and reflect, and I felt that poetry was the right avenue to pursue.

What guided me in my selection of poems and themes? In the beginning, it was the Core Knowledge curriculum. The curriculum lists poems for study in the 5th grade, and I knew that my students had not studied these poems before. Poetry was not in the texts from the earlier grades, and I knew I could use some Core Knowledge poems to teach poetic style that my students needed. For example, some of the poems we were going to experience were “O Captain, My Captain,” “I Hear America Singing,” “I, Too,” “Narcissa,” “Casey At the Bat,” “Jabberwocky,” and “Some Opposites,” to name a few. So in the beginning of my journey with this poetry unit, Core Knowledge dictated what I was supposed to teach. Did curriculum as plan keep me from exploring my students’ interests? In the beginning of this unit, I chose to use Core Knowledge poetry. However, this unit and this list **led** my students and me to a place where we were able to move

beyond the lists. This question was not far from my thoughts: As I use curriculum as plan, can it evolve into curriculum as lived choice?

Speaking from the heart: Using poetry to explore curriculum. As I sought some insight into my questions, I marveled at the success of the students. What amazed me most about this unit was the opening up of students with whom I had not had much earlier success. It was as if they were experiencing for the first time the opportunity to create something they were proud of in a safe atmosphere. I remember a conversation with a student whose mother had written poetry, and she was excited to have her son share in this experience. What might we learn about students when we give them an opportunity to express themselves? When students speak from the heart, can teachers hear them more clearly? What does curriculum, particularly the Core Knowledge curriculum, offer students? What might I learn in conversations with teachers about their successes with Core Knowledge, and how it affected their students' learning?

The school librarian and I encouraged students to read the poetry and find their own voices in the words they heard. We also encouraged them to go to the library and check out poetry books, which they did in record numbers, and share their favorite poems with the class during sharing time. It happened that poetry sharing time continued beyond the time of this poetry unit. There were just too many poems that students wanted to share, and they were composing their own poetry, as well. This experience with poetry gave the students in my class a place to hear and bring forth their own voices, as well as their classmates' voices. To my knowledge, this was the first experience many of these students had with poetry beyond reading poems in their basal textbooks, or maybe writing a poem or two during a "creative writing time." What did this curriculum

add to their experience in 5th grade that year? Would it have happened without the Core Knowledge curriculum?

The many experiences that my students wrote about and talked about are too numerous to mention here. I feel the effects of this unit long after these students left my 5th grade class; in fact, I feel it every time I go back to read one of their poems. Some of the students recorded sound poems for me on a tape, and I return to their presence when I hear their voices reading to me. One student gave me a book of poetry for Christmas and suggested I use it for the next year. One poem from the book starts, “I found a book of poems, I brought the book to school, And every time I read it, I giggle like a fool” (Lansky, 1997, p. 12).

What stories do students tell about their poems? I know that these students still write poems, and I hope they still take the time to read poems, as well. One of the ways that we encouraged the students to keep poetry books was to take the poems from the *Core Knowledge Sequence*, type them up, and put them into a journal for them to read. So, this unit, which started with Core Knowledge, continued to focus on poetry from the *Core Knowledge Sequence* and beyond throughout the unit. The students had the poems that they were “supposed” to learn, according to the 5th grade curriculum, and they built on those poems to include a repertoire of beloved verse. So, my question remains: Should I have started and remained bound by the poems that the students were supposed to learn? What initial call to poetry did Core Knowledge provide that allowed a reaching beyond?

Poems from the *Core Knowledge Sequence* elicited different responses. While writing poems about sounds, one student used this medium to write about his favorite

sport. Often, students told me that they were not allowed or able to write about the hobbies or activities that they most enjoyed. This unit gave students a chance to write about those passions. What happens when curriculum deprives students of an opportunity to be passionate about learning? Barth (2001) relates the story of an urban student's description of school; his words ring true of what is happening when schools deprive students of time truly to learn:

And then at the end of my sophomore year I just stopped going, man. I hated school anyway. I always hated it. . . And other than that, school was just. . . boring! I mean, you sit up in a hot classroom, and the teachers are mean, and they're old, you know what I mean. Once I got past kindergarten and first grade when we did all the activities and made stuff—once it became more book work. I just didn't like it. It's like this—let's say you don't know how to drive a car and I'm gonna teach you. I can say, "Well, you're gonna have to do this, you're gonna have to press down on the brake, and throw it into drive." But after awhile, I can't do too much more talking. You're gonna have to get behind the wheel and do it yourself. And I think that's how school should be. Instead of being told how to do things, you have to do it more yourself. I mean, after telling me the basics, shut up—let me do it now. (pp. 38-39)

The words of this teenager are light, but they tell a sad story of school curriculum and instruction. What did I learn about my students? What did my students learn about themselves?

The students scratch pencil against paper to write and illustrate their poems. The time would pass in a day before they could write all they wanted to talk about. The poems provided time for them to write about worries, loves, and celebrations. It also gave them time to learn about punctuation and poetic devices. It was not what others have called "wasted time." It was meaningful time. That is why it is hard for me to argue with Core Knowledge. How can I argue with giving students this opportunity to study poems and write poetry? Can students explore what is meaningful to them and still have me require certain elements from them? I told the students which poems we would be

reading, and I required that they practice elements of poetic style in their writing. The poems I chose were of different authors with varied backgrounds. There was time left in this unit for students to explore their own interest in poetry. While I provided them with an opportunity to work with a medium that they had not used, I still was prescriptive. Can Core Knowledge provide structure without depriving students of a chance to speak from the heart?

My Experiences with Core Knowledge: A Phenomenological Question

These questions about my personal experiences with Core Knowledge and the unit that I wrote provide an opportunity for me to explore my personal feelings about Core Knowledge. My experience with the Core Knowledge curriculum has provided a vital background for my phenomenological research. These experiences with Core Knowledge and the questions I have described have made an imprint on my heart that I carry with me as I begin conversations with other Core Knowledge teachers. Both Heidegger and Gadamer write about the importance of having a historical understanding of ideas. Heidegger (1953/1996) writes about the pre-understanding that humans bring to every encounter in life: “Furthermore, every interpretation operates within the fore-structure which we characterized. Every interpretation which is to contribute some understanding must already have understood what is to be interpreted” (p. 142). Heidegger describes here a circle of understanding where I must be exposed to Core Knowledge and have wrestled with what my place and impact is within this curriculum. I cannot continue to study Core Knowledge without acknowledging and struggling with my “for-structure” or pre-understandings about this curriculum.

Gadamer (1960/2000) also writes about pre-understandings and discusses his interpretations of Heidegger in this regard: “The general structure of understanding is concretized in historical understanding, in that the concrete bonds of custom and tradition and the corresponding possibilities of one’s own future become effective in understanding itself” (p. 264). Gadamer writes about the importance of understanding the past and being able to understand how past experiences may be meaningful in future experiences. “This task of working through understanding has important consequences” because Gadamer (1960/2000) writes: “Thus, it is true in every case that a person who understands, understands himself. . . projecting himself upon his possibilities” (p. 260). Therefore, self-understanding and understanding of the Core Knowledge curriculum is not only important, but also essential to this research. My pre-understandings of Core Knowledge include the questions I ask myself during my work with the Core Knowledge curriculum that are addressed in the previous sections. I want to explore how Core Knowledge might have the potential to help teachers find their true hearts in the classroom—their “core.” What are teachers’ true experiences when dealing with the Core Knowledge curriculum, and what might I learn about the authenticity of this particular curriculum? Misconceptions about Core Knowledge circulate, however; I have seen Core Knowledge give a freedom to teachers that they have previously not had. I search for the answers to these questions, as I bring my experiences with Core Knowledge forward that have marked me. This section has provided stories of some of my personal experiences with Core Knowledge and how these experiences have provided me with a pre-understanding of Core Knowledge. Teaching is in my soul, and my soul marks me in this research.

Phenomenologists and philosophers are essential to consult while I re-visit my question: **what is the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher?** To answer that question, I continue to re-visit my experiences with Core Knowledge and begin to consult the works of philosophers who will aid my search. As much as I might ponder over my past experiences with Core Knowledge, there is something within my experiences that have marked me, and I cannot step outside my experiences completely. I continue to rely on them as a valuable part of this journey. The phenomenological philosophers will lead the heart work.

Phenomenology as Method: The Heartbeat of This Work

They say “seeing is believing,”
But it is not. Seeing is much more,
The horizon, the figure, the ground, they all mean
Something different.
Where do I see? What do I believe?
How do I perceive the things I see? These things I think?
“To think being,” Heidegger says. . . “requires in each instance a leap,
a leap into the groundless from the habitual ground upon which for us beings
always rest” (in Levin, 1999, p. 174).
Time to think, time to see, time to wonder about what is in the horizon,
How does the heart see?
Seeing with the heart,
Deeply, Strongly, With Open Mind,
Questioning, Pondering, Feeling,
The Heart in the Seeing,
Phenomenology.
(Grove, 2001)

As I read phenomenological philosophers, I become attuned to the thoughts of each one. The piece I wrote above provides a steady pulse of thoughts that continue to flow through my mind. Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences, and I use phenomenology to explore the Core Knowledge curriculum and to explore myself, as well. Van Manen (1990) suggests that “From a phenomenological point of view, to do

research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p. 5). By practicing phenomenology, I search for a deeper meaning of my teaching experience with Core Knowledge and the experiences of other Core Knowledge teachers. By exploring these experiences, perhaps I can understand more deeply the teaching experience. Van Manen brings together hermeneutics and semiotics to illustrate how philosophers provide the body of work, the veins and arteries that pump the lifeblood into this research.

Moran (2000) writes: “Explanations are not to be imposed before the phenomena have been understood from within” (p. 5), so I turn within as well as to other teachers to understand the lived experience of teaching Core Knowledge. I rely on the works of philosophers for background and guidance, such as Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, van Manen, Casey and Moran. How will Core Knowledge reveal my heart and my life, as well as the hearts and lives of other teachers?

Gadamer (1960/2000) writes: “To think historically always involves mediating between those ideas and one’s own thinking. To try to escape from one’s own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible but manifestly absurd. To interpret means precisely to bring one’s own preconceptions into play so that the text’s meaning can really be made to speak to us” (p. 397). Gadamer, like Moran, emphasizes the importance of bringing my experience to the task of interpreting the experiences of teachers. This interpretation is vital and shows another dimension of what I am experiencing. “What is true of understanding is just as true of language. Neither is to be grasped simply as a fact that can be empirically investigated. Neither is ever simply an object but instead comprehends

everything that can ever be an object” (Gadamer, 1960/2000, p. 404). One of the vital parts of this process is questioning and conversation involved in phenomenology.

A Steady Beat: The Pulse of a Question and an Answer

Gadamer provides a unique foundation for thinking about dialogue and conversation with teachers regarding their experiences with Core Knowledge. Conversation is vital to this research, and will provide the textual foundation for thematizing and working more deeply with this phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) uses the concept of care to describe phenomenological research. “In doing research we question the world’s very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which bring the world as work into being for us and in us. Then research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being. To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love” (p. 5). To do research in this caring way necessitates a different way of being with the participants in the process.

Gadamer (1960/2000) stresses the importance of questions in phenomenology: “We cannot have experiences without asking questions” (p. 362). Questioning and language provide a way for me to get “behind” the experiences of Core Knowledge teachers. The steady pulse of a question and an answer or the quiet exchange of conversation is the lifeblood of this research.

Foundations of this Method: Van Manen

Gadamer’s writings about the care and importance of question and dialogue provide a foundation for van Manen’s (1990) methodological framework that serves to guide my study:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;

2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. Balancing the research context by considering the parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

Van Manen writes, “A phenomenological description is always one interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially richer or deeper description” (p. 31). Gadamer and van Manen provide some of the preliminary philosophic background for this methodology of phenomenology and what it entails. I explore these philosophers and others more deeply in chapter three. The question I am called by in this research is **what is the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher?** I use the six components provided by van Manen to explore this question more fully, as I travel each of these arteries to arrive at the heart of this question.

To Go Deeper Inside the Body. . .

While chapter one has provided a foundation for the background of Core Knowledge and my questioning in this study, my search must be deepened. Chapter two explores the body of work about Core Knowledge, and presents a picture of this curriculum. I focus on the spaces that encourage learning, the stories of teachers and curriculum, and how teachers may seek to articulate their stories. I seek to bring forward the notion of Core Knowledge and the questions about curriculum more clearly. Chapter three explains the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology in more detail, exploring the philosophers that provide the foundation for phenomenology. I provide the background for my use of the philosophers’ work in my study of the lived experience of Core Knowledge teachers, as well as my plan for engaging them in the process. In

chapter four and other chapters, I will delve into the heart of Core Knowledge teachers, closely listening to what they have to say in conversations and developing themes for further study as the phenomenon is uncovered. In the final chapter, I use insights that I have gleaned from Core Knowledge teachers to explore the implications of the Core Knowledge curriculum. I will suggest recommendations for the way in which Core Knowledge might be realized to make teaching better for those who work with this approach, as well as new insights that it might mean for curriculum in general.

This chapter is only the beginning, and there are many more parts to this body of research. There are many questions to ask and many places to explore. Although, I will remember to let the questions be the guide.

. . . to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the *questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. (Rilke, 1934/1993, pp. 36-37)

CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORING THE HEART OF BEING A CORE KNOWLEDGE TEACHER

Heart Spaces: The Waiting Room for Core Knowledge Stories

The heart, at the center of the body, receives and pumps blood to sustain human life, and a Core Knowledge teacher also performs an essential function as the sustainer of the Core Knowledge curriculum in a classroom. As critical partners in education, Core Knowledge teachers are at the heart of Core Knowledge as a curriculum reform. If Core Knowledge teachers are at the center of classrooms, the heart, then in what ways may this reform affect them? Chopra (1998) writes:

The human heart exists not only in the middle of our chests, but also in the center of our consciousness. It is the focal point of the human circulatory system, and it is the true seat of the soul. . . . But despite all this, in contemporary society, the human heart is often stripped of its poetry. . . . like any other piece of machinery—like any other pump. (p. 3)

Similar to Chopra’s description of the human heart, Core Knowledge teachers exist centrally in classrooms and schools that implement Core Knowledge, yet they may not receive credit for being the glue that may hold this curriculum together in a school. They also may be “stripped of their poetry” and regarded only as givers of facts—transmitters of knowledge. Critics of Core Knowledge may categorize these teachers as ones that have students only memorize a long list of Core Knowledge topics instead of professionals who write and craft Core Knowledge units. Teachers are also seats of the soul, and they struggle to maintain soul and spirit in Core Knowledge classrooms.

In what ways does Core Knowledge reveal the souls of teachers? What is in the hearts of teachers that helps sustain them in their profession? In this chapter, I first explore the spaces in the heart and in classrooms that encourage learning and conversation. In what ways does Core Knowledge fit into this space? Then, I explore

teachers' stories about their profession in order to open up their rich descriptions of what it means to be a teacher. These descriptions provide insight into the job of teaching and how this job is closely connected to curriculum choices and other facets of education. Teaching is more than just transmitting knowledge. It is vital to hear stories from Core Knowledge teachers and begin to ponder the importance of the addition of these conversations to the literature about Core Knowledge.

In the second section, I concentrate more closely on a description of curriculum, school reform, and specifically, Core Knowledge. Where does Core Knowledge fit in the puzzle of curriculum reform? A discussion of the place of Core Knowledge in the world of school reform reveals a debate about this curriculum. What does curriculum theory reveal about the contested nature of the Core Knowledge curriculum? What is the difference between how theorists characterize Core Knowledge and what teachers practice? In what ways do teachers work in this space between theory and practice? The emotional and often tense world of school reform reveals a side of education that often provides challenges for Core Knowledge teachers.

The final section explores the role of language and writing in the lives of Core Knowledge teachers, and how they make sense of their jobs within the context of Core Knowledge and school reform. In what ways can Core Knowledge teachers open their hearts? The third section delves into more detail, through writing, the importance of narratives from the classroom. Writing and sharing these stories about Core Knowledge may provide a welcome opportunity to explore it more completely.

The voices of Core Knowledge teachers in classrooms are brought forward through stories and the spaces in which they dwell with this curriculum. Hearing and

sharing these stories provides a more complete picture of Core Knowledge. In what ways can Core Knowledge teachers find safe spaces to encourage growing of spirit, soul, and heart? To understand the concept of place and how it is vital in Core Knowledge conversations, it is necessary to explore different aspects of education, including teaching, curriculum, and the relationships between them.

A Core Knowledge teacher plays a central role in the implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum in a school. In the process of planning for the school year or even a school day, a Core Knowledge teacher will likely be familiar with state and local curriculum requirements, as well as the requirements of Core Knowledge for that grade level. These requirements must be included in the classroom, according to what the state mandates for testing. What space can Core Knowledge teachers create to include Core Knowledge in an already crowded day? Core Knowledge teachers have the job of making information meaningful and important to students, so that students may appreciate how education can sustain them throughout their lives. As the heart of the classroom, Core Knowledge teachers may deal with a myriad of questions about Core Knowledge. The constant battle to “fit it all in” can be overwhelming, so teachers need ways to work with Core Knowledge and sustain their hearts, as well.

There is a similar process in the human body. The heart also has multiple functions. The heart must take in oxygen depleted blood and redirect it when it is ready to replenish and nourish the body. There is a word for the heart spaces that hold blood that needs to be nourished with oxygen or needs to be routed to the body when it has received oxygen. These spaces in the heart are called atria from the original Latin word *atrium*, meaning chamber (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2003). These are the actual

“receiving spaces” in the heart (Chopra, 1998, p.17). There are two atria within the heart, and both are waiting rooms. One atrium provides a waiting room for blood before it travels to the lungs to be filled with oxygen. The second atrium holds the newly oxygenated blood before it passes through one of the two ventricles, the aorta, and out to the body. I compare Core Knowledge stories yet to emerge from the hearts of teachers to these first, weary blood cells, waiting for their chance to regain new life. In what ways will stories about Core Knowledge be told and energize other Core Knowledge teachers? In what ways are teachers given this type of space to think about their life-giving process of teaching and to rejuvenate their tired spirits? What might be learned about Core Knowledge that needs rejuvenation itself? Does Core Knowledge have a potential to give teachers clues about what is waiting in their hearts to be told? Can teachers find the language to describe their experiences in these heart spaces? In the heart, these waiting rooms provide much needed rest and organization for the process of re-oxygenating the blood. I propose that teachers need these spaces, as well. These heart spaces are where the true emotions and stories reside—the life-giving motivation that continues to keep teachers in classrooms, despite the numerous daily challenges. These heart spaces hold the key to more understanding of Core Knowledge.

Finding Learning Spaces

Space to experience emotion is vital for a healthy heart, and space to learn is essential in successful Core Knowledge classrooms. Palmer (1993) recognizes the importance of space while struggling to define teaching: “How can we translate the theory of personal truth into a practical pedagogy? . . . to teach is to create space in which obedience to truth is practiced” (p. 69). Palmer recognizes that spaces for learning need to

be acknowledged in classrooms, and he searches for ways to help teachers find the spaces that can encourage spirit and truth, not only for themselves, but also for students. Palmer (1993) defines this type of space as needing three essential components: “. . . openness, boundaries, and an air of hospitality” (p. 71). I explore his three components of space while writing about Core Knowledge schools.

Philosophers (Casey, 1993; Heidegger, 1953/1993; Palmer, 1993) write about the relationship between space and place and realize the profound importance of openness and boundaries in everyday life. Palmer (1993) writes:

Space may sound like a vague, poetic metaphor until we realize that it describes experiences of everyday life. We know what it means to be in a green and open field; we know what it means to be on a crowded rush-hour bus. On the crowded bus we lack space to breathe and think and be ourselves. But in an open field, we open up too; ideas and feelings arise within us; knowledge comes out of hiding. (p. 70)

The physical, open spaces in hearts that allow for nourishment of the rest of the body are related to these classrooms spaces—knowledge, emotion, and passion are connected to successful classroom spaces. Core Knowledge classrooms provide the physical, open spaces for learning, but there also are necessary mental and heart spaces needed for Core Knowledge teachers to connect with the concept of curriculum and successfully implement Core Knowledge.

I had some preliminary conversations with Core Knowledge teachers to begin to open up this phenomenon of place. Chloe shares: “Because at Smithfield, when I went in, it was well, well-established. And it was just a norm. And that everyone was a Core Knowledge teacher and it was in place. You know. . . everything was in place. . . the books, the school-wide commitment, the yearlong plan. Everything was there.” Chloe’s quote indicates the importance of spaces in teaching, and teachers can feel tremendous

emotions attached to these physical spaces. Chloe speaks about the books and the yearlong plans as pieces of a puzzle that she had to reconcile in her mind to see the entire picture of Core Knowledge. Classrooms are places that are important because of the sense of security they provide. For Chloe, part of her safety and the peace in her heart are connected to the actual physical arrangement of Core Knowledge and how she will prepare for being in this space with her students. Chloe's worries relate to Palmer's (1993) connection to openness: "To create space is to remove the impediments to learning that we find around us, to set aside the barriers behind which we hide so that truth cannot seek us out" (p. 71).

For Chloe, the impediment to learning or accepting Core Knowledge might be due to not having a yearlong plan in place. The politics of school systems may place obstacles in the way of creating a comfortable space in her Core Knowledge classroom, such as having written lesson plans that adhere to a certain format, meeting requirements for teacher evaluations, or worrying about passing state test mandates. In what ways can teachers maneuver around these obstacles to seek out heart spaces? Is Core Knowledge instrumental in providing opportunities for openness, or does Core Knowledge close off heart spaces? Openness is one of the necessary components for creating heart spaces. The idea of openness brings forward thoughts of open spaces, limitless in possibility. Palmer (1993) writes:

But to study with a teacher who not only speaks but listens, who not only gives answers but asks questions and welcomes our insights, who provides information and theories that do not close doors but open new ones, who encourages students to help each other learn—to study with such a teacher is to know the power of a learning space. (p. 71)

However, these spaces are often hard to locate in education, and alone they are not enough.

Palmer (1993) illustrates that it is not only important to realize openness, but also it is vital to remember that openness has boundaries. These boundaries provide control: “A learning space cannot go on forever; if it did, it would not be a structure for learning, but an invitation to confusion and chaos” (p. 72). Core Knowledge teachers recognize the ability to provide boundaries within the curriculum.

Teachers with whom I have visited about Core Knowledge speak of the order of the curriculum in a positive way. The order and the sequence make teachers feel at home with the amount of material and how it is “laid out” from grade level to grade level. One teacher shares: “I think it totally makes sense to lay it out in sequential order. . . it’s so much more than what they would be getting through the books. You know, for the district.” The boundaries in Core Knowledge seem to offer a sense of comfort. One teacher shares with me that she is happy that she can write units and really work with her grade level on Core Knowledge, and also be aware of what other grade level teachers are going to teach. It gives a sense of when to start and stop.

A group of Core Knowledge fifth grade teachers tried a new way of teaching the Renaissance to their students, and their experience provides an example of setting boundaries within Core Knowledge. I describe this unit in greater detail later in this chapter; however, Chloe, a Core Knowledge teacher, shares: “We felt really exhilarated. It was a way of teaching that, for me anyway, was a departure from the norm—more creative, more student-driven, more ‘artsy,’ but very Renaissance-ish feeling. The climate in the room when we were working on our books was SO positive and charged with

excitement and personal growth—the kids loved this book and this project” (personal communication, 2002). Chloe and her colleagues encourage curiosity, but also have a sense of being within a safe space. Core Knowledge teachers may encourage openness and a spirit of exploring the unknown, while still realizing boundaries. Chloe continues: “It just kept getting better and better, and we could have gone on, but it was just before Christmas so we wanted to finish. Many kids gave their books as gifts to family members” (personal communication, 2002). While this unit charged this classroom with an energy and spirit of creativity, the teachers and students realize the boundaries of the unit to avoid chaos and confusion within their studies. Avoiding feelings of anxiety are ways to stay within boundaries and encourage openness. And yet, Heidegger explains that anxiety may also have positive aspects.

Heidegger (1953/1996) links feelings of anxiety to exploring the state of Being more deeply when he refers to feelings of *Angst*:

It is true that it is the nature of every kind of attunement to disclose complete being-in-the-world in all its constitutive factors (world, being-in-self). However, in *Angst* there lies the possibility of distinctive disclosure, since *Angst* individualizes. This individualizing fetches Da-sein back from its falling prey and reveals it to authenticity and inauthenticity as possibilities of being. (p. 178)

Feelings of *Angst* force human beings to take a close look at their hearts and reflect upon how they react to anxiety. Situations of fear or anxiety may return one to a state of authentic Being—exploring the states of authenticity and inauthenticity. In what ways do Core Knowledge teachers react to the possible discomfort of having Core Knowledge introduced in their classrooms? In Chloe’s case, she chose to write units of study to enhance the Core Knowledge curriculum. In what different ways might other Core Knowledge teachers respond to this anxiety? Palmer’s writing suggests that creating

boundaries may alleviate this fear; however, what can be learned in this place between comfort and anxiety?

A third aspect of creating a learning space explores implementing Core Knowledge as an emotional experience. A learning space must be filled with a sense of hospitality, and I equate this sense of hospitality with a sense of care and respect. Palmer (1993) writes:

A learning space needs to be hospitable not to make learning painless but to make the painful things possible, things without which no learning can occur—things like exposing ignorance, testing tentative hypotheses, challenging false or partial information and mutual criticism of thought. (p. 74)

Core Knowledge classrooms are places that encourage questioning and the spirit of learning, and this spirit of learning must be as important for the teacher as it is for the students, encouraging the sharing of stories. Core Knowledge teachers explain to me that they enjoy re-discovering units of study from earlier school days. Stories about Greek or Roman mythology or other Core Knowledge units encourage them to awaken their curiosity. In turn, teachers communicate this feeling of curiosity to their students. Palmer's (1993) idea of hospitality is important to the attitude in classrooms and the openness of space and heart that encourage classrooms to be learning spaces.

Core Knowledge units enhance the spirit of learning in classrooms, and also encourage the growing of an inner spirit of students. The word "spirit," is related to the Latin word *spiritus*, and means "the breath of life" (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2003). The "breath of life" brings forward the importance of including matters of spirit in curriculum. In what ways might students be enriched by finding the breath of life in their studies and in school? In other definitions, "spirit" relates directly to the soul. Kessler (2001) writes:

Honoring the soul in education means attending to the spiritual development of students. The body will not grow if it is not fed; the mind will not flourish unless it is stimulated and guided. And the spirit of the child will suffer if it is not nurtured. A soulful education embraces the many and diverse ways we can satisfy the spiritual hunger of today's youth. (p. 108)

Creating a learning space for Core Knowledge students encourages the spirit of students to grow in an atmosphere that challenges them academically. While describing the Renaissance unit, and its tremendous success, Chloe shares: "It was, at first, very spur-of-the-moment and spirit-guided. . . we weren't sure if we were onto something or not. . . but the more we did it, the more the kids loved it" (personal communication, 2002). Chloe speaks to the importance of being guided by spirit. Using a Core Knowledge unit, Chloe and her fellow teachers let themselves be guided by spirit in their pedagogy.

As Core Knowledge classrooms become learning spaces that Palmer describes, it is important to view these classrooms as vital "dwelling places," as well (Casey, 1993, p. 175). "We then come to appreciate more fully what Bachelard calls the 'intimate immensity' of dwelling places, their capacity to move us even in their most minute details" (Casey, p. 175). This "intimate immensity" in dwelling places encourages a spirit of teaching and learning that will promote greater emphasis on stories and conversation about the Core Knowledge curriculum. These types of places encourage a bodily lived sense of knowing. Core Knowledge teachers recall experiences of turning classrooms into places where students can explore Core Knowledge units of study. I have visited classrooms that have been transformed into a rainforest or an Egyptian pyramid. The students in these classrooms feel the care and contemplation that their teachers have given their shared space.

Palmer (1993) writes: “Only in hospitable classrooms, where questions and answers do not need to be couched within the ground rules of a competitive game, can we come into troth with each other and encounter truth’s transformations” (p. 75). These learning spaces of caring and concern found in Core Knowledge classrooms are the places that will encourage stories about the deeper meaning of this curriculum.

Casey (1993) writes:

We get back into place—dwelling place—by the cultivation of built places. Such cultivation *localizes caring*. What is for Heidegger a global feature of existent human being—namely, “care” (*Sorge*)—is here given a local habitation and not just a name. We care about places as well as people, so much so that we can say that *caring belongs to places*. (p. 175)

To view school buildings as places of caring is to view them in the way that nurtures and cultivates children, and it is also to view them in a way that extends hospitality and encourages self-growth. Viewing classrooms as learning spaces centers the importance on teachers and students. By providing rich units of study and an opportunity to delve more deeply into interesting topics, the Core Knowledge curriculum encourages teachers to create these dynamic learning spaces in their classrooms. These spaces are alive with the electricity of students learning about Core Knowledge topics, as Core Knowledge teachers bring these units alive in their classrooms.

Heidegger (1953/1993) also explores the characteristics of a place of caring. He writes: “The old word *bauen*, which says that man *is* insofar as he *dwells*, this word *bauen* however *also* means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine” (p. 349). Heidegger’s words are profound, especially when connecting them to the idea of creating a learning environment in a Core Knowledge classroom. The Core Knowledge classroom becomes a place where

teachers care for students, and the place where they “dwell” together. In this dwelling place care and hospitality become central to promoting teaching and learning. A Core Knowledge classroom becomes a place where teachers gently till this soil of young minds and plant the seeds of knowledge, in the form of interesting units of study. As the heart of the classroom, teachers knowingly and intimately work with Core Knowledge in a way that allows students to make meaning and allows for the curriculum to be meaningful to the teacher. What could be more important in the life of “cultivating” a child’s learning than realizing the importance of a child’s place in the Core Knowledge curriculum?

Heidegger (1953/1993) continues to stress the importance of dwelling: “The nature of building is letting dwell” (p. 361); “Dwelling, however, is the basic character of Being in keeping with which mortals exist” (p. 362). Dwelling is a connection to place and to self. This idea of dwelling connects with the importance of **where** we dwell. Barth (2001) also highlights the importance of schools as places of joy:

I believe that schools can become much more than places where there are big people who are *learned* and little people who are *learners*. They can become cultures where youngsters are discovering the joy, the difficulty, and the excitement of learning and where adults are continually *rediscovering* the joy, the difficulty, and the excitement of learning. Places where we are all in it together—learning by heart. (p. 29)

The connection between dwelling places for teachers and students and the importance of space may provide a yet undiscovered link in curriculum and schools. While teaching Core Knowledge units, teachers do re-discover the joy of learning, and they share it with their students, making successful Core Knowledge classrooms places of profound care for sharing of knowledge. Core Knowledge provides a way for teachers to energize students and bring their classrooms alive with learning by teaching students concepts with which they are not familiar and are eager to learn more about.

Casey's and Heidegger's notions of dwelling places and care characterize Core Knowledge classrooms because these teachers are dedicated as guides and fellow students in the Core Knowledge curriculum. Classroom space relates to heart space. Core Knowledge teachers hold stories and insights within their hearts, and these stories are critical to bring forward greater understanding about how Core Knowledge and curriculum reform affect the hearts of teachers and students. Through exploring the ideas of space and place through Palmer, Casey, and Heidegger, I search for connections between Core Knowledge conversations and a safe place in which to experience them.

Searching for Stories of Learning Spaces

Teachers tell stories because they want to open up and share heart-felt emotions that illustrate the complex job of teaching. Teachers' stories may be hard to find, and these stories differ from general descriptions of classroom activities. Core Knowledge teachers may recount descriptions of units, but some still struggle with the sharing of genuine experiences, concerns, and questions about Core Knowledge. In addition to describing the learning environment, stories from the hearts of Core Knowledge teachers probe for the elusive questions and answers about this curriculum.

One of the most interesting aspects of my job with the Core Knowledge Foundation has been the opportunity to work with teachers across the country on Core Knowledge units of study and to provide time to begin having conversations about this curriculum. Through this work with teachers, I have discovered an opportunity for educators to share what they have observed in classrooms and reflect on those experiences together. This reflective time has not been a time that teachers are encouraged to experience and explore very often. Teachers with whom I work often are

surprised when I provide time for sharing and writing about what they have experienced in Core Knowledge classrooms. One of the activities that I have provided in the past calls for teachers to move around the room to various pieces of paper. On those pieces of paper is a word to which I want them to respond—such as “Core Knowledge,” “curriculum,” or “your favorite teaching topic.” I begin with this activity to open up a conversation about what is being taught in this school and why. Even this simple reflection can cause discomfort for teachers. In what ways might I be closing their hearts as I attempt to open them? What opportunities can I provide in Core Knowledge workshops for teachers to tell heart stories, and how can school districts provide more time for these stories as well? Core Knowledge stories from the heart are hidden deep down in the recesses of the soul and they may be difficult to bring forward.

Even in more intimate environments, searching for meaningful conversation about Core Knowledge may be challenging. In my work with Core Knowledge, I have visited several small school districts, where teachers often have worked together in small, caring environments for extended periods of their lives. They know each other, and most of them went to the same school together, the schools in which they now work. Traveling through life together, they intimately are connected with each other’s life details, but I notice when I appear to talk about Core Knowledge, they may not even know what is going on in the next room. Why can’t these teachers apply the same reflection and genuine conversation about Core Knowledge? I have met with teachers who seem concerned about sharing stories of what and how they teach. This topic of conversation is “private,” and teachers seem guarded about their lesson plans. Within this secluded world of curriculum and the classroom, there must be stories about Core Knowledge that can

break through the shell of “privacy” in curriculum. Telling these stories provides a way for Core Knowledge teachers to connect to one another and begin to converse deeply about teaching.

Intrator (2002) writes about isolation in classrooms: “There’s an irony to teaching: we ply our craft in densely crowded rooms, but teaching can be psychologically lonely for teachers” (pp. xlvi-xlvii). Intrator reports a teacher’s poignant words from Alaska:

Other teachers rarely come into my classroom, and I don’t have time to go to theirs. We’re too busy. In other jobs, people see what you do, and they understand. But in teaching, you can have everybody do really well on a test [and] nobody knows about it. . . It’s a very lonely profession. You’re in there every day doing it and having a wonderful, time, but [there’s] not much recognition. (p. xlvii)

In what ways can Core Knowledge open up classrooms and help these teachers find a way to share conversations about curriculum? There is much to learn from teachers, and it is critical that they find a place to share insights, as it helps them find strength.

Teachers’ stories also provide inspiration and hope to other teachers. In my work with Core Knowledge, the most successful inservices occur when teachers take the time to have true conversations about what they teach in the tradition of Gadamer’s sense of conversation.

Conversations about Core Knowledge and insights into Core Knowledge differ from reporting of classroom activities. Storm (1993) shares one example of a successful experience with Core Knowledge, and she recounts the process she went through to become acquainted with its components:

The teachers on my team had chosen to teach Core Knowledge from a whole-language approach (Core Knowledge gives teachers the freedom to make pedagogical choices). Our study began with the balance of nature in science,

comparing how the Native Americans respected their land with how it is treated today. Using the content specified for 3rd grade, we discussed such terms as *ecologists, fossil fuels, acid rain, greenhouse effect* and *ozone layer*. (p. 26)

Storm's description is compelling because she begins her discussion of this Core Knowledge unit with recognition of her grade level team and their work together on unit material. She indicates that her group of teachers is a "team," and they made a "choice" about a curriculum decision. Storm considers her team a successful example of one that implemented Core Knowledge, and she concludes her article with this testament:

The Core Knowledge curriculum has convinced me that teaching meaningful content is far more rewarding than teaching vague skills and ambiguous units. As E.D. Hirsch, Jr. has said: children from every ethnic and economic background should have access to a shared core of knowledge that is necessary to reading, understanding, and communication. (p. 27)

While I find Storm's article to be positive and an example of one teacher's experience with Core Knowledge, I have more questions. Storm felt moved to mention her work with her grade level, and I feel a sense of respect for her fellow teachers and the work they provided on this successful unit. The third grade teachers had time and space to work together, and they obviously worked diligently on this unit. However, that fact seems secondary, and I want to probe more deeply into this part of the story. Storm credits the Core Knowledge content with much of the success. Did these teachers recognize the importance of time to share and reflect? Did they critically address the components of race and class? What will I find when I visit with Core Knowledge teachers about their experiences with this curriculum? Although Storm's account is helpful, I find myself searching for the story behind this account of Core Knowledge. I want to hear about the deeper lived meanings regarding the implementation of Core Knowledge to expose the yet unnamed understandings behind the use of this curriculum.

McKamey (1995) describes the experience of trying to tell stories from the classroom:

You couldn't really understand my classroom unless you were there: engrossed in a lesson or activity, knew the kids, and understood the context of school within their lives. I could give you the nonliving artifacts of my classroom: lesson plans, seating charts, and grade book. . . You might then have an idea about what kind of classroom I have. It isn't the same as being there. . . By not being there, you miss out on the best part of teaching—the human interactions. When I call my parents, siblings, or friends from college, I tell them stories about my classroom. . . Stories are the next best thing to being there. (Henry, et al., pp. 4-5)

In what ways can conversation from the heart with teachers about Core Knowledge provide the context of the curriculum within their lives? Stories of reflection about Core Knowledge show the inner depths of this reform and how it truly affects teachers and students. To continue the implementation of Core Knowledge without these stories misses the heart of the experience. To continue research of Core Knowledge without this aspect of conversation and search for meaning misses a vital opportunity for interpretation of this curriculum.

. . . because conventional education neglects the inner reality of teachers and students for the sake of a reality “out there,” the heart of the knowing self is never held up for inspection, never given a chance to be known. . . For the sake of objectivity, our inner realities are factored out of the knowledge equation. (Palmer, 1993, p. 35)

Palmer writes about the importance of the “knowing self,” and how that aspect of self often is overlooked in classrooms because of the emphasis on objectivity. Remaining objective means that the knowing self may remain hidden deep in the heart of Core Knowledge teachers and students, never to emerge in a classroom that should be preparing students for the world's reality. Returning to *cor*, or the heart, means that Core Knowledge teachers may find an opportunity to share their knowing selves and help students find their way on the journey of finding their inner selves. Palmer (1998) writes:

“The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts, meaning *heart* in the ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit will converge in the human self” (p. 11). Successful Core Knowledge teachers have the ability to bring forward the best parts of themselves to make Core Knowledge meaningful.

Carlsson-Paige (2001) writes: “Even under the weight of conflicting political and cultural forces, many teachers are finding ways to teach that draw in and nurture every dimension of humanity that children bring to school” (p. 38). Teachers find ways to bring students into the curriculum that they teach by making it a journey into the soul of learning. Teachers know that they have to be ready to travel on that journey themselves by opening up their hearts and searching for meaning. These powerful words remind educators that it is vital to remember how teaching affects students and teachers, as well as what is taught. Teachers must focus on the spiritual aspects of learning, as well as the factual knowledge that students should learn. Core Knowledge teachers provide an opportunity to explore challenging content while nurturing spirit. In what ways do Core Knowledge teachers accomplish this? In what ways do they keep the spirit of students in the forefront of their work? In what ways might the spirit of the students be forfeited to the content of the curriculum? What implications does this have for the Core Knowledge curriculum? Exploring curriculum and Core Knowledge’s place in the world of curriculum begin to provide background to these questions.

Curriculum and Teachers: Finding Strength to Tell the Story

A Core Knowledge teacher in a classroom represents the heart of that classroom, interpreting information, providing space for teaching and learning, and dwelling with

students in that space and with curriculum. When meaningful and enriching, curriculum provides an opportunity for teachers and students to thrive together and grow. However, if difficult or full of doubt, curriculum may cause pain and heartache. When teachers enjoy working with Core Knowledge, their enthusiasm revives new life from otherwise boring classrooms. However, when Core Knowledge teachers feel stressed under the demands of this new curriculum, Core Knowledge may falter in that school. Teachers must work with curriculum, as it is a part of school culture, but how teachers approach curriculum, whether it is through personal interpretation or otherwise, provides a foundation for exploring Core Knowledge.

Grumet (1989) states: “Curriculum is both a producer of culture and a product of culture” (p. 233). The clarity of Grumet’s thought provides an insight into the sheer weight and impact of curriculum in schools, and the impact of programs such as Core Knowledge. In what ways does Core Knowledge affect the pulse of classrooms? What does Core Knowledge show about the culture of classrooms, and does it provide a space for teachers to tell stories about Core Knowledge? In what ways does Core Knowledge reflect the culture of society?

Grumet (1989) continues: “If we understand culture to be a system of meanings available to actors situated in shared space, time, history, and possibility, then it is reasonable enough to think about curriculum development and criticism as hermeneutic activity, as acts of interpretation” (p. 233). Grumet’s observation about interpretation lends added importance to the stories and feelings of Core Knowledge teachers. Studying and reflecting upon Core Knowledge stems far beyond the concrete ideas of state standards and benchmarks and requires more work. Interpretations of Core Knowledge

curriculum also must be found in the experiences of Core Knowledge teachers. In what ways will Core Knowledge teachers provide a broader and deeper picture of this curriculum? In what ways will I interpret teachers' stories to give greater depth to the study of Core Knowledge?

The process of interpretation brings forward the underlying theories giving shape to the Core Knowledge curriculum. In the next section, I focus on different theories of curriculum. Studying the background of some noted curriculum theorists provides a lens through which to frame Core Knowledge. What aspects of Core Knowledge are present in these theories? By reviewing curriculum theory, I am able to focus on the debate about the Core Knowledge curriculum.

Curriculum as Debate: Curriculum Theory and Core Knowledge

Grumet (1989) stresses the importance of looking deeply into curriculum and finding out what curriculum means—at its core. What lies at the heart of curriculum, such as Core Knowledge? What are the author's motives behind Core Knowledge? In her work on pedagogy and the power of address, Ellsworth (1997) studies questions of pedagogy as an analytical mode of address to ask a central question borrowed from film and transposed to ask: Who does curriculum think you are? By asking these questions, the study of curriculum becomes more deeply impacted by the stories of teachers in schools. It may also become clearer how the Core Knowledge curriculum fits into the larger realm of curriculum theory. Who does the Core Knowledge curriculum think you are? By conversing with Core Knowledge teachers, I will think about this question and bring its answer forward, as Core Knowledge teachers should have insight into what called them to work with this curriculum.

Curriculum takes a variety of forms in classrooms, and the history of curriculum in schools reflects different theorists and reformers. Because curriculum reflects culture and different belief systems, it is always being reviewed and contested. What does curriculum assume about students and teachers? What curriculum theory connects to Core Knowledge? Are there ways in which teachers can have conversations about curriculum theories that impact their practice? “Students are not apt to benefit from curriculum development in an interpretive mode unless teachers have had the opportunity to experience personal worthwhileness and a sense that their personal knowledge is worthy of dialog” (Roderick, 1991, p. 146). In what ways can teachers connect with curriculum on a personal level, and in what ways might this impact their work with Core Knowledge? In consideration of these questions, I review the concept of curriculum through different theorists and apply some of those tenets to the Core Knowledge program. Curriculum theorists (Applebee, 1996; Eisner, 1985; Grundy, 1987; Pinar, et al., 1996; Posner, 1992; Tyler, 1947; Young, 1998) reveal the multiple perspectives of curriculum and illustrate its many aims and assumptions.

Core Knowledge as a return to tradition? Grundy (1987) outlines the basis of her theory of curriculum, and she begins with a telling confession: “This book has its genesis in dissatisfaction with much of what is regarded as ‘the gospel’ of curriculum theory. . . It seemed that such a structure already presupposed a philosophical foundation which was never exposed. . . it is possible to construct a curriculum differently from the traditional Tylerian (1949) model” (p. 1). Many of Tyler’s strict structural ideas are still prevalent today in schools, in the form of objective-based lesson plans, developed in a linear fashion, and standardized testing, among other examples. Posner (1992) describes a

Tylerian view of curriculum as “traditional.” Not only do traditional views of curriculum preserve the strict structural tenets of lesson planning, but these views also may seek to preserve the “cultural heritage,” and portray curriculum as plan, which means the focus is on the products of curriculum, not the process. Does referring to curriculum as plan ignore the heart of children in the classroom? Does it ignore their culture?

As a critic of Core Knowledge’s founder, E.D. Hirsch, Grumet (1989) is suspicious of this type of traditional curriculum. She writes: “The reference of Bloom and Hirsch is to the world of their own aspiring youth. It is drenched in nostalgia, poignant with regret that the world they put so much hope in has slipped away” (p. 239). These theorists who write about traditional curriculum as preserving cultural heritage would classify Core Knowledge as a traditional curriculum because of its apparent focus on history and strict adherence to a list of curriculum topics. Buras (1999) reports: “In the end, Hirsch fails to acknowledge that schooling is a cultural undertaking rather than a cognitive-technical matter. The questions of what and whose knowledge defines an educated and literate person and the implications of these questions are at the heart of critical examinations of schooling” (p. 80). Buras brings forward that the more troubling aspect of Core Knowledge may be that it literally robs students of their culture and replaces it with one that is determined by someone else.

Core Knowledge advocates, however, believe that the Core Knowledge curriculum gives students a chance to learn about culture and history. Advocates of this curriculum would not view the content as conservative or traditional. Hirsch writes about giving disadvantaged students access to concepts and culture that already are taught to students in affluent schools. By teaching students in disadvantaged schools the same

curriculum and topics taught in affluent schools, Hirsch believes that the students would have access to the same bank of knowledge afforded to students in more wealthy schools.

Hirsch says in an interview:

The data most gratifying to me are the data on predicted improvement of disadvantaged students. . . I'm less worried about the suburbs than I am about the inner city. If teachers in the inner city can actually deliver this kind of curriculum, if they decide they want to do it, their children will gain, most significantly in reading comprehension and learning ability. (O' Neil, 1999, p. 30)

Hirsch believes that providing an opportunity for every student to learn about the country's common culture will help those in disadvantaged schools succeed, and his belief that students in this country share a common history provides some of the background for the extensive American and World History sections of Core Knowledge. Teaching specific history topics at each grade level provides an opportunity for knowledge of history and culture to build and expand as the students progress through the Core Knowledge program. However, is there anything lost by teaching specific topics? Does learning some historical topics over others mark students? Have they lost their voice? Is there culture included in knowledge that all students should have?

One Core Knowledge teacher and mother of a Core Knowledge student shares a story:

. . . and I get to see two sides of it as a Core Knowledge teacher and parent. My daughter is in the PreK program. . . It was President's day weekend, and they had the Presidents up there. . . and she said "Mommy, that's George Washington. That's Abraham Lincoln and he's on the penny. And George Washington is on the quarter. . .". I think my favorite part about Core Knowledge is the building. . . The introduction and more information. . . (personal communication, 2001)

This mother and Core Knowledge teacher takes particular notice of the opportunity for her daughter to learn about concepts of history and to build on those concepts. In this particular instance this three or four-year-old is able to recognize the Presidents of the

United States. It is also evident that this Core Knowledge teacher realizes the opportunity for her daughter to recognize the historical concepts in ordinary activities, such as a day at the mall. Hirsch desires that all children be exposed to this kind of experience. All children should be able to recognize these concepts of common history and culture. What do we do about faced not included in our common culture?

Within Core Knowledge, there is a place for exploring different historical voices that comprise World and American history. Students have an opportunity to read Langston Hughes, Sojourner Truth or debate the plight of the Native Americans. Core Knowledge, while establishing a curriculum sequence, does not adhere to Euro-centric views, despite criticism to the contrary. While this belief in a strong historical background drives Core Knowledge, it is also a forum for debate within this curriculum. Critics say that this curriculum promotes a return to the conservative view that schools must promote one heritage.

Core Knowledge as an emphasis on the technical? The debate about traditional views of curriculum is not the only controversial topic in Core Knowledge and curriculum theory. Grundy's (1987) book divides curriculum frameworks into three types: technical, practical, and emancipatory. Tyler's model would fit into the technical framework, seeking to measure results. Greater results mean greater success. The technical view of curriculum characterizes teaching as transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. Freire (1972) describes this process: "Education is suffering from narration sickness. Narration . . . turns [the students] into containers . . . to be filled by the teacher. The more completely he fills the receptacles, the better teacher he is. The more

meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (in Grundy, 1987, p. 101).

This technical and transmission model of curriculum is another theory used to characterize and criticize the Core Knowledge curriculum. Critics label Core Knowledge as a curriculum that promotes rote memorization. Since Core Knowledge is a list of concepts, they often are characterized mistakenly as a list to be memorized by students. My experience with this list of concepts in Core Knowledge has been quite different. Personally, I have not visited one Core Knowledge school where students were memorizing the list of topics. Students may memorize speeches or poems from the *Core Knowledge Sequence*, but memorization occurs in non-Core Knowledge schools, as well. Core Knowledge teachers are excited to have the creative capability finally to write meaningful units based on Core Knowledge concepts. Chloe shares her experience about writing a unit about the Reformation for fifth graders:

I think the best unit that I’ve taught because I think it really was something totally out of the students’ understanding was the Reformation unit. . . it’s so deep and it’s so personal to talk about religion and it’s something that you feel like you really need to tread lightly but you can’t when it’s a subject like that. . . It really is a unit that seems to really impact them and they ask question after question after question about this deep theological stuff. . . (personal communication, 2001)

Chloe wrote a unit on the Reformation, and she still is amazed at students’ understanding of this historical concept. Her work with Core Knowledge units is some of Chloe’s most rewarding and interesting professional work. Being a tremendous writer, she feels continually enriched by her Core Knowledge units, not only working with the curriculum on her own, but also sharing her work with her colleagues in their conversations about Core Knowledge. This is an example of one teacher who uses Core Knowledge as a way to communicate and collaborate with her grade level. Chloe’s story provides a different

portrait of the Core Knowledge curriculum from one of transmission and rote memorization. What more can be learned about Core Knowledge by visiting with Core Knowledge teachers and hearing their stories about learning and instruction in their classrooms?

In a later email conversation, Chloe tells the story of another Core Knowledge unit that she taught with other teachers on her grade level. In this unit on the Renaissance, Chloe and her fellow fifth grade teachers decided to teach the historical concepts of the period based on a book titled, *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci: Seven Steps to Genius Everyday* (Gelb, 1998). This book encourages readers to explore their inner genius in order to become more familiar with Leonardo da Vinci, using a journal to approach a different activity every day. By studying the Renaissance using this book, the teachers had an opportunity to involve the students in the planning for the unit and in the unit's culminating activity, which was a journal filled with the thoughts and work of each child. Chloe reacts to her work with this unit: "It's our favorite thing of the year. I think it is a special, unique unit that is a great example of what Core can ultimately be—NOT just facts, but a living, breathing example of history coming to life and having meaning for our kids today" (personal communication, 2002). By accompanying her students on this journey with Core Knowledge, Chloe demonstrates how teaching solid facts about the Renaissance using Core Knowledge can work within her personal choices for pedagogy. Palmer (1993) describes this kind of teaching:

Educating toward truth does not mean turning away from facts and theories and objective realities. If we devote ourselves to truth, the facts will not necessarily change (though some may, since every fact is a function of relationship). What *will* change is our relation to the facts, or to the world that the facts make known. . . We find truth by. . . knowing. . . and knowing becomes a reunion of separated beings whose primary bond is not of logic but of love. (pp. 31-32)

In what ways do Core Knowledge teachers make meaning of the truth within this curriculum? Chloe's story about the Renaissance unit demonstrates that Core Knowledge can be based on solid facts as well as strong pedagogy.

Core Knowledge connections. Another curriculum theorist and critic of Core Knowledge is Applebee (1996), whose main argument against Core Knowledge is that it is a list of ideas to be taught, and there is no connection between the topics of study. Applebee's theory is in direct opposition to the work that Core Knowledge teachers have accomplished. In Applebee's theory of curriculum as conversation, the topics need to be linked. Applebee cites that meaningful and successful conversation needs to be easy to enter. The manner in which instruction helps students become engaged and involved in curriculum is an essential piece to this puzzle of a successful curriculum.

Applebee's theory of curriculum is one that is comfortable; however, it would require a deep change in the way teachers view curriculum. What would it take for Core Knowledge teachers to view Core Knowledge as conversation, and how would this conversation open up new places to have these conversations? A change to include Core Knowledge in a school also would require teachers to view curriculum differently. Applebee's criticism of Core Knowledge does not directly address teachers' personal experiences with this curriculum. What do teachers recognize about Core Knowledge that the critics do not?

Applebee's theory highlights the need to view curriculum as conversation and to transform classrooms into places of "knowledge-in-action rather than knowledge-out-of-context" (p. 2). Applebee (1996) writes:

Discussions of curriculum in American schools and colleges have usually focused on what is most worth knowing. . . They strip knowledge of the contexts that give it meaning and vitality, and lead to an education that stresses knowledge-out-of-context rather than knowledge-in-action. In such a system, students are taught about the traditions of the past, and not how to enter into and participate in those of the present and the future. (p. 3)

What kinds of spaces in schools will lead to using knowledge-in-action, and how might this type of curriculum perspective affect teachers and students? Is Core Knowledge “knowledge in action”? Applebee does not categorize Core Knowledge as “knowledge in action,” but Core Knowledge teachers would disagree. Successful Core Knowledge teachers thrive on conversations they must have with their colleagues in order to write units and make Core Knowledge meaningful to their students. Core Knowledge teachers may also provide students feedback and choices in Core Knowledge units. This way of working with Core Knowledge is very much “knowledge in action” that Applebee describes, yet it is not included in Applebee’s critique of this curriculum.

Core Knowledge teachers view Core Knowledge as quite different from Applebee’s assessment, and they also fit into Applebee’s framework for work with curriculum. In what ways can Core Knowledge reconcile the gap between theory and practice for Core Knowledge teachers? Can Core Knowledge be a bridge between these two camps? In Chloe’s earlier description of the Renaissance unit, she describes the success of a unit based on the fact that it was driven by a spirit to learn. In her description of the unit, Chloe describes the book upon which the unit was based, *How to Think like Leonardo da Vinci: Seven Steps to Genius Everyday* (Gelb, 1998). Chloe discusses how the Renaissance unit evolved through teacher conversations:

I’d love to say I had the inspiration, but it was another teacher’s idea. I believe the inspiration was the book itself—she saw it at the bookstore, bought it because of the title and subject matter, read it, and saw the implications and possibilities for

using with students. She began working through the principles in her own journal, and we just sort of ran with it that year. . . Others were very interested. . . our GT (gifted and talented) teacher loved the idea, so did the principal. . . .

Chloe's work with her grade level on this study of the Renaissance is exactly what Applebee describes between teachers, yet this type of work is not recognized in his criticism of Core Knowledge. There is a disconnect between the hard work of teachers and the theory that describes curriculum reform. Huntley (1995) explains this frustration:

In my anxiety, I experience the tension between the rolled-up-sleeves feeling of teaching in action and the higher philosophical aims I formulate about what I do. It's as if there are two opposing worlds for education, one seething with organic activity, the other a pristine latticework of ideas and beliefs. When I started my internship at Twain, experienced teachers laughed knowingly as I told them about the theories we were studying in our night classes. "All that philosophical thinking about education is interesting," they would say, "but you'll find it isn't worth squat in the classroom. That's teaching." . . . Very quickly I found out for myself that action and reflection in teaching can be worlds apart. The smell of a middle school, the whirlwind appearance of the classroom, the things there that have been touched. . . these things drive clean, well-crafted, long prepared ideas from the building screaming in terror. Oh, you could probably heavily Scotch-Guard the ideals and smuggle them in, but don't expect miracles. (Henry, et al., pp. 106-107)

What creates this divide in teaching, the one between theory and practice?

Applebee describes curriculum as conversation, and conversation occurs between teachers in Core Knowledge classrooms, but is not recognized as valuable. What do teachers need to do to make their practice recognized? In what ways can this study bring the practice of Core Knowledge teachers forward? What teachers practice with Core Knowledge and what the theories say about Core Knowledge is live with tension and discovery. What more will be learned from exploring it further?

Grundy (1987) and Applebee (1996), among others discussed in chapter one, provide an interesting framework for studying curriculum, particularly recognizing the ways that Core Knowledge fits into the study of curriculum. There are many ways that

the formal study of curriculum dismisses Core Knowledge, yet some teachers remain committed to this program. These teachers' descriptions of Core Knowledge are quite different from the formal theory. Critics may label Core Knowledge as ineffective, but teachers' stories may contradict this criticism and provide another picture of Core Knowledge. The question remains: who does this curriculum think teachers are? Will teachers have a chance to respond to this question and the criticism of curriculum theorists? Does Core Knowledge only represent a technical view, or is there room for alternative conceptions as it is practiced? Curriculum theorists open up a conversation for researchers and teachers in their work with particular reform efforts like Core Knowledge.

The tension between what critics expect of this curriculum and what society expects of teachers is one that requires closer examination. Curriculum is the lifeblood of education, and it is curriculum that reflects the heart and soul of those who work with schools. Outside forces, however, are quick to find problems in schools. Perhaps there are not enough successful results, and test scores may not be improving. When this happens, there may be a perceived problem with the curriculum, which may open up the possibility for changing the school's curriculum, to include Core Knowledge.

Curriculum Reform: A Change of Heart

“Repeatedly, Americans have followed a common pattern in devising educational prescriptions for specific or economic ills” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 2). Tyack and Cuban compare education to a tonic that is perceived to cure greater social illness, where the idea of cure has obvious limitations. How does Core Knowledge fit into such a picture of education reform? Core Knowledge advocates may believe that this curriculum

is the one that will cure the problems in education, but that, too, would illustrate limited thinking. However, Core Knowledge often requires a change in schools and requires much work on the part of a teacher who implements Core Knowledge. In what ways do Core Knowledge teachers respond to this change?

Fullan (1991) recognizes the importance of feelings connected with change: “Neglect of the phenomenology of change—that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended—is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms” (p. 4). Fullan’s work highlights the essential need for teacher’s stories about educational change, especially about curriculum and Core Knowledge. Not only is it vital to know how Core Knowledge may affect schools, but it is also vital to listen to the stories of teachers affected by change to know how to improve the process in the future.

Unfortunately, society often wants to cure educational ills with drastic measures instead of pondering the causes and treating the problem accordingly. Society also often wants a “quick fix.” Curriculum reform initiatives, such as Core Knowledge, hope to solve problems in schools with a new formula for success. Many reforms have materialized in schools and have left behind stress and frustration at failed attempts to reform an educational system. Some Core Knowledge schools have not survived. What are the reasons that Core Knowledge may not succeed in schools?

Hirsch (1996) writes about the stagnation of tired ideas in reform, and the need to “jump start” the circulation of new ideas for curriculum. He describes the problem: “Although we are a diverse nation, our optimistic educational ideas and slogans tend to be uniform from one education school and reform movement to another. Dressed-up-like-

new versions of old ideas still dominate. . .” (p. 2). Hirsch describes the dominant paradigms of instruction that may be present in schools and teacher preparation programs and the need for an alternative theory of reform. He proposes an alternative in the form of the Core Knowledge curriculum and advocates working against oppressive reform practices that might stifle teachers and students.

In a study of teachers encountering what Hirsch (1996) calls the “Thoughtworld”—a place where rigid ideas about school instruction dominate—Kamuka and Vitale (1998) explore Hirsch’s ideas about the dominant status quo. After studying teachers’ responses to a “highly effective program” for reform that had been introduced in their school, the authors write:

In effect, the prior perspectives and experience “filtered” by those “thoughtworld” perspectives caused the majority of teachers to reject an instructional program proven to be highly effective in teaching advanced content and skills to students they had previously indicated their schools were presently ineffective in remediating. (p. 6)

The authors find that teachers may reject a reform program because they consider the program to be “more of the same.” Are teachers rejecting a world in which they do not feel that they belong? What might be learned about Core Knowledge and other reforms that try to “tinker” with the idea of a “real school”? In what ways do cultural ideas impact heartfelt feelings about education and curriculum? Tyack and Cuban’s writing reveal important ideas about schooling that truly reach into people’s hearts. Realizing the tremendous emotions connected with change reinforces the importance of hearing teachers’ stories regarding their experiences with Core Knowledge in schools. In what ways has the introduction of Core Knowledge changed schools for better or worse?

Reform affects the emotional wellness of those involved in the reform process. Fullan (1991) describes educational “change” as another aspect to reform. To re-form is to change the form of an entity. Change has implications for everyone involved in the process. This can be a painful and stressful process to go through, as Laing illustrates:

Knots

There is something I don't know
that I am supposed to know.
I don't know what it is I don't know,
and yet am supposed to know.

And I feel I look stupid
if I seem both not to know it
and not know *what* it is I don't know.
Therefore, I pretend I know it.
This is nerve-wracking since I don't
know what I must pretend to know.
Therefore, I pretend I know everything.
(as cited in Fullan, 1991, p. 105)

Although there is playfulness in Laing's words, his stress is evident in the poem. Laing is a psychiatrist, and he seems to have described the angst of the change process correctly. What must teachers feel in their hearts when expected to “know it all”? Will re-forming eventually lead to a loss of form and a loss of heart? Fullan (1991) expresses his concern about this reform process: “In highlighting the problem of meaning in educational change, the main implication is that innovations should not be taken for granted. What values are involved? Who will benefit from the change? How much of a priority is it? How achievable is it? . . . All are important questions about the sources and consequences of change” (p. 27).

If Core Knowledge teachers and students are at the heart of a curriculum reform movement, then why aren't their voices heard more clearly? What feelings do Core

Knowledge teachers and students have when they are told they need to be “re- formed”? Can the heart stand to be formed in another way? Stories about teachers’ reactions to reform and change, particularly Core Knowledge, may provide another lens through which to view Core Knowledge. In what ways does Core Knowledge as a curricular reform affect teachers? Are teachers’ reactions different when Core Knowledge is chosen for the school? Core Knowledge has achieved a reputation as one of the reforms that schools can adopt in this menu of items. Joella Good Elementary school in Miami was one school that adopted Core Knowledge. A report about implementation at this school reads:

These two elements—the focus on content and the built-in flexibility—help explain the enthusiasm the Core Knowledge approach has generated among Joella Good’s staff. For teachers who have lived through a series of “reforms” aimed more at process than content, Core Knowledge reaffirms their role as professionals. “This tells me, this is what the child should know—you figure out a way to do it,” says third-grade teacher Silvia Padron-Salgado. “If I’m a good teacher, I’m going to do that. That’s better than being given all these workshops on how to teach.” (Gursky, 1997, p. 6)

This school is one that has implemented Core Knowledge with the teachers having direct experience with it; and the school still uses Core Knowledge. Padron-Salgado’s comments are insightful because she says that she wants to be told specifically what to teach, but she does not want to spend time at workshops on how to teach. These comments should also be questioned. What does it mean that one teacher wants to be told what to do? Does this comment give weight to the argument that Core Knowledge will not encourage the creativity of teachers, but instead keep them from searching themselves for the meaning of curriculum? Has this teacher thought about what Core Knowledge means to her? These troubling comments merit more attention. In ways has this teacher been affected by school reform, and how does that affect her work with Core

Knowledge? What does this comment reveal about the heart of one teacher involved in Core Knowledge? The specificity of Core Knowledge as a reform appeals to teachers who become weary of constant flux in the system. Perhaps listening to more voices of teachers provides another way to view Core Knowledge.

Change evolves to find solutions for vexing problems in education. Fullan (1991) describes change: “One of the most fundamental problems in education today is that people do not have a clear, coherent sense of meaning about what educational change is for, what it is and how it proceeds” (p. 4). Understanding this meaning will make the conversations about Core Knowledge more complex and more revealing. Thinking about educational change is important, and realizing how Core Knowledge fits into this puzzle of change provides more insight into Core Knowledge as educational reform.

A Sense of Being Overwhelmed: Teaching with a Heavy Heart

Fullan describes how emotional change and curriculum reform can affect education. What have been some of the reactions to change within Core Knowledge schools? In the book, *To Be a Teacher*, teachers talk about some of their challenges with curriculum and change. McKamey writes:

. . . I had become quite adept in educational espionage. I slipped curriculum into class like a mother hides vitamins in a kid’s dessert. Students were like every other kid who preferred the brightly colored, sugarcoated cereals that come with prizes to more wholesome cereals with more substantive nutrients. “It’s good for us?” They would look at me in horror. “Yuck!” (Henry, et al., 1995, pp. 14-15)

So the teachers have to decide what to teach, when to teach it, and how to make it fun.

What does it mean if teachers have to disguise curriculum to make students want to study? How can curriculum be meaningful to students when they are not interested in the topics? The Core Knowledge content provides lists of topics for each grade level. Who

gets to make the list? Who gets to decide when Core Knowledge is taught in the classrooms? What **is** the core that is most important to teach? For whom? For what purpose? How does it feel to be presented with Core Knowledge as the only option for change? In what ways can teachers be supported in this change?

Upon being told that her school was going to adopt the Core Knowledge curriculum, Ann, a teacher in a Core Knowledge school, says, “The planning is much more than what all of my friends [experience] who teach somewhere else, who just open the textbook and copy out of it.” What is daunting about planning and why do teachers feel intimidated by planning? Ann worked at a school that adopted Core Knowledge as a whole school effort. The teachers, a small group in a small private school, decided to teach Core Knowledge after researching the curriculum together. Even though Ann was teaching in a school that decided to adopt Core Knowledge, this collaborative decision did not alleviate the fear of planning and teaching specific and daunting new units. Ann’s school was a different situation from other schools. Other school districts may adopt Core Knowledge without providing information to the teachers about the program.

Chloe worked at a Core Knowledge school, and her school was a larger public school in a city district. She also speaks of the challenges in implementing Core Knowledge: “And I thought. . . that was a hard year. I think I took on too much too fast. And I wanted to do it all and do it all well and it was hard.” What do Chloe and Ann’s statements introduce about the tensions in Core Knowledge? There are issues about implementation that must be recognized as curriculum is changed. What does implementation mean? Is it a worn out idea in the face of different curriculum thinking?

Chloe was not only overwhelmed, but she also was affected emotionally about all the things she had to do. “. . . I just cried almost every night the first year we tried to implement at [my school]. Because you know. . . I didn’t have all the books I needed, I didn’t have all the knowledge I needed, I didn’t have any help and I wanted to do it all. And that was frustrating.”

The phrase “heavy heart” describes someone who is worried or sad. Why is the heart heavy? Is it because it has so many things filling it? But where was the heart before? Was it light and floating, and now that it is heavy, does that make it sink? What is the difference between being “light-hearted” and “heavy-hearted”? What is in teachers’ hearts that makes them worry and cry about Core Knowledge? For what are they crying? Perhaps they see a vision about what they want to teach?

Levin (1999) shares the words of T.S. Eliot: “I see the eyes but not the tears/ This is my affliction” (p. 4). Teachers are physically affected by the worries in their hearts, but those who are imposing curriculum reform do not seem to recognize those emotions. When will the gaze of educational reformers fall upon the matters of the heart as well as the head? What can change in classrooms when educators look more deeply?

While Fullan describes change in schools in the previous section, this section focuses specifically on teacher’s reactions to Core Knowledge. Changing to become a Core Knowledge school can bring forward different reactions by teachers. Exploring these reactions, whether positive or negative, and conversing about them provides a foundation for questions about Core Knowledge in schools. What can be learned about Core Knowledge while exploring feelings of tension? What do the reactions of teachers to Core Knowledge show about this curriculum?

Teachers' Heartbreaks: Losing Meaningful Connections

With the present emphasis on reforming schools, in order to make changes that address real concerns of teachers in schools, the voices of teachers must be heard. As Intrator (2002) writes: "If our children need empathetic, caring, 'wide-awake' adults who can support students' academic, social, and personal development, then we had better attend to how our institutions support and sustain these people" (p. 154). Listening to what teachers have to say about educational reform may provide a look into the heart of the problem, and this approach provides another portrait of Core Knowledge.

Intrator (2002) continues:

The essays presented here describe an approach to educational reform that focuses on attending to the teacher. The verb *attend* is derived from the Latin *attendere*, meaning "to stretch toward, listen to, heed." Ironically, the typical approach to attending to teachers in educational reform movements has something to do with stretch, but not the humane version of stretch connoted by *attendere*. (p. 155)

"Attending" to teachers in this way may mean a revolutionary way to view educational reform. Taking care of a teacher's heart may prevent more future problems in education—such as teacher "burnout" and retention. What will the stories of Core Knowledge "stretch" us to hear?

There are groups of teachers who choose to ignore reforms and close their doors, remaining secluded from the school system and its practices. By doing so, these teachers constantly are arguing with the administration about "conforming." Then, the other camp of teachers may be ones who decide to give into reform, but they then give up their beliefs and what they love about teaching (Intrator, 2002). As Intrator (2002) writes, "Or we can adopt the practices and beliefs of the institution, despite our misgivings, and diminish ourselves from inside out" (p. 158). In what ways can conversing about Core

Knowledge help teachers that are trapped in these situations? In what ways can educational reform help these teachers? Conversations about lost connections expose the strong emotions of teachers regarding curriculum reform. In what ways do teachers react when they have been disrupted by a curriculum like Core Knowledge?

This second part of chapter two has raised questions about Core Knowledge in relation to teaching and curriculum. In what ways does Core Knowledge relate to formal curriculum theory? What can be learned in conversation with teachers regarding their understanding of curriculum theory and how they relate it to Core Knowledge? Further questioning of Core Knowledge teachers about these issues will open up Core Knowledge more fully. The final section of this chapter illustrates the need for reflection and time to write about teaching Core Knowledge. This time is essential for Core Knowledge teachers, but it is often neglected.

The Language of Giving a Name

Poetry is the saying of the unconcealedness of what is. Actual language at any given moment is the happening of this saying, in which a people's world historically arises, for it and the earth is preserved as that which remains closed. (Heidegger, 1971/1975, p. 74)

Acts of interpreting curriculum and reform may emerge in non-traditional forms, and interpretation may include bringing forward teachers' stories from their personal background as well as their time spent in classrooms. Heidegger (1971/1975) provides deeper meaning to the power of words and names. Exploring the depths of feelings may lead to naming them and opening up the heart to the experience of those feelings, and a world that might have been closed off to interpretation previously. It is through exploration of language, perhaps through poetry, narrative, or conversation, which I wish to travel into the deeper meaning of being a Core Knowledge teacher. I also seek to hear

the stories of teachers who wish to go through the same exploration process with Core Knowledge. How might the meanings of words connected to Core Knowledge re-name the heart-felt feelings of teachers?

Poems may have the power to say what regular prose cannot. Metzger (1992) expresses the meaning of a poem as the “penetration into the essence of something. It begins in a moment, is the thing itself as well as the surrounding space. A poem is the space between the words” (p. 11). This journey through the meaning of the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher begins with a single step, and these steps are represented by single words, like “teach,” “pedagogy,” and “curriculum.” Can these simple words truly represent the depth of Core Knowledge? What happens when the words are mis-represented? How may poetry, either written by others or me, name the thoughts and feelings about Core Knowledge? Can others who discuss the writing process bring a deeper meaning to curriculum? Are teachers able to find their hearts in the language of curriculum and in Core Knowledge? Language from the heart names feelings that must come from deep within teachers. When delving deep into teachers’ hearts, there is a place for teachers’ backgrounds and personal lives.

The Voice of Poetry and Language

When van Manen (1990) writes about phenomenology, he reminds the reader that the essence of poetry makes it so beautiful and meaningful:

As in poetry, it is inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or a summary of a phenomenological study. To summarize a poem in order to present the result would destroy the result because the poem itself is the result. . . . So phenomenology, not unlike poetry, is a poetizing project; it tries an incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling, wherein we aim to involve the voice of an original singing of the world. (p. 13)

Van Manen illustrates a connection between poetry and phenomenology, as does Metzger (1992) when she writes: “Poetry evokes. It speaks to feelings—not emotions, necessarily, but to feelings. Feelings are the way we know experience, while emotions are a response to it” (p. 12). I use poetry to name an experience and explore it more deeply and fully, and I find that exploring these feelings can be another way to research more deeply. This phenomenological study into Core Knowledge is one that uses the heart as a vehicle to uncover important discoveries about Core Knowledge and general questions about curriculum. Metzger says that poems rely on images, and as I uncover those images, Core Knowledge will be opened in ways that might be more helpful to teachers.

As human beings communicate through language, that language requires “naming” of objects, feelings and desires. These names encompass a variety of meanings that may lie deep below the surface. Mayes (2001) says that, “Words are names, and naming is a rite. . . Naming is one of the great involvements of the writer, the bonding of words as close to the subject as possible” (p. 28). Mayes illustrates how important naming can be, particularly in our culture. That is probably why she names the chapter in her book, “The Muscle of Language” (p. 32) to show the sheer strength of words.

Language is vitally important to this work with Core Knowledge. In what ways do I interpret word meanings? In what ways do I hear Core Knowledge teachers describing their experiences? In what ways am I prepared to hear their words in describing Core Knowledge?

The power of poetry lies in its ability to speak and name experiences in a deep way. Teachers may use poetry to name those experiences that occur in classrooms and

explore them on another level. McKamey (1995) uses the metaphor of a tapestry to explore her experiences of teaching:

The Tapestry

Begin with
Small, fragile threads.
Careful!
Do not stretch too far or
Some threads may. . .

. . . Break.
That happens sometimes.
Don't sweat it.
Usually you can
pick up the pieces
and retie them.
Sometimes too many
threads break
And you get discouraged.

But set it down
for a while,
Concentrate
on another part
of your tapestry,
You will get back to it.

The tapestry
is all connecting.
The tapestry
is everything,
It won't disappear.

If you want to make
an intricate design,
You need to spend
some time building
the threads
into strings,
or even ropes.
Wrap the ideas around,
gather
and
twist them together.

Sometimes it helps to
group similar colors.
Colors can complement
each other.
But don't worry

If your color scheme
doesn't work,
You never know
If colors clash
until
You get them together.

Well,
then there are
the Reds.
They tend to bleed all over
The Pastels. . .

If you get tired
of a motif,
pick up
another strand,
focus
on another design.
This tapestry isn't a
uniform, one-colored
one-designed piece.

This tapestry
is a busy patchwork
full of holes
weak spots,
stains.
But it is also
Unique
And beautiful in parts
The colors so vivid
and varied.

And it is a tapestry
One continuous art form
One continuous classroom. (pp. 34-36)

By using the metaphor of a tapestry to name her experiences in the classroom, McKamey has described this place differently and in a way that brings forward the tedious and careful way that teachers work with middle school students. McKamey's way of describing her work with the classroom by comparing it to artwork contrasts another middle school teacher's poem. Huntley (1995) writes:

T.G.I.M (Thank God It's Monday)

I thought I vowed I'd never see
What today ran over me. . .

Pillow and pencil fights
Violated computer rights
Abhorrent sights,
Like:
A student jumping out of the window
(I didn't see who it was, though);
Outrage that cause brought detention effect
After running and screaming left concentration wrecked;
"Read!" can never work as a command
Especially when classrooms get way out of hand. . .
Out of sorts. . .
From:
Breached trust;
Teenage lust;
Now I must. . .
go on.

The last group came
And they were—the same.
Did I treat them fairly?
As they screamed and fussed? Barely.
I took one aside
And could not let it slide. . .
I called his mother.

Then I sat with the boy, trying to be a man
To escape the classroom's peace-and-quiet ban
He's devoted to friends, and scoffs at school—
The fool!
But gets threats for colors on shirts, shoes, and pants
He rants—

Why do you care?

Why do I care?

I was born to—hey, life is unfair.
I may get ulcers and gray hair,
But on Tuesday morning. . .
I'll be there. (pp. 82-83)

Both poems describe quite differently vignettes from a middle schools teacher's day. Not only do the poems illustrate each teacher's feelings, but they also have a different texture that brings forward the unique personalities of each teacher. One poem has a hypnotic effect of describing the making of a tapestry, and the other poem's frantic pace feels as though it is following a student who is running down the halls. Each poem names the experience of being a middle school teacher differently, but each poem expresses the power of language and phenomenology to describe that experience.

Van Manen (1990) writes, "Language that authentically speaks the world rather than abstractly speaking *of* it is a language that reverberates the world, as Merleau-Ponty says, a language that sings the world" (p. 13). Preciseness of words and language is also important to hear and understand. Therefore, exploring different words and worlds in education will provide interesting and meaningful insights into questions about Core Knowledge.

Finding the Courage to Tell Stories from the Heart

Earlier in chapter two, I focus on the possible emotions and tensions that arise when teachers cannot articulate stories. In what ways can I encourage the telling of stories? Not only is it important to converse with Core Knowledge teachers and hear the language they speak, but it is also vital for me to provide an open atmosphere for the written word—perhaps through poetry and interpretation. In what ways do teachers tell

their heart stories? Are there spaces available for teachers to tell these stories? What do heart stories mean in education, for teachers and curriculum? Freire (1997) gives some evidence of how heart stories affect his view of education:

My childhood backyard had been unveiling itself to many other spaces—spaces that are not necessarily other yards. Spaces where this man of today sees the child of yesterday in himself and learns to see better what he had seen before. To see again what had already been seen before always implies seeing angles that were not perceived before. Thus, a posterior view of the world can be done in a more critical, less naïve, and more rigorous way. (p. 38)

Freire explains how his stories of growing up in his native country of Brazil impact his understanding of life and his powerful rendering of stories about education and curriculum. His writings express a desire for teachers to examine, reflect, and write about their past histories and how those experiences might affect their understanding of curriculum. I explore these stories of writers and teachers to delve more deeply into questions about Core Knowledge. Where are heart stories hiding, and how do they affect teachers? What heart stories do Core Knowledge teachers have to share about their experiences that may lead me to a deeper understanding of their work with this particular curriculum? Can stories from the heart and elements of these stories affect teachers and the way that they teach?

Personal narratives have an important and often overlooked place in education and curriculum, as Kridel (1998) writes:

I am struck by the power of autobiography and biography—the construction of landscapes and the act of making history become personal. As Maxine (Greene) underscores the importance of “being grounded in one’s personal history and lived lives,” autobiographical and biographical writing serve as a critical way not only to become grounded but, also, to preserve, maintain, and understand our contemporary heritage. (p. 122)

If teachers are grounded in personal history, then conversations with teachers reveal not only their hearts and souls, but also their backgrounds that may have led them to education and Core Knowledge teaching.

Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) write about how place is central to understanding education and curriculum. In their introduction, the authors describe social psychoanalysis as a process that incorporates self-reflection, and suggest how this is lacking in education today by teachers and by students. Pinar and Kincheloe describe the importance of interpretation in the process of psychoanalysis and link this process of interpretation with social research and critical theory, (which) “. . . seeks to unravel social constructions in order to achieve movement toward emancipation” (p. 2). Social psychoanalysis proves to be an innovative and vital way of studying curriculum, because it takes into account the history and the experiences of teachers in relation to curriculum. The concept of place becomes important when studying teaching and curriculum because a person’s concept of place is going to have an effect on interpretation. Calling forward remembrances of place and time are components of heart remembrances. In what ways do teachers connect with Core Knowledge on a written level? In what ways can the heart remembrances illuminate Core Knowledge?

Writing about teaching and heart stories is not an easy task, as Intrator (2001) reveals the challenge for teachers: “Being open to a view of teaching that includes the teacher’s heart and energy as an authentic subject of conversation poses a profound challenge to the profession. Simply put, we can’t dictate heart, we can’t legislate genuine caring, and we can’t hand out a teacher’s manual that scripts vitality” (p. xxxvi). In this age of standardized testing and standardized teaching, Intrator highlights the difficulty in

finding a place to tell heart stories. It is hard enough for teachers to open up generally, without the hostile atmosphere of an educational bureaucracy. King (2000), a noted novelist, underlines the importance and challenge of writing stories: “You can approach the act of writing with nervousness, excitement, hopefulness, or even despair—the sense that you can never completely put on the page what’s in your mind and heart. . . . Come to it any way but lightly. *Let me say it again: you must not come lightly to the blank page*” (p. 106).

Exploring conversation and stories about Core Knowledge involves deep reflection about teachers’ places in education. Remembering one’s personal teaching history and sharing how Core Knowledge is part of that history exposes deep insight into Core Knowledge. Since this may be a difficult and emotional journey, encouraging teacher narratives as a way to share this history is important.

Narrative as a Way to Sustain the Heart: The Benefits of Telling Stories

Finding the courage to tell heart stories in an atmosphere of suspicion is a challenge for teachers. However, finding the time and the open ears to listen to these stories may be one of the most important ways that teachers can sustain heart and soul. Palmer (1998) highlights many reasons that teachers should continue to have heart as they teach, and he continues to listen to teachers who want to tell heart stories. Listening to these stories has provided teachers with a place to share their struggles and their triumphs. In what ways can these stories from teachers change the face of education?

By sharing stories of the heart, Core Knowledge teachers provide an opportunity for everyone else to experience what happens in a Core Knowledge classroom between teacher and student. Storytelling and phenomenology imply a significant place for

listening. Not only do stories about Core Knowledge need to be told, but also they need to fall upon intent listening from those who are able to open their hearts to this journey. Telling stories is a fragile craft because it implies a contract between those who are willing to tell the stories and those who are willing to listen. Gadamer (1960/2000) writes about the importance of this type of serious conversation: “The first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us” (p. 367). There are many instances while working with Core Knowledge when teachers would like to share their stories about this curriculum, but they are unable to find a forum where the others will be “with them.”

Gadamer continues: “Every conversation presupposes a common language, or better, creates a common language” (p. 378). Conversations about what occurs in Core Knowledge classrooms provide an outlet for other Core Knowledge educators to share their feelings and experiences. These would be powerful conversations in which to participate.

Telling teachers’ stories would provide a valuable opportunity for listening, and this process of intent listening may have positive results on personal lives and the world of teaching. Palmer (2002) writes:

You do not even have to lay this book down to start listening to teachers, for the book you are holding was conceived to give teachers a voice. In it, you will hear them speaking honestly and openly about what teaching is really like, telling stories that—if we only try to understand them—can energize us to reform education in ways that really matter. (p. xix)

Energizing the public about education and the problems that need attention would be a monumental way to use the stories about Core Knowledge. Would listening to the heart stories of Core Knowledge teachers bring more understanding about the effect of this

particular reform? Would the stories of Core Knowledge teachers provide the energy to study this reform and see how it transforms classrooms? To interact with energized Core Knowledge teachers and those who are willing to share the contents of their hearts might provide an opportunity to find a different understanding of Core Knowledge curriculum and teaching. It would also allow any remaining questions or doubts about this curriculum to be addressed.

The act of simply listening to the stories of Core Knowledge teachers may seem trivial, but as Palmer (2002) illustrates, “Listening is what the human self most yearns for: to be received, to be heard, to be known, and in the process to be honored. And listening, deep listening, is what gives rise to the impulse toward personal and social change” (p. xx). Listening to stories of Core Knowledge teachers provides such an opportunity for change as this curriculum reform is opened for examination.

Palmer (2002) chronicles the positive impact of “soul sharing”: “You will find tales of teachers who learned to listen to their own inner truth, fortifying both their own souls and their ability to hear what other souls are saying” (p. xxii). Listening to these inner stories and sharing them with others provides teachers with a deeper look inside their motivations to educate students. Are teachers who share their heart stories more motivated to teach? Are Core Knowledge teachers who share their heart stories about the curriculum more motivated to continue teaching Core Knowledge units? Might these Core Knowledge units improve the educational space in schools? In an age where new teacher turnover is half within the first five years (Palmer, 2002), would it not make sense to encourage a type of dialogue that would help teachers maintain collegiality and remain

committed to teaching? Would it not make sense for Core Knowledge teachers to improve their craft by sharing their heart stories about the curriculum?

Palmer (2002) writes: “As teachers learn to listen to themselves and to others, they find new ways of relating to the educational institutions in which they work. They become advocates for a new kind of institution. . . and become advocates for educational reform. Listening—openly, deeply, and faithfully—has consequences that are not just personal and professional but political as well” (p. xxiii). Palmer enumerates another reason for listening and valuing teacher stories, which is to show a way that these stories might affect the political landscape. Becoming engrossed in the stories that teachers have told, even for a short while, imparts the tremendous power and insight their words are able to name. The political landscape of Core Knowledge awaits understanding.

Bringing the Body Together: The Heart Working in Concert

I have written in this chapter about teacher as the heart in a classroom. The implications are enormous, and they are waiting within the hearts of Core Knowledge teachers to be explored through phenomenology. The poet Rilke (1910/1975) describes living of life as experiencing life: “For Rilke. . . the progression is. . . from feelings through experiences through memories through forgetting to what can be called, adapting Rilke’s own words, *blood-remembering*” (as cited in Mood, 1975, p. 93). The metaphor that I have sought to use of heart and the blood that flows through it seems to correspond to “blood-remembering,” and the heart stories of teachers told through phenomenology must allow for experiences, feelings and memories. Rilke (1908/1975) writes the following poem about lovers:

See how their veins all become spirit:
Into each other they mature and grow.

Like axles, their forms tremblingly orbit,
Round which it whirls, bewitching and aglow.
Thirsters, and they receive drink,
watchers, and see: they receive sight.
Let them into one another sink
So as to endure each other outright. (p. 51)

Although the poem is about lovers, I find myself drawn to the first line, “Their veins all become spirit,” and I am moved to search for that spirit in the stories of teachers’ hearts. I am eager to find the stories of the lifeblood that sustains them in the classroom and gives them the inspiration and the spirit to teach Core Knowledge. The next chapter provides the foundation for my search.

CHAPTER THREE: THE WAY OF THE SEARCH: HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

The Search for Meaning

Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the “texts” of life, and semiotics is used here to develop a practical writing or linguistic approach to the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics. (van Manen, 1990, p. 4)

Exploring the world through the heart of a Core Knowledge teacher means to experience the world of education and curriculum reform in a different way. Not only is it important to describe the lived experience of Core Knowledge teachers, but also to interpret that text in search of a deeper meaning. To approach teaching through phenomenology requires a different **way** of thinking—a way that emphasizes place in the classroom and experience as a Core Knowledge teacher. In what ways will stories from Core Knowledge teachers open up the phenomenon of teaching Core Knowledge? Van Manen emphasizes that I must know the world in which I plan to question and to experience my place in that world. To this point, chapters one and two illuminate Core Knowledge as a curriculum reform and explain more fully my involvement with the curriculum. Chapter three highlights the research methodology I use to open up the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher and brings forward the key philosophers who inform my work.

Van Manen (1990) helps to locate the place of phenomenology:

Thus, at the risk of oversimplification one might say that the difference between natural science and human science resides in what it studies: natural science studies “objects of nature,” “things,” “natural events,” and “the way that objects behave.” Human science, in contrast, studies “persons,” or beings that have “consciousness” and that “act purposefully in and on the world by creating objects of “meaning” that are “expressions” of how human beings exist in the world. (pp. 3-4)

As a human science, hermeneutic phenomenology reflects the heart of the researcher: “Thus it is true in every case that a person who understands, understands himself. . . projecting himself upon his possibilities” (Gadamer, 1960/2000, p. 260). Understanding the difference between these two sciences helps to clarify the research methodology involved in both. In this chapter, I provide the grounding for this human science way of knowing through hermeneutic phenomenology, a way of exploring meaning. I also describe my work with Core Knowledge teachers at Stuart Elementary in more detail.

“To *do* hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal” (van Manen, 1990, p. 18). I realize the challenges involved with this research; however, I also realize how rich the descriptions of Core Knowledge can be through a hermeneutic phenomenological rendering. I ask: **What is the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher?** In what ways will hermeneutic phenomenology reveal the heartbeat of Core Knowledge teachers within the lifeworld of education?

To explore “being” requires a movement beyond meaning, to the place of what it means to “know” the experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher. The philosophers provide a more complete picture of the journey into knowing and being. I do not intend to show understanding of the totality of the philosophers’ work. Instead, I intend to do what van Manen (1990) suggests:

. . . it is important for the human science researcher in education to know something of the philosophic traditions. This does not mean, however, that one must become a professional philosopher in an academic sense. It means that one should know enough to be able to articulate the epistemological or theoretical implication of doing phenomenology and hermeneutics. (pp. 7-8)

I heed van Manen's advice to a phenomenological writer and begin with the ideas of the philosophers who influence my work.

Existence in the World: Heartbeats that Sustain Consciousness

Hermeneutic phenomenology has the potential to uncover deep meaning within the study of Core Knowledge. Van Manen (1990) writes about the possibilities of what hermeneutic phenomenology can open up for those involved in the journey:

“Phenomenological research is the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness” (p. 9). Does Core Knowledge open up a different way of being for teachers, a consciousness not yet articulated? To explore that consciousness is to look deeply into their lifeworld experiences. What do these experiences reveal about the deeper meaning of Core Knowledge? Van Manen (1990) explains that to be conscious is to be aware of the world. If I am aware of my experiences as a Core Knowledge teacher, then those experiences are going to affect how I bring meaning to the phenomenon.

Husserl and Heidegger both explain the relationship of consciousness to the world around us.

Exploring a new way of seeing.

Intuitively, I had no doubt that the heart was the most important organ in the body. . . Soon enough, however, I learned that the heart was not so supremely important after all. Elementary school science classes informed me that the brain was the real control center of vital functions. Although I had believed that the surest indication of life was the presence of a heartbeat, I now learned that life was present as long as the brain was functioning, and that life ended only when brain activity ceased. (Chopra, 1998, pp. 8-9)

When the body's function is characterized solely around the brain, there is a focus on intellect and reasoning. Reasoning and emotion are both important; however, science often portrays the brain as more precise than the heart. Although functions of the brain

control seeing and processing, often “seeing” with the heart reveals a deeper level of emotion, understanding, and consciousness. In what ways can seeing with the heart provide a deeper understanding of Core Knowledge? Does seeing with the heart require a deeper level of consciousness? If so, this level of consciousness provides a foundation for hermeneutic phenomenology. Philosophers provide the background for exploring relationships with self and the surrounding world.

Husserl, sometimes referred to as the founder of phenomenology (Moran, 2000), describes our consciousness in relation to the world around us. He recognizes that phenomenology begins in the world surrounding us. Through a phenomenological lens, I am interested in how I experience Core Knowledge, as well as the meaning of other teachers’ experiences. Phenomenology is not about categorization (van Manen, 1990) of the world, but about existence in the world. In exploring the lived experience of Core Knowledge teachers, I am looking for what stands at the heart of their world—the essence of what this curriculum reform means to them.

Seeing with the heart requires a different way of looking at the experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher. While Husserl provides the initial turn to phenomenology, I turn toward Heidegger, who explores a deeper realm of consciousness. Existence in the world is central to the ontological focus that Heidegger brings to phenomenology, remembering that hermeneutic phenomenology provides a different lens through which to view Core Knowledge—perhaps providing a different picture.

Opening the heart: Exploring *Dasein*. Seeing with the heart may require a new way of looking at Core Knowledge, and opening the heart requires an opening of one’s self—an experience that requires a deep involvement in the world and in one’s own

experiences. I continue to question and explore the meaning of being, and during this journey that means being a Core Knowledge teacher. Heidegger's emphasis on "being-in-the-world" provides the foundation for my exploration of being in the world with Core Knowledge teachers. In what ways do Core Knowledge teachers express themselves? In what ways do they interact with each other? In what ways do these experiences help teachers explore their being with Core Knowledge?

Heidegger charges that traditional philosophy does not address the questions and issues of "being," and his pursuit of phenomenology was an attempt to bring forward the question of the meaning of being in the world. "The traditional ways of asking the question are actually impediments to a solution. Heidegger saw himself as involved in a radicalisation of ontology which involved connecting it with the nature of historical occurrence" (Moran, 2000, p. 196). Heidegger seeks new ways of questioning one's existence with the world and in the world. His questions about "being in the world" provide a way to explore "being" a Core Knowledge teacher. He forges a connection between human existence and human connection with history and how that history affects humans. This involves getting beyond the unchanging theories of just describing things as they occur. A researcher must also consider attitudes about the world and how we exist in it (Moran, 2000). Although works written about Core Knowledge reveal important insights about this curriculum, exploring the ways that teachers exist with Core Knowledge is another vital piece of the puzzle. Heidegger's questions about being provide an alternate entrance into the world of being a Core Knowledge teacher.

I seek to get beyond the "sedimentation of everyday sets of assumptions" about teaching and learning (Moran, 2000, p. 197). The world of teaching is likely to remain

sedimented, or unlikely to change, if experiences are not explored in a deeper, more reflective manner. The question of being a Core Knowledge teacher provides rich potential for understanding the power of everyday situations and the ability of these situations to shed light on the Core Knowledge curriculum. Much is written about being a Core Knowledge teacher, but how much do we really know and understand about what it means to teach from this place? Heidegger (1953/1996) helps reveal how being stuck in the sediment may prevent further exploration into being a Core Knowledge teacher, as he writes: “The fact that we live already in an understanding of being and that the meaning of being is at the same time shrouded in darkness proves the fundamental necessity of repeating the question of the meaning of ‘being’” (p. 3). Thus, I continue to question the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher in order to reach more deeply into the stories from classrooms to open up Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein*.

In what ways do I characterize “being with” the curriculum? Heidegger (1953/1996) calls this experience of being, *Dasein*, or literally “being there”:

Everything we talk about, mean, and are related to is in being in one way or another. What and how we ourselves are is also in being. Being is found in thatness and whatness, reality, the objective presence of things [*Vorhandenheit*], subsistence, validity, existence [*Da-sein*], and in the “there is” [*es gibt*]. (p. 5)

Heidegger’s ontological focus in phenomenology explores questions of being-in-the-world through searching for vivid descriptions of those experiences to expose meaning. My being and existence informs how I question the Core Knowledge curriculum.

Dasein, this existence of being, is not a simple description of “what” it means to be a Core Knowledge teacher. Indeed, the question of *Dasein* must be explored in the various conversations of Core Knowledge teachers and how they relate their experiences to explore the deeper meaning of this kind of teaching. Finding meaning is an integral

part of exploring “being.” It is a constant circular questioning asking about the deeper “being” of “being.” Heidegger (1953/1996) describes this process:

And because the essential definition of this being cannot be accomplished by ascribing to it a “what” that specifies its material content, because its essence lies rather in the fact that it in each instance has to be its being as its own, the term *Dasein*, as a pure expression of being, has been chosen to designate this being. (p. 10)

I ask what the lived experience of a Core Knowledge teacher is in relation to how each teacher describes that experience to me. What new experiences of Core Knowledge will these conversations reveal? In what ways will the search for meaning enrich the literature about Core Knowledge? Exploring *Dasein* requires meaning making from these conversations and questions and provides another level of interpretation about Core Knowledge.

Heidegger’s (1953/1996) concept of *Dasein* provides a guide for my description of Core Knowledge. It is important for me to ponder being in the world, but I also should realize my relationship to others involved with Core Knowledge. Heidegger believes that we are intimately involved in the world and cannot approach it objectively. We encounter everything in a way that keeps us extremely close to the phenomenon we seek to understand. Giving Core Knowledge teachers time to explore and contemplate their own existence would support Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein* and my role as researcher in the process of exploring everyday situations. What has this research shown me about the Core Knowledge curriculum? What have I learned about myself and how I view teaching and learning? Opening the heart can be a painstaking process of exploring meaning and relationships to others. This exploration requires great care and concern. The way in which we approach the world is intimately connected to Heidegger’s idea of care. *Dasein*

describes the state of being in the world, and Heidegger's idea of care further explores a relationship with the world.

Touching others' hearts: Heidegger's world of care. Heidegger's (1953/1996) ideas about being are critical to my phenomenological project, and he believes that the way in which we exist in the world is fundamentally connected to care. Care is at the center of teaching and must be explored to uncover this phenomenon further. If care is directly related to the heart, then why is it not more prominently explored in Core Knowledge? Noddings (1992) alludes to Heidegger's work on care: "The German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1962) described care as the very Being of human life. . . . From his perspective, we are immersed in care; it is the ultimate reality of life" (p. 15). Heidegger explains that care is at the center of all human relationships. What does the concept of care have to show me about Core Knowledge? Exploring care as important in schools provides a different way of viewing curriculum and connects to Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*.

Care is part of the entire concept of being, as Heidegger (1953/1996) illustrates: "Being-in-the-world, as taking care of things, is *taken in by* the world which it takes care of" (p. 57). In what ways do Core Knowledge teachers care for their students? In what ways are these teachers "taken in" by the world of Core Knowledge? As Noddings (1992) alludes earlier, Heidegger's idea of care pervades every aspect of our lives. In order to explore "being," Heidegger professes that we must explore our relationships with others and the world as an ". . . integrated whole" (Frede, 1993, p. 63). Heidegger (1953/1996) writes, "Because being-in-the-world belongs essentially to Da-sein, its being toward the world is essentially taking care" (p. 53). Thus, Heidegger essentially connects our whole

being (*Dasein*) with our relationship to the world (care). Seen in this larger context, the connection of care and Core Knowledge are important pieces in the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher.

Heidegger's connection between being and relationships to the world is most relevant in schools as Darling-Hammond (1997) illustrates: "Environments that attend to students as individuals also help heighten the probabilities that school relationships will be characterized by respect and caring rather than by demeaning interactions, threats, and sanctions" (p.137). In order for students to feel care and develop their sense of being, they must feel respected. Milbrey McLaughlin reports:

. . . in five years of research in secondary schools conducted the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, "students' expressions of 'invisibility' were chorus and refrain" in a majority of schools: "'Nobody knows my name', 'Nobody cares if I show up or not,' 'I had to introduce myself to my math teacher at back to school night.' . . . Students told us 'the way teachers treat you as a student—or as a person actually,' counted more than any other factor in the school setting in determining their attachment to the school, their commitment to the school's goals, and, by extension, the academic future they imagined for themselves." (as cited in Darling-Hammond, p. 137)

By feeling invisible, these students have lost their sense of being, and in their minds, they literally no longer exist. What tragic consequences might these feelings hold?

Heidegger's philosophy, which connects care to being, is illustrated here when students feel they have lost their existence.

Thus, Heidegger's philosophy of care directly relates to the way students form relationships in schools and how I might observe the relationships of Core Knowledge teachers to students. This phenomenological project has implications for school structure and policy. Meier (1995) writes:

Caring and compassion are not soft, mushy goals. They are part of the hard core of subjects we are responsible for teaching. Informed and skillful care is learned.

Caring is as much cognitive as affective. The capacity to see the world as others might is central to unsentimental compassion and at the root of both intellectual skepticism and empathy. . . . Such empathetic qualities are precisely the habits of mind that require deliberate cultivation—that is, schooling. (p. 63)

Exploring care in schools and how cultivating this kind of care might be continued has an effect on the future of students and a direct influence on forming their sense of being.

In what ways might the teaching world change if we view it as the interconnectedness that brings children, teachers and community together? Noddings (1992) directly connects some of the questions of Heidegger’s concept of care to students in schools:

Finally, we must consider Heidegger’s deepest sense of care. As human beings, we care what happens to us. We wonder whether there is life after death, whether there is a deity who cares about us, whether we are loved by those we love. . . For adolescents these are among the most pressing questions: Who am I? What kind of person will I be? Who will love me? How do others see me? Yet schools spend more time on the quadratic formula than on any of these existential questions. (p. 20)

In what ways do these questions relate to concepts of Core Knowledge? In what ways do Core Knowledge teachers address these concepts of care when teaching Core Knowledge? Heidegger (1953/1996) writes, “The phenomenon of care in its totality is essentially something that cannot be split up . . .” (p. 180). Therefore, I cannot research the Core Knowledge curriculum without this sense of caring connectedness.

Heart of Darkness

I have asked people what “heart of darkness” means to them. Most of them are surprisingly direct about “their” heart of darkness experiences: ordeals they despaired of emerging from, rampant cruelty in wartime. . . a loss of faith in humankind. . . What all of the stories had in common was that *their hearts were afflicted, tested, or changed*. (Godwin, 2001, p. 198)

Godwin (2001) explores possible reasons for having a “heart of darkness.” If the heart is capable of deep feelings of joy, then it must also be capable of dark and dismal

feelings. I pause to think about the heart of Heidegger. While I have written about Heidegger's ideas that directly affect my work with phenomenology in this study, I must address Heidegger's affiliation with the National Socialist Party in Germany. It is an affiliation that I have questioned and struggled with as I read and reflect on Heidegger's work. I read Heidegger's writing on care, self reflection and constant questioning, and I wonder how he could write eloquently about these ways of Being and also be affiliated with the political party of death and destruction. I struggle with seeing him as a person of this party and a philosopher writing about life. I continue to dwell in this tension, and reflect on this struggle within my mind about Heidegger.

Heidegger's activities in Germany during World War II disturb and puzzle me. His role in "molding" German universities into the National Socialist framework exemplifies his prominent status in the party (Krell, 1993). What happened in Heidegger's heart to move him to work within the National Socialist party? Heidegger's writing about care is a significant foundation for my study of Core Knowledge teachers. It is a vexing problem that Heidegger, so immersed in concepts of being and relationships with others, would choose a road of neglect for fellow Germans. In what ways did Heidegger's association with the National Socialist party influence him? Did it affect his work? Does it taint his philosophy? I include this piece on Heidegger because I am troubled by his affiliation and question his motives.

Godwin (2001) addresses "cruelty in wartime" as a reason for the "heart of darkness" (p. 198). What cruelties left a mark on Heidegger's heart? Why did he not come forward with an apology after he left the party? Did he think it would have compromised his philosophy? While I struggle with Heidegger's involvement with the

National Socialist party, his work has given shape and a particular stamp on the way in which phenomenology has come to be practiced. Heidegger questions the meaning of being and the ability of everyday experiences to open up that question as deeper meaning is sought. I frame much of my work with Core Knowledge in Heidegger's work. While I still question his politics, I use his writing on care to focus while writing about Core Knowledge. Can a heart of darkness coexist with a caring heart? Perhaps it is living in such tension that allows us to be open to the world.

Godwin (2001) writes:

If *heart* is the symbol of the inmost sanctuary of personal being, and *darkness* a symbol for the unconscious, the unknown, evil, ignorance, death, and the underworld, *as well as for the dark of germination and potential new life*, you get an astonishing range of meaning when you put the two images together. (p. 195)

Godwin's discussion of the heart of darkness concludes with her idea that one may not ever know what makes a heart of darkness. I may not ever reconcile in my heart what happened with Heidegger. What led Heidegger to become an active part of the National Socialist party, and did his heart lose strength from that experience? Did he lose his heart entirely? There are no answers to these queries, but they allow Heidegger to be questioned by his own questions, and they provide a way for me to move forward.

Searching for Heart Stories: The Research Methodology

While the work of Husserl and Heidegger lay philosophical foundations for hermeneutic phenomenology, van Manen's (1990) description of phenomenology is an appropriate place to start the search for stories from the heart. Finding stories hidden deep in the recesses of the soul is a difficult process that requires careful thought and reflection, and it also requires contemplation of consciousness for Core Knowledge teachers. Van Manen (1990) writes: "Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper

understanding of the nature of meaning of our everyday experiences. . . . It differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it” (p. 9). Where do these experiences occur? What is a Core Knowledge teacher’s relationship with Core Knowledge?

The realm of everyday experience is the place where I work with Core Knowledge teachers. I seek to have conversations with them about their experiences with Core Knowledge. Existence in this world of everyday experiences provides insight into how Core Knowledge teachers perceive the curriculum. I delve more deeply into their stories of teaching Core Knowledge to provide a place for them to share what they know and can teach me. I provide a safe place to share stories and create a feeling of comfort for teachers in our together-space. By hearing these stories, I understand Core Knowledge more insightfully.

Van Manen (1990) writes: “So phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world” (p. 9). I seek to show how conversations with Core Knowledge teachers will open this view of curriculum in action and how it may inform teachers who might choose to use it. Phenomenology seeks to bring the researcher in closer contact and deeper understanding of the world instead of separating the researcher from the world. My contact with Core Knowledge teachers has deepened my understanding of this curriculum. A beginning look at the research methodology of phenomenology opens different facets of this journey. Relationships to the world of Core Knowledge and places

where teachers practice Core Knowledge provide a context for this curriculum and methodology.

Relationships to the World

Closely linked to phenomenology is the concept of consciousness, or how we exist in the world. Heidegger emphasizes that it is important to think about how we exist in relation to the world—directly connected to his concept of *Dasein*. Van Manen (1990) describes phenomenology as closely linked with consciousness because, “Consciousness is the only access human beings have to the world. Or rather, it is by virtue of being conscious that we are already related to the world” (p. 9). If we are conscious, then we are somehow keenly aware of how we are interacting with the world and the world with us. Being keenly aware implies that we have some indication of how we interpret this interaction with the world. Certainly, for Core Knowledge teachers, consciousness requires thought and reflection, and it requires a time and place to think about being in this curriculum arena.

Heidegger encourages thought about how we exist in the world, although he realizes that we often do not have the time or perseverance for this deep thought. Authenticity requires constant questioning of being. Heidegger warns that focusing on “everyday multiplicity” may seem to be a deep focus on how we exist in the world, but this is actually an “empty” way of viewing everyday existence (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 296). He continues:

Of course, by refusing to go along with the everyday way in which the I talks, our ontological interpretation of the “I” has by no means *solved* the problem; but it has indeed *prescribed the direction for further questioning*. . . The phenomenon of the authentic potentiality-of-being, however, also opens our eyes to the constancy of the self in the sense of its having gained a stand. (p. 296)

To begin the search for meaning requires more questioning. To reach the authentic self requires questioning of how we relate to the world, and for Core Knowledge teachers, it requires reflection on the curriculum and their relationship with it. Heidegger's writings emphasize the length and intensity required for such a study into these questions of being a Core Knowledge teacher.

Researching Core Knowledge through the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology provides a potential way for teachers to discover more about who they are as they reflect upon their authentic experiences with Core Knowledge. In what ways has Core Knowledge changed their lives? In what ways has Core Knowledge opened teachers to new possibilities in their craft? Has it in any way hardened their hearts? In what ways has it made them view their practice differently? What is the role of Core Knowledge in relation to teaching? These questions and others related to Core Knowledge provide a door through which Core Knowledge teachers can proceed to think about their experiences and learn from them.

Heidegger (1953/1996) also describes a different scenario of existence in the world. The opposite of deep reflection is an absorption in the world that leaves one too busy to contemplate existence. Although not necessarily bad, this state of being in the world does not provide more insight into being—in this case, being a Core Knowledge teacher. Ideas about the educational system can be “stuck” in the same bureaucratic cycle of reform and disconnect between teachers and Core Knowledge. Heidegger (1953/1996) believes that most of human life actually is spent in the opposite of authentic reflection, or inauthentic behavior, as he describes it—in a state of “*tranquillization* to

Da-sein” (p. 166) which leaves us without an idea of how we truly are interacting with the world.

In what ways does Core Knowledge reveal an authentic or inauthentic interaction? Does Core Knowledge enrich educational life? These most basic questions seem to be at the heart of the experience with Core Knowledge; however, these questions cannot be answered quickly. Such questions require thought and conversation, and in some instances, Core Knowledge schools cannot “afford” that time. What deep insights are Core Knowledge schools avoiding by not asking these questions? Heidegger (1953/1996) writes: “This tranquillization in inauthentic being, however, does not seduce one into stagnation and inactivity, but drives one to uninhibited ‘busyness.’ Being entangled in the ‘world’ does not somehow come to rest. Tempting tranquillization aggravates entanglement” (p. 166). How often do Core Knowledge teachers find themselves so busy with the lesson planning and work with Core Knowledge that they forget to think about how this curriculum affects them and the classroom? In what ways will conversations give them back the time to consider these crucial ideas about Core Knowledge, and what do these conversations reveal about the curriculum?

Considering states of consciousness makes the research of phenomenology complicated and exciting. Van Manen (1990) points out that we cannot reflect on an experience while we are having it, or that experience becomes changed in some way. “Thus, phenomenological reflection is not *introspective* but *retrospective*” (p. 10), and that is the way in which conversations with Core Knowledge teachers can be described. “The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in

a fuller or deeper manner” (van Manen, p. 10). I open up the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher by reflecting upon these essences and questions of being, while exposing another side of this curriculum reform often not seen.

Lived Existentials: Connections with Place and People

Phenomenology is a research methodology that describes experiential meanings as we live them. Van Manen (1990) writes: “Phenomenological human science is the study of lived or existential meanings; it attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness” (p. 11). By searching for these meanings in the lifeworld, it is important to focus on aspects of teaching Core Knowledge—such as places and relationships—that show the essence of being a Core Knowledge teacher. “There are four existentials that may prove especially helpful as guides for reflection in the research process: *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality)” (van Manen, 1990, p. 101). While these dimensions are a part of any lived experience, they are not used as an overlay for finding themes; rather, they announce themselves when lived accounts are brought forward.

The themes of lived space and lived human relation are evident in the conversations with Core Knowledge teachers and provide insight into teaching Core Knowledge. Casey’s (1993) writing about place reveals the importance of Core Knowledge classrooms in this journey through the world of Core Knowledge. I began my conversation about Core Knowledge in earlier chapters with a reference to “feeling at home.” Home as place triggers intense emotions and connections to Core Knowledge. Casey (1993) explains:

To be in the world, to be situated at all, is to be in place. Place is the phenomenal particularization of “being-in-the-world,” a phrase that in Heidegger’s hands retains a certain formality and abstractness which only the concreteness of *being-in-place*, i.e., being in the *place-world* itself, can mitigate. Can we rediscover and redescribe that concreteness? Can we regain and restore a sense of the full significance of place? (p. xv)

What type of place is a Core Knowledge classroom? In what ways does Core Knowledge fit into classroom spaces?

Casey (1993) writes: “Dwelling places offer not just bare shelter but the possibility of sojourns of upbringing, of education, of contemplation, of conviviality, lingerings of many kinds and durations” (p. 112). Core Knowledge classrooms are places where teachers and students dwell together and therefore offer potential for uncovering this lived quality of the curriculum. Dwelling places “must be constructed so as to allow for repeated return. . . . Second, a dwelling place must possess a certain felt familiarity, which normally arises from reoccupation itself” (Casey, p. 116). What “reoccupation” might Core Knowledge provide?

Heidegger (1971/1975) writes about how one might actually dwell: “To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. *The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving*” (p. 149). In what ways might Core Knowledge teachers and students dwell together in classrooms? Does Core Knowledge provide freedom that Heidegger suggests is an essential part of dwelling? Not only do classroom dwelling places hold great potential for exploring Core Knowledge, but they also show important relationships within the dwelling place.

Van Manen (1991) connects the idea of a caring place to the relationships that develop there: “Like love and friendship. . . pedagogy is cemented deep in the nature of

the relationship between adults and children” (p. 31). Sergiovanni (2000) writes: “These conditions are at the center, driving the more instrumental systemsworld conditions needed to make schools academically, socially, and developmentally effective places for all of our students” (p. 36). He emphasizes that schools need to be based on caring relationships, which connect classrooms to the relationships that are formed there.

Within the phenomenological exploration of Core Knowledge, there is a strong connection between the lived existential of space and lived relation. The teacher and student relationship in a Core Knowledge classroom defines what occurs in that place. The bond between Core Knowledge teachers and their students, other Core Knowledge teachers, and the curriculum creates a special place—defined by those relationships. For example, when Gadd (1995) asked what makes a transition to Core Knowledge smoother, one teacher in her study emphasizes the importance of the relationships on that grade level: “Having a team to work with, and being able to depend on them. . . and talking with them after we’d tried something to see if they’d had the same problems or successes. . .” (pp. 80-81) shows the importance of relationality. One teacher says, “I really feel like we had such a good relationship between the four of us. That really made it easier” (p. 81), and another declares, “I couldn’t have done it without the people I’ve worked with” (p. 81). The strength of the bond between these Core Knowledge teachers is evident and contributes to the success of Core Knowledge on this grade level.

One of the ways that Sergiovanni (2000) gauges forming a community is the way that the members of that community are connected through a common place. He writes:

Three characteristics are important in gauging the extent to which a school forms a community: the extent to which members share common interpersonal bonds, the extent to which members share an identity with a common place (for example,

my class, my space, my school), and the extent to which members share a commitment to values, norms and beliefs. (p. 60)

Sergiovanni notes the connection between lived relation and space. The writers who focus on these existentials (Casey, 1993; Sergiovanni, 2000; van Manen, 1990) begin to bring forward connections to the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher. In addition to the context and methodology of phenomenology, van Manen provides a framework for the research process. In the next section I describe that framework in more detail and provide a description of the way I work with Core Knowledge teachers, using more of van Manen's writing and the philosophy of Gadamer to explain the importance of language and conversation in this process.

Following My Heart: A Framework for Phenomenology

Aren't the most captivating stories exactly those which help us to understand better what is most common, most taken-for-granted, and what concerns us most ordinarily and directly? (van Manen, 1990, p.19)

Van Manen's quote identifies everyday stories as potential places to discover meaning and deeper realization of being. Phenomenological research does not try to categorize experiences, but rather it focuses on the larger picture, while at the same time going deeper. Deeper meaning and reflection is sought while exploring the experiences of teachers. I seek to write about stories that reside deep in the hearts of teachers, as we explore what it means to be a Core Knowledge teacher.

While phenomenological research is based in philosophy, text, and reflection, there is also a process to follow in order to discover the lived experience of Core Knowledge teachers. Van Manen (1990) suggests six research activities that a human science researcher must go through in order to uncover meaning:

1. turning to the phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art or writing and rewriting;
5. maintaining a strong oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

These components provide a guide for the process of human science research. Although these six activities follow an order, they are not linear in process. The following section reveals how I use this framework in carrying out my study.

Turning Inward to Listen to the Phenomenon

Van Manen (1990) describes the first activity as one of turning toward the phenomenon: “It is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence” (p. 31). “This starting point of phenomenological research is largely a matter of identifying what it is that deeply interests you or me and of identifying this interest as a true phenomenon, i.e., as some experience that human beings live through” (p. 40). This is how I start this work about Core Knowledge. I am first and foremost, a teacher—one who works with children in elementary school, and I remember the experiences of being in a learning place with students. I am also a Core Knowledge teacher—one who has struggled with and questioned this curriculum. I begin with the question: **“What is the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher?”** because I want to find the essence of that human experience and share it with others who work with Core Knowledge.

Chapter One tells a story of how I turned to this phenomenon of the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher. I struggle with a tension that draws me to

search for a deeper interpretation of the curriculum. I ask myself how teachers feel about having such a specific curriculum imposed upon them, and yet I see examples of how dynamic other teachers become when they begin to see the possibilities within this curriculum. Is it the curriculum or the teacher that becomes the pulse of Core Knowledge? What can I learn from my own experiences with this curriculum and from talking with other Core Knowledge teachers?

A phenomenological study of Core Knowledge seeks to explore the curriculum openly and through a broad range of meanings. Bradbeer (1998) explains his work with curriculum as he attempts to explore new aspects of curriculum theory:

Curriculum is so established as a technical term, an instrument that teachers administer, that thinking about it differently was difficult. Perhaps curriculum offered no point of reception for the elusive interest I had in the feminine—in the dark Yin. (p. 21)

Bradbeer's interest in viewing curriculum differently relates to the way I view Core Knowledge. I also seek to portray this curriculum in a different way, by exploring what is involved in the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher. This way of viewing Core Knowledge uses a different methodology to find the heart of the curriculum. Bradbeer (1998) continues: "My purpose, too, was not utility, as such, but gestation and depth. . . I hoped to assert the importance of subjective dimensions of schooling, so ubiquitous and subtle that they are often overlooked" (p. 22). By focusing deeply on the experiences of teachers, Bradbeer hopes to uncover the tiny details that might reveal more about teaching and curriculum. I also search for the details and tidbits of wisdom that hide within the conversations of Core Knowledge teachers. Perhaps by focusing on their words that describe the experience, I can uncover more about Core Knowledge and that which stands unnamed behind the experience. Van Manen (1990)

writes: “And no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* description” (p. 31). I hope that my turning to the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher will help provide a richer understanding of Core Knowledge.

“To truly question something is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being” (van Manen, 1990, p. 43). Van Manen’s quote about questioning involves looking inward to questions of being. He suggests reading and gathering as much information as possible when initially investigating a phenomenon. As a beginning for this research, I start with my personal experience in being a Core Knowledge teacher, and working with other teachers using this curriculum. It is essential to begin here in order to reveal my preunderstandings. These experiences open me to the experiences of others that become the text upon which themes are derived. Van Manen (1990) writes: “Lived-experience descriptions are data, or material on which to work” (p. 55). “It is to the extent that my experiences could be our experiences that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of certain experiential meanings” (p. 57). Beyond this initial rendering of experiences, it is always the quest of a phenomenologist to dig deeper and to find the elusive meaning that is within the experience.

Searching for the Center of Being: Investigating the Core

Van Manen suggests using other ways to investigate the deeper meanings that remain hidden in lived experience accounts by studying the etymological sources of words named and brought to reflection. My personal experience, again, is a starting point. I revisit my journal from my beginning work with phenomenology and Core Knowledge, where I write about Core Knowledge and the questions with which I am struggling.

As I work this week on a piece for my turning section, I find myself thinking back about my time in the classroom. This time with students and working with curriculum was such a joy for me. I was thinking about “questioning” it. . . Why did I leave the classroom? What was it about teaching that I loved so much? . . . Will these questions about my own teaching experience open up for me the experiences of teachers who work with Core Knowledge? . . . I want to get behind what is said about Core Knowledge and examine how I feel about the tension and distress I feel about my work with it. What is it I am struggling with? (Grove, 2001)

This personal journal provides a springboard for my conversations with Core Knowledge teachers. As I read over that piece of text, I think about the questions I have about Core Knowledge and Gadamer’s (1960/2000) advice: “In order to ask, one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know” (p. 363). This writing and questioning provides a background for having conversations with Core Knowledge teachers.

While writing about these experiences, I find myself exploring the meaning of words associated with education. I struggle with the language of education and how heart stories fit in to the technical world of lesson plans, objectives and goals. Gadamer (1960/2000) asks: “What is a technical term?” (p. 414) to which he responds:

A technical term is always somewhat artificial insofar as either the word itself is artificially formed or—as is more frequent—a word already in use has the variety and breadth of its meanings excised and is assigned only one particular conceptual meaning. In contrast to the living meaning of the words in spoken language. . . a technical term is a word that has become ossified. Using a word as a technical term is an act of violence against language. (Gadamer, 1960/2000, pp. 414-415)

Might such technical language also be an act of violence against teachers? Can teachers hear their hearts when they are directed only by “technical terms”? While having conversations and reviewing text, I pay special attention to particular words and phrases that may help me illuminate the center of being a Core Knowledge teacher. Technical terms give grandeur to educational problems and solutions that might mystify and

impress teachers. Gadamer and van Manen encourage me to research these technical terms and other words more thoroughly. What can I learn about the “heart” of a word through re-searching and re-membering?

Van Manen (1990) reminds me: “Ordinary language is in some sense a huge reservoir in which the incredible variety of richness of human experience is deposited” (p. 61). Through carefully considering language, I seek the heart of meaning in phenomenological descriptions. Searching for the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher requires a methodology that allows me to explore language and conversation. This process is an important part of this work with Core Knowledge teachers.

Storytellers: Teacher participants. When I visited Stuart Elementary for the first time, I began to feel that this Core Knowledge school had treasures to discover behind its classroom doors and valuable conversations yet to be had with the teachers there. To protect the anonymity of those working in this school, I have used pseudonyms to name those involved with my project. I waited in the principal’s office of Stuart Elementary School in order to share my desire to work with this school on my phenomenological project. During my work with the Core Knowledge Foundation, I met principals and Core Knowledge coordinators for several schools, and through these relationships I had met a Core coordinator for a district who suggested working with one of the schools. I established contact with the principal of Stuart Elementary through this area representative. Through a connection with an educational specialist for the district, who I have known through my work with Core Knowledge, I was able to meet with the principal of Stuart. During this initial meeting, with the principal and other Core

Knowledge personnel of the school, I was able to have a conversation with the group about phenomenology, Core Knowledge, and this project. The principal gave me permission to work within the school after receiving permission from the Research Department of the school district. Working with this one Core Knowledge school would allow me the opportunity to meet with teachers on several grade levels, observe the teachers in their classrooms, and begin to see them work with Core Knowledge.

Stuart Elementary is a Title I school and is located in an inner city section of a metropolitan city in the north east United States. The school began its implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum in September 2002. During the 2004-2005 school year, there were 471 students enrolled at Stuart from kindergarten through fifth grade. Of the students enrolled, 0.2% were classified as American Indian; 1.5% Asian; 8.3% Hispanic 38.9% Black; and 51.2% White. Of this population, 68.6% qualified for free lunch, 11.0% qualified for reduced lunch, and 20.4% paid the full price for lunch. The daily attendance rate reported for the 2003-2004 school year was 93.2%. This data was obtained from the district's web site.

Once I had a preliminary conversation about Core Knowledge with the previously mentioned group from the school, it was suggested that we would be able to “walk and talk,” so I had a chance to see the school and meet some of the teachers. As I walked the halls, I had the opportunity to see students and view their artwork and classroom papers that were decorating the walls like many colorful flowers on this early spring day. The mood was one of hospitality and welcoming visitors into the rooms. The principal often stopped students to ask what they had learned that day, and they were happy to tell him and our group of something new and exciting. The many animals in their classroom

habitats—the turtles, birds, and fish lived alongside these students in a learning community. I was eager to begin my work with the teachers at Stuart.

In addition to receiving IRB clearance from the University of Maryland, I had to secure permission to conduct my study from the city district offices, where the school was located. My dissertation proposal meeting was held in May 2003, but I did not receive permission from the school district until July 2003. Since I was not allowed to contact teachers or even enter the school building without this permission from the district, I was not able to start the process of contacting teachers until the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year.

After I received permission from the district research office, I contacted the principal to ask about the best way to publicize the information about my study. Since I had not worked with this Core Knowledge school previously, I relied on the Core Knowledge coordinator and the principal to connect me with interested teachers at the school. The principal shared with me that the teachers at Stuart would be willing to work on projects that encourage professional growth and provide an opportunity to share what they are working on in their classrooms. Initially, information about my work was posted on the school website that teachers accessed daily, inviting anyone that was interested to contact me. After posting the information, I also visited the school to hand deliver letters to some teachers who had expressed interest when I met them with the principal. I met with others to explain my work more completely, since I noticed some hesitance to volunteer based on the teachers' worry about time commitments. After learning more about my work, other teachers joined the group. I also assured the teachers that I would meet with them at any time that was most convenient—whether it was before, during or

after the school day. All of the teachers chose to meet with me during the week instead of during the weekends. Initially, I had planned for between 6-8 teachers to participate, so I was eager to work with the seven teachers who came forward and volunteered their time.

I provided a written invitation to the seven teachers that explained the expectations for our time together. A copy of this invitation may be found in Appendix A. The teachers who agreed to participate in this study also signed a consent form (Appendix B) that indicated their willingness to participate in this study and informed them of the parameters of their involvement. The consent form assured the participants of any risks, benefits, and the confidentiality of their conversations.

After securing the proper documentation, I met with each teacher individually on three separate occasions with our conversations lasting between 1 to 1 ½ hours. I taped the participants with a small recorder and took notes during our conversations. After each meeting, I transcribed our conversations to interpret possible themes and also to reflect on our conversations before our next visit. On one occasion, a teacher also asked for a written transcript to reflect upon, and I provided this to him.

In addition to meeting with individual teachers, I also observed them in their classrooms. I arranged to visit classrooms for an hour long period during a Core Knowledge activity. I did not interact with the students in the classroom as part of the research for this project—other than the casual contact during my visit. I felt that it was important to see how these Core Knowledge teachers interacted with the Core Knowledge content in a classroom. Did the Core Knowledge material change from page to practice? I used my observation notes to reflect upon what the teachers thought about Core Knowledge and then how they actually engaged with the curriculum. I took careful

notes as their teaching unfolded, and I found that I used the notes as background for subsequent conversations that we held. The notes on classroom practice were helpful to use as a reference when the teachers talked about their Core Knowledge lessons.

As a final activity with the group, I gathered the Core Knowledge teachers together for a group conversation about their experiences with the curriculum. I hoped that a group conversation would lend an opportunity for teachers to be reminded of their stories of experience as called forth by others. Conversation, as Gadamer asserts, is a fluid opportunity to have a dialogue. I explain this meeting more thoroughly in a section that follows. We met as a group only one time, but our individual meetings provided time for giving and receiving of stories about Core Knowledge.

Giving and receiving stories: Conversations with others. Van Manen (1990)

writes:

In phenomenological research, the emphasis is always on the meaning of lived experience. The point of phenomenological research is to “borrow” other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience. (p. 62)

In the past, I have explored some of the aspects of being a Core Knowledge teacher through poetry, texts about teaching and curriculum and through conversations with Core Knowledge teachers who I have worked with in other schools around the country. These preliminary conversations and explorations have been enlightening. For this research, the teachers in my study have shared their experiences teaching Core Knowledge, and their conversations have provided the further text for deeper exploration and meaning making.

Gadamer (1960/2000) emphasizes the importance of a phenomenological question and conversation: “Posing a question implies openness, but also limitation. . . Hence, a

question can be asked rightly or wrongly, according as it reaches into the sphere of the truly open or fails to do so” (pp. 363-364). As I began to visit with teachers, I wanted to establish a safe place for meeting with them—a place where they felt comfortable sharing their experiences. The principal offered me any meeting rooms in the school, and he also told me I could meet with teachers in their classrooms. As our visits progressed, it was most convenient for the teachers to meet with me in their classrooms. I was eager to meet with them in their rooms to be able to see the environment in which they worked with Core Knowledge.

I began the conversation with each teacher by asking them to talk about a specific Core Knowledge lesson they had taught. They had been invited to bring that lesson along to our first conversation, as well as artifacts from that lesson, such as student work or their own development of materials for that lesson. I had hoped that bringing these artifacts would provide a concrete anchor point for their initial reflection. However, I had only one teacher actually bring an artifact to share. Dan, a first year teacher who will be introduced in chapter four, was anxious to have my feedback on a lesson he taught about different Native American dwelling spaces. He had been disappointed that the students were not developing writing skills, and he had not been able to glean answers from the Language Arts coach. Although Dan was the only teacher to bring an artifact, I found that the rest of the group was able to reflect on a favorite Core Knowledge lesson while talking with me. Having this conversation with them enabled us to talk about Core Knowledge lessons and provided a foundation for future meetings.

Next, I hoped to gather textual background about their experiences with the Core Knowledge curriculum. I sought descriptive stories about how they became aware of the

curriculum. In what ways did they arrive at teaching Core Knowledge at their school? What are their experiences with Core Knowledge? The teachers were able to talk with me about their first experiences with Core Knowledge. Three of the seven teachers worked with the Core Knowledge curriculum at another school before coming to Stuart Elementary, and their experiences were interesting to compare to their current situation. The other four teachers had not heard about Core Knowledge before coming to Stuart, and none of the teachers had been familiar with Core Knowledge before teaching it in their classrooms. One thought that she had heard of E. D. Hirsch's writings in education classes, but she was not familiar with the curriculum.

I also gathered textual background about how Core Knowledge teachers develop relationships with their students and get them motivated about Core Knowledge. What has been their most memorable experiences in working with Core Knowledge? In what ways does the grade level team work together on Core Knowledge units? I found that asking about grade level dynamics led us to talk about the culture of the school and to describe their ideas about collaboration. Talking about their relationships enabled the teachers to reflect on how Core Knowledge had affected their work with others in the school building.

Without questions, it is more difficult to establish a dialogue with Core Knowledge teachers and learn more about the curriculum. Gadamer (1960/2000) continues: "The art of questioning is the art of questioning further—i.e., the art of thinking. It is called the dialectic because it is the art of conducting real dialogue" (p. 367). The questions and the art of conversation hold the deep meanings that I seek to understand as I learn about Core Knowledge and curriculum reform. At the beginning of

this study, I was concerned about the flow of the conversation that Gadamer describes, and that the conversations would not be deep enough to yield insights into Core Knowledge. However, after the conversations with the teachers, I was surrounded by their words collected on tapes, transcribed and then organized, to mine for deeper understanding. There was a wealth of information.

Phenomenological conversations are based on the openness of questions and encouragement to explore deeper meaning. Gadamer (1960/2000) writes:

We say that we “conduct” a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. . . it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation or even that we become involved in it. (p. 383)

Gadamer’s description of a conversation is one that I employ in my conversations with Core Knowledge teachers. Phenomenology does not require a strict list of questions that I address to Core Knowledge teachers, but instead I seek to elicit as rich a description as I can about the experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher. I found that I gained access to the hearts of the teachers by sharing my own stories about Core Knowledge, as well. These conversations and interactions with Core Knowledge teachers provided the foundation for thematizing and the body of this work.

The Heart of Meaning: Thematic Analysis

Experience is not wordless to begin with, subsequently becoming an object of reflection by being named, by being subsumed under the universality of the word. Rather, experience of itself seeks and finds words that express it. We seek the right word—i.e., the word that really belongs to the thing—so that in it the thing comes into language. (Gadamer, 1960/2000, p. 417)

In his description, Gadamer writes about the importance of finding a way to express an experience through truly the right word—the word that actually “belongs” to the thing. Finding such words requires a deep reflection on the language of the text. That

reflection is part of the process that van Manen suggests for working with thematizing. To search for meaning is to search diligently and with great care to find exactly the right words to describe an experience. In order to get at the heart of what it truly means to live the experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher, I need to work closely with the text that I glean from talking with Core Knowledge teachers. Van Manen (1990) writes: “The purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the essential meaning of something” (p. 77). By thematizing, the phenomenological writer strives to “read between the lines” in collected texts and derive meaning to explain that experience. “‘Theme analysis’ refers then to the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work” (van Manen, 1990, p. 78).

Working with the text of phenomenological conversations is a daunting task, and finding a way to organize the texts and make meaning is characterized by searching for themes—searching for the common structures that make up the experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher (van Manen, 1990). As I read text, I search for instances where I find the essence of what it means to be a Core Knowledge teacher. In searching for these themes, I discover the deeper meaning of Core Knowledge, and as I continue to write my way to deeper understanding, the insights gained provide a basis for suggested recommendations to improve practice.

Van Manen (1990) stresses that while some phenomenological descriptions may be deeper than others, there is always meaning to be gleaned from a conversation. He suggests three approaches to search for thematic statements within phenomenological descriptions:

1. the wholistic or sententious approach;
2. the selective or highlighting approach;
3. the detailed or line-by-line approach. (pp. 92-93)

Each approach provides a different way to dwell with the text and search for thematic statements. The wholistic approach provides an overall interpretation of the text. Each person has a different reaction when reading text; however, this type of reading provides a general overview of the piece and directs the reader to think about “What sententious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole?” (van Manen, 1990, p. 93). The wholistic approach is the most general approach and provides first impressions of the text. After transcribing the texts of all of the conversations, I would play the tapes again and read through the text in its entirety. Not only did this provide me an opportunity to check the accuracy of my transcription, but it also provided this first wholistic view of the text. It was helpful for me to hear the voices of the teacher again and then connect the voices with words on a page.

The selective or highlighting approach to the text is a more specific way to approach the text and attempt to discover themes. During this approach, the phenomenologist looks for particular phrases that stand out in the text. This approach involves several readings of the text and recognizing important phrases. The reader may ask, “What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?” (van Manen, 1990, p. 93). When the reader locates these phrases, they should be marked in some way—by circling or highlighting for future reference. After I used the wholistic approach to read the transcripts, then I employed this method. I used different colors to highlight any interesting or provocative phrases that led me to think about Core Knowledge more deeply or differently. Often, I

would highlight a text between conversations with the participants, and then I would use these phrases with the teachers when I met with them again. As I was thematizing in this way between conversations, I was able to keep the teachers connected to our last conversation and was able to explore more deeply what they had shared with me.

The third approach to reading the text involves the most specific reading. The detailed reading approach involves reading the text sentence by sentence and contemplating the meaning of each sentence. The specific question asked of the reader and text is, “What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?” (van Manen, 1990, p. 93). This close reading of the text reveals even deeper meaning about the phenomenon to support the first two, more general readings of the text. Van Manen’s suggestions for thematic analysis show the necessity of the phenomenologist being open to the text in order to find new meaning. The themes describe the structures that make up the experience (van Manen, 1990). These themes do not always occur in plain sight, which is why the process of thematizing in phenomenological writing takes such careful reading and analyzing.

In order to work with this detailed approach, I made copies of the transcripts and then cut them apart in order to focus on line-by-line portions of the conversations. I assigned each teacher a color of index card and then attached these parts of text to different index cards so that I would know which teacher made that observation. The index cards were a way for me to move text around, arrange sentences to see them next to each other, and to open the transcript up to deeper interpretation. Again, it was then easier to organize parts of text and bring those specific sentences to the attention of the teachers.

After careful thematizing work with these texts, I met with the Core Knowledge teachers as a group in the school to share themes for further dialogue. Van Manen (1990) writes, “Once transcript themes have been identified by the researcher then these themes may become objects of reflection in follow-up hermeneutic conversations in which both the researcher and the interviewee collaborate” (p. 99). Unfortunately, I could not find a time after school for all of the teachers to meet, and one teacher had decided that she did not want to interact with a group. We gathered as five of the seven participants. I provided a copy of the themes to the group that seemed to be emerging from our conversations. The themes were only a draft of ideas at this point, and I was hopeful that we could talk through them. The initial ideas for discussion included:

- teachers not having the knowledge to teach Core Knowledge;
- not having the resources needed (resources at hand) and how this makes teachers feel about teaching Core Knowledge;
- dealing with issues of equity and fairness (also the difficulty in teaching Core Knowledge topics to some classes) What does this mean in relation to the separation into “houses?”;
- issues of “work” and what that means in the learning of Core Knowledge concepts.

Although it was helpful to hear about the teachers’ reactions to the emerging themes, they were not open to discuss their insights with me in front of the group. They were able to read over what I had provided and agree to the ideas I was developing. I felt that the meeting did not go any deeper than the words on the page, and instead stayed with polite conversation. However, the meeting was helpful as a first step for me to begin

to organize my thoughts and bring the teachers together in a collegial atmosphere. I was glad that I had to been able to organize a time for them to come together and talk, even if they did not open up as I would have hoped. As I noticed throughout the time with the teachers, they needed these times to gather together.

Van Manen (1990) writes: “In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (p. 107). Thus, thematizing is a careful and thought-provoking activity. This important process of thematizing leads to further phenomenological writing and deeper exploration into the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher.

Wearing my Heart on My Sleeve: Phenomenological Writing

Van Manen (1990) stresses the importance of writing in human science research: “To write is to measure the depth of things, as well to come to a sense of one’s own depth” (p. 127). The writing process brings me closer to the experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher through writing about other teachers’ experiences, as well as reflecting on my own. Using the themes I discover, I explore those revelations through phenomenological writing. Van Manen (1990) writes: “Yet for the human sciences, and specifically for hermeneutic phenomenological work, writing is closely fused into the research activity and reflection itself” (p. 125). What have I learned about Core Knowledge? What lies at the heart of a Core Knowledge teacher? In what ways does Core Knowledge contribute or take away from a classroom? In what ways has this project changed me? Within phenomenological writing lies the discoveries and work with Core Knowledge teachers, and the writing in this project is inextricably linked to the research.

Phenomenological writing pays special attention to language because of its power to name “anew”—to see the ordinary in extraordinary ways.

The language used in Core Knowledge arises from the conceptualization of its intention, which may or may not be interpreted in the same way as teachers live it. Van Manen (1990) insists, it is important to listen to the “subtle undertones of language, to the way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak” (p. 111). Allowing for the things themselves to speak requires special attention to language, and it requires a way of writing that brings about new possibilities in the very act of naming.

Poetry has a link to this meaning-making. Heidegger (1971/1975) maintains that reading and writing poetry form the backbone to living and understanding life. He closely relates language and poetry by saying, “Language itself is poetry in the essential sense” (1971/1975, p. 74). Hofstadter (1975) agrees: “So poetry—together with the language and thinking that belong to it and are identical with it as essential poetry—has for Heidegger an indispensable function for human life: it is the creative source of the humanness of the dwelling life of man [*sic*]” (p. xv).

Heidegger, while exploring questions of being, realizes that different modes of writing may open up ideas about being. Poetry provides the opportunity for writers to express deeper meanings, and it also affords the opportunity to choose words carefully to capture that meaning. Heidegger emphasizes the meaning of questioning and traveling the pathway that may lead to deeper understanding of those questions and answers. “Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings *to* their being *from out of* their being” (Heidegger, 1971/1975, p. 73). Heidegger helps us see the importance of language for

bringing ideas into existence. As teachers reflect on their experiences with Core Knowledge, their naming has such potential for poetic rendering of new understandings. My challenge is to bring their lived meanings to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon as I engage in phenomenological writing. “Phenomenological text succeeds when it lets us see that which shines through, that which tends to hide itself” (van Manen, 1990, p. 130). And the hermeneutic interpretive process is about uncovering that which is hidden or covered over.

Touching Hearts with Research

It all seems somewhat absurd until we begin to discern the silence in the writing—the cultivation of one’s being, from which the worlds begin to proliferate in haltingly issued groupings, then finally in a carefully written work, much less completed than interrupted, a blushing response to a call to say something worth saying, to actually *say* something, while being thoughtfully aware of the ease in which such speaking can reduce itself to academic chatter. (van Manen, 1990, p. 8)

One needs only to travel to the nearest bookstore to see the many volumes of work about teaching. In the local store, there is an enormous bookshelf full of books on teaching: inspirational stories, ways to spot a poor teacher in the classroom, what it means to be a teacher, or ways to express gratitude to teachers. There, nestled in the bottom shelves are even the books by Hirsch, *What Your 1st Grader Needs to Know*, and so on. The writing on education is expansive, and I look at its potential for illuminating the world of teaching, particularly teaching Core Knowledge. I think beyond the local bookstore, as I bring it into the local classroom. As van Manen emphasizes above, I have a desire to actually *say* something to teachers about Core Knowledge, and to make the event of working with Core Knowledge better for all those involved. In what ways can I expose how working with Core Knowledge can change the experience of teaching that

curriculum? Huntley (1995) asks, “Do I dare put my emotional and intellectual foundations on the line every day by attempting to reflect on my deepest beliefs in the daily tempest of middle school?” (p. 107). I ask Core Knowledge teachers to explore their “emotional and intellectual foundations” with this curriculum and then ask the same question that Huntley asks. In what ways can I use these beliefs in the classroom from day to day? I ask teachers to explore their feelings about Core Knowledge, as I do when I write, and then think about how those feelings transform their Core Knowledge classrooms. Huntley (1995) concludes:

But don’t count me out yet. I still take great pleasure in returning to the safety of my home, where I can face the things I believe at the bottom of my heart. I wash my hands, and I tell myself, “I am a teacher.” My ideals intact, my hands clean, I sit and reflect upon the day that, once the laughter and the tears have been wiped away, becomes a tool with which I may better myself. (p. 107)

I journey with Core Knowledge teachers into the heart of their experiences and retrospections about the curriculum. My desire is that this work will leave a lasting impression on those who teach Core Knowledge, and that all teachers can use these insights. I want this work to contribute to the debate about Core Knowledge on another level where teachers’ voices can be heard so that Core Knowledge can be understood from the core. Chapter five is an exploration of this pedagogical potential.

I continue to ask: **What is the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher?** Rilke (1910/1975) writes about experiencing things in order to know them and refers to this experience as “blood-remembering,” a connection to the heart metaphor. He writes: “For verses are not, as people imagine, simply feelings—they are experiences” (pp. 93-94). Rilke reminds the reader that writing, whether it is poetry or otherwise, is intimately connected to living and living through certain experiences. As I continue down

the road to the heart of what it means to be a Core Knowledge teacher, I try now to put those experiences into words and into a phenomenological rendering that will reveal the heart of the experience.

**CHAPTER FOUR:
SEARCHING THE HIDDEN SPACES FOR THE INSPIRITED:
IMAGES OF TEACHING CORE KNOWLEDGE**

In our curricular landscape, it is a space that knows planned curriculum and live(d) curriculum, a space of generative interplay between planned curriculum and live(d) curriculum. It is a site wherein the interplay is the creative production of newness, where newness can come into being. It is an inspirited site of being and becoming. (Aoki, 2005, p. 420)

Just as Aoki (2005) writes about moving toward an inspirited curriculum, I search for the spaces that allow teachers and students to become “inspirited” in their hearts about the Core Knowledge curriculum—to find a way that Core Knowledge might inspire them. I have seen inspired Core Knowledge teachers and students, so I know that this transformation is possible. However, my conversations and work with Core Knowledge teach me that those inspirited moments often happen in the hidden spaces—the spaces that are not always apparent in teaching and schools today. These spaces appear to us in times of tension, obscured by different views and experiences with Core Knowledge. Core Knowledge might be buried under the view of curriculum as plan, or its shutters of possibility in classrooms might be closed.

The American Heritage Dictionary (2001) defines “inspirit” as a verb that means “to instill courage or life into, animate” (p. 442). To instill life into means to nurture the heart and keep it strong. To inspirit teachers is to instill in them the ways to recognize that curriculum “can influence the ways people can be attuned to the world” (Aoki, 2005, p. 360). The word inspirit is also defined as a synonym with “encourage,” derived from the Old French word *encoragier*, meaning courage or “to inspire with hope, courage or confidence” (p. 284). Where are the places that teachers are encouraged and inspirited by the Core Knowledge curriculum to bring it forward to their students? Unfortunately, in

my conversations with the Core Knowledge teachers, I have found that these places are hard to find. The hidden spaces that hold the treasures of teaching Core Knowledge escape being seen and felt by teachers and cause them to struggle with Core Knowledge instead of seeing its potential.

How do the teachers at Stuart Elementary School experience Core Knowledge, and what can it teach us about making connections between curriculum as plan and curriculum as lived? As Aoki (2005) writes about curriculum, he reminds teachers and students that to be inspired means to study curriculum as well as to live it. When Core Knowledge is hidden under the appearance of choice, teachers view it as a plan to be implemented, rather than as an experience to be lived. Core Knowledge at Stuart was hidden under a process of choosing a method of reform. Teachers were led to believe that it was their decision, and consequently did not protest that choice. What follows is the search for hidden spaces—the spaces where teachers and students experience Core Knowledge authentically.

Core Knowledge as the Appearance of Choice: Searching the Heart for Answers

Stand Still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you. (Wagoner, 1999, p. 10)

At the beginning of my conversations with Core Knowledge teachers, I felt lost in Core Knowledge and faced with a similar situation as the poet Wagoner when I did not

know how to maneuver through the facets of Core Knowledge. Wagoner writes about letting the forest find you, and in writing hermeneutically, themes find me as I read and re-read the conversations with the teachers, as well as listen to their voices on the tapes in the stillness of my writing place. Gadamer (1960/2000) writes, “Hermeneutics must start from the position that the person seeking to understand something has a bond to the subject matter that comes into language through the traditionary text and has, or acquires, a connection with the tradition from which the text speaks” (p. 295). I have been a Core Knowledge teacher, and as I wait for the themes to appear to me through the teachers’ voices, I am connected to the Core Knowledge traditions that bind us, and the “language in which the text addresses us, the story that it tells us” (Gadamer, 1960/2000, p. 295). I wait for the story to come forward and find me as I seek to understand the teachers’ experiences with the Core Knowledge curriculum. Gadamer’s writing about texts also includes the in-between spaces, those that hold tension, like the spaces that Aoki (2005) describes for teachers. The in-between holds much promise for me to discover what teaching Core Knowledge means. Gadamer (1960/2000) writes, “Here, too, there is a tension. It is in the play between the traditionary text’s strangeness and familiarity to us, between being historically intended and distanced object and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between*” (p. 295).

The Core Knowledge teachers shared with me their experiences about feeling lost in the choice to bring Core Knowledge to Stuart Elementary. In beginning this journey with the teachers, I began to see the choices that were being made by them and for them in relation to Core Knowledge, and these choices had a profound effect on their instruction and direction of the school year. In what ways do teachers turn away from

uncomfortable situations and “conform” to what is around them? How do issues of choice affect relationships that teachers form with each other and to Core Knowledge? As I began to think about these choices, I remember that Heidegger (1953/1996) connects our whole being (*Dasein*) with our relationship to the world (care) and that this relationship nurtures personal growth. When the world does not realize being, whether in schools or other places, one can feel invisible—without being. In what ways does this attitude of invisibility affect teaching? Do teachers value their choices and input when they do not feel like they are being seen or heard? What happens to one’s core when not allowed expression?

The American Heritage Dictionary (2001) defines “voice” in several contexts. Many of the definitions relate voice to sound, but voice also is defined as “the right or opportunity to express choice or opinion” (p. 910), such as using your voice or losing it. Loss of voice is also a loss of heart. Sound is partially described as a “vibratory disturbance. . .the sensation stimulated by such as disturbance” (p. 790). The idea of a “disturbance” related to sound and voice resonates with teachers. Without sound, there is no disturbance, only silence. However, with sound and voice, there is stimulation for disturbance and the expression of choice. The definitions show how vital an inner voice can be for teachers. To “choose” means to “select with care” or to “pick out” which indicates that there is more than one option to select (p. 158). That may not always be the case. Schools may proclaim teacher choice and freedom in instruction, but the choice may not clear, or teachers may have been pressured to choose one curriculum over another. In what ways is this reflected with the teacher participants at Stuart Elementary? As I introduce the teachers, their voices resonate in my mind as their stories are told.

The Choicemakers: Core Knowledge Teachers

Eventually I came to realize that teaching was like writing. Just as I had to find my writing voice, I also had to find my teaching voice. (Cisneros, as cited in Michie, 1999, p. x)

To find the beat of one's heart and find one's teaching voice, schools have to be willing to allow and nurture that voice. In what ways do teachers create their Core Knowledge voices? How can they speak if they can't understand the language of the Core Knowledge curriculum? Teachers cannot teach the curriculum if they do not have the background upon which to build. Ironically, the Core Knowledge curriculum requires students to build on prior knowledge in order to gain the most from this curriculum. Might building on the teachers' prior knowledge be just as important?

Teachers view educational programs with a cautious eye because they don't know where to start, and many tire of thinking about how to begin again without the support needed. As I began to talk with these teachers, I realized that they did not have the background to get started with Core Knowledge, which requires extensive knowledge in many subjects—subjects that they have not studied since their days in teacher preparation—or even high school. This required background knowledge presents a particular problem for elementary school teachers who often are self-contained, teaching all eight of the Core Knowledge subject areas in their rooms. This lack of knowledge became immediately apparent in our beginning conversations. As I introduce the teachers, all names, including, the school and local areas, have been changed to pseudonyms.

Joanne is White and came to Stuart because she wanted to teach and could not find a job in her home state. She says, "At home, there are so many teachers that I applied

to jobs for nine months. I would go to an interview and there would be 2000 applicants for one teaching job.” Joanne has been teaching for eight years in the city. She always has taught in an urban school district setting, and had experience teaching Core Knowledge at another school before she came to Stuart, where she has been for three years. When reconstitution threatened her previous school, Joanne and Marilyn, another colleague, decided that they wanted a fresh start in another place. Joanne describes the situation: “Our principal was sent to another school in the city that was taken over by the state—a reconstituted school. And we had the choice to go with her, but it was a humongous school with about ten grade levels, you know, ten of *each* grade level. I just didn’t want to go to a school like that.” So Joanne and Marilyn opted for Stuart as they had come to know the principal of that school.

After transferring to Stuart, Joanne was involved in the committee that researched new curriculum options for the school. Core Knowledge was one of the options, and Joanne was familiar with the curriculum from her previous school; however, she wanted another reform method as her first choice. Joanne did not have the best experience with Core Knowledge at her previous school, and she was “kind of disappointed” when Core Knowledge was chosen at Stuart; “Not that Core Knowledge is bad, but I really didn’t know enough about it to know how much of a difference it could make.”

Sheila is a White woman who has been teaching for 16 years in the city and about 6 years at Stuart. She proudly claims that teaching is her second career. Sheila was also at another Core Knowledge school before she came to Stuart. That experience with Core Knowledge was her first introduction to the curriculum, and she did not have a good experience. She describes it as “horrible, absolutely horrible.” She cites lack of materials

and support at her previous school as reasons that she has not supported Core Knowledge.

Marilyn is White and has been teaching for 14 years in the district, and says that she has moved around quite often because “I haven’t found my niche yet.” She first taught Core Knowledge at another elementary school in the city with Joanne, her colleague at Stuart, and has been at Stuart for about three years. Marilyn’s experience with Core Knowledge at her previous school left her questioning if Core Knowledge teachers have enough background to teach the curriculum. When she taught at her previous school, she taught parts of Core Knowledge, but she felt she was lacking in her history background, in particular.

Marilyn also was involved with the committee that researched Core Knowledge as an option for Stuart’s curriculum change. Her first choice was for another reform method, like Joanne. She says: “My vote for the other reform was not based on whether or not I liked Core as much as [what] I felt the children would get with the other method. I did both methods and I thought that one was more responsible for student achievement than Core was.” By the time that Marilyn and I met, she had grown in her expertise with teaching Core Knowledge, and she was eager to talk about the experience of getting to that point.

Stacey is a White teacher who was another transplant to Stuart. She came to Stuart to find a job, after going to school in the Northeast. Her experience in classrooms had been through student teaching, and she had not heard of Core Knowledge before coming to Stuart.

Stacey was not involved in the process of bringing Core Knowledge to Stuart. She says, “Last year, I taught 5th grade and we had Core Knowledge then. Then this year, I had second grade. And pretty much we were just told. I wasn’t involved in the process of getting it or anything.”

Marjorie is a White teacher and has taught at Stuart for five years. She talks about her experiences student teaching and her teaching career, because she began her student teaching in another county, which is quite different from the city where Stuart is located. She speaks of these experiences to show her familiarity with change. “So all three were totally different, even for one grade level, it was totally different what we did in Kindergarten in the city and Kindergarten in the county—so for me personally, I am kind of used to change, and I didn’t come in with expectations.” Even though Marjorie was not familiar with Core Knowledge throughout her student teaching, she shares that she is a strong supporter of Core Knowledge, and she has many stories of the curriculum’s success with her classes.

Marjorie was not directly involved in the committee that researched Core Knowledge, but she did vote to begin implementing it in the school. She says, “We had a choice between several programs and we had decided to use Core Knowledge. . . before that I did not know what Core Knowledge was. I came without any expectations and I did not know what to look for.” Marjorie feels that Core Knowledge has been a success in her classroom, and she has integrated the curriculum with many other teaching methods. Marjorie’s room often is visited by other teachers who want to observe her teaching lessons, and there is evidence of her love of teaching throughout her room and outside in the hallways surrounding her room as well.

William is an African American teacher, who came from a background of teaching physical education. William has been teaching at Stuart for five years, but this year was his first direct involvement with Core Knowledge history. When Core Knowledge was first introduced in the curriculum, William taught the math section to his students. His transition to this different aspect of teaching Core Knowledge has forced him to think about the content of the curriculum and what connections he can make in the classroom. William has struggled with Core Knowledge and how it impacts the students in his room. He describes some of his first impressions: “So last year, they went through that whole process of the tests and trying to teach—which to me really started giving me a negative feeling about it. Because they bring in this new system, and they are giving you all this new curriculum stuff—for a teacher who knows nothing, now I’ve got to study Renaissance theory?” William has struggled with Core Knowledge, but he is another teacher who is questioning and learning as he goes.

Dan is a White, first year teacher, who is completing an alternative certification program with a local university. The idea behind Dan’s program is to move highly qualified teachers into schools that need them, and it is typically a program for career changers. Dan describes himself as someone who has had several careers—including ones in the military and computer science fields.

Since this is his first year, Dan was not involved with choosing Core Knowledge for Stuart, but he constantly is thinking about how it impacts his instruction. Dan still is thinking about how he feels about Core Knowledge and all the other aspects of teaching. He said to me, “I haven’t done any student teaching. I mean, whatever, September 4, or whatever the first day was—that was the first day I saw more than two kids in the same

room at the same time. Everything was new. So there was a lot I thought about Core Knowledge that I imagine is unique to that first year.” I found Dan constantly questioning and thinking about schools and the curriculum. Our conversations were peppered with questions such as: “What is the purpose of Core Knowledge? What is the big picture with Core Knowledge, and why doesn’t anybody really have a decent answer?” Dan’s questions moved me to think more deeply about Core Knowledge and how he was using it in his classroom.

Although these seven teachers were at different points in their careers and had different stories to tell, I could feel that they were all passionate about teaching. They spoke about the students in their classes with great concern and pride. The concern rose from wanting to do the best to make sure that each student was learning and growing, and the pride arose from telling me about the students’ accomplishments. These teachers continued struggling with Core Knowledge even though they felt like they were not participants in the choice-making that was determining their future. These seven teachers were my companions on this journey into the heart of Core Knowledge. They were willing to open their hearts, and I was honored to be in that space with them. We search together for the hidden spaces that bring forward what it means to teach Core Knowledge. Although we may have felt lost in the beginning, we continued to find our way through sharing conversations and time together.

The Choice: Be-coming or Not Be-coming

It was definitely a little bit overwhelming at first. How are you going to start, or how are things are going to match up? (Stacey)

In my conversations with the teachers, I found that even though Core Knowledge was an option for a new curriculum at the school, initially the teachers did not know

about Core Knowledge. As Stacy ponders in the quote above, she was overwhelmed by the simple idea of where to start and how Core Knowledge was going to match up with current teaching practices. Several teachers spoke with me about their initial reaction to the curriculum choice, and their loss about what to think because they lacked background information about Core Knowledge. How can schools expect teachers to enact new programs without having the necessary background on these programs?

After teachers at Stuart Elementary began to implement Core Knowledge, they found that they did not have enough knowledge of the curriculum content, and they were not comfortable teaching it. When a teacher is made to feel ignorant and ignored by the school and district, what happens to their core? Barth (1990) writes about creating a community of learners and leaders in schools where teachers are made to feel confident in the instruction at their school and not angry or ambivalent. He writes, “The energy, the fun, the commitment around leadership comes from brainstorming one’s *own* solutions and then trying to implement them. For a community of leaders to develop, tough important, problems need to be conveyed to teachers before, not after, the principal has played them out” (p. 135). Barth explains that by including teachers in the process of decision making, the district can help them become stakeholders in the process, not outsiders.

When schools decide to become Core Knowledge schools, the process requires work and learning on the part of teachers and students. There are generally two ways schools can choose to implement Core Knowledge. Implementation can occur informally where the schools fund the materials and training themselves at their own pace, using their own timetable. Or, in a more formal approach, schools can apply for educational

grants that will provide the funds to implement Core Knowledge at their schools. The United States Department of Education selected Stuart Elementary to receive a Comprehensive School Reform grant (CSR grant), which is awarded to a school that is willing to implement a reform that uses scientific evidence to improve student achievement. During this period, the school may use the grant money for instruction and materials to support the reform method that the school chooses. During this process of “choosing” a reform method for use with CSR funds, schools may attend presentations where the school reforms are presented and representatives give information to the teachers about the reform. Generally, teachers then take back the information to the school to inform the rest of the faculty.

According to the accounts of the Stuart teachers with whom I conversed, a committee of teachers attended the presentations on various reform choices and then presented their findings to the rest of the faculty. Marilyn remembers, “We went to different places, and they set out different options and came back with information and opinions and presented that to the staff. So we presented the different options and the ones that we liked, we picked.” There was much perceived power in this committee, as they winnowed down the choices for the rest of the faculty, and presented their choice of the curriculum reforms. Fullan (1991) writes:

One of the great mistakes over the past 30 years has been the naïve assumption that involving *some* teachers on curriculum committees or in program development would facilitate implementation because it would increase acceptance by *other* teachers. . . . It was just assumed that “teachers” were involved because “teachers” were on major committees or project teams. Well, they were not involved, as the vast majority of classroom teachers know. (p. 127)

By involving the teachers on the committee it is easier to perpetuate the illusion of choice because it is a committee of one's peers making the presentation. As Marjorie states later, she questioned how much she could possibly learn about a curriculum method in a few minutes, but she did listen to her fellow teachers. The principal held a meeting one afternoon to chart the course for the upcoming year. Marilyn describes the day that the faculty "chose" Core Knowledge:

We took it to the staff and then the staff voted. There were only about ten of us present at the voting. So it wasn't exactly the entire staff. So it was a tie between these two different programs, and Mr. Hobbes made the deciding vote. So that is how we became a Core Knowledge school.

Marilyn was involved in the committee that presented the curriculum choices to the faculty. While she remembers the vote in one way, Sheila has a different perception, which she crafted after listening to what happened at the meeting: "Because he said, then, okay, I'll cast the final vote. Now I wasn't there, but this is what I heard. And he did it. That wasn't right." What did choice come to mean here for teachers? Joanne describes her experience:

Oh I wasn't happy, but there wasn't anything I could do about it. I don't think it would have done a bit of good. He knew what he wanted from the beginning. Which was fine, but he should have just told us that and not made it seem like we had a play in it. And just waste our time.

Joanne says, "Then we had to pick a comprehensive school reform grant, and it was kind of thrown at us. It wasn't really what we wanted, but it was kind of what the principal wanted and that is what we got." These teachers' accounts of what happened show the appearance of choice. Joanne and Marilyn discuss that they knew it was not their choice to implement Core Knowledge but the choice of the principal. By having a "vote" on

Core Knowledge, the principal tried to create an illusion of choice. However, the teachers know that they were not involved in the choice.

Not all of the teachers had such adverse reactions. Marjorie did not feel that the presenters gave enough information about all of the reform methods. However, she has been enthusiastic about choosing Core Knowledge and works to succeed at the program in the school. She describes her experience with the choice of Core Knowledge in this way:

So certain things change in the school program and more research comes out and the city picks a different program and the other program that you feel comfortable with, it's gone. So I think for me personally, I kind of go with the flow. I didn't really know what to expect from Core Knowledge. We had a brief introduction. We had several programs that we were voting on . . . Core Knowledge proved to be—out of one minute presentations of each program, how much can you get? But it seems to be the most flexible, the most teacher friendly. . .

Can teachers teach Core Knowledge when they do not understand the background or when they do not feel like they have content knowledge or the materials? What if teachers have not worked with the curriculum before and now they feel like they are being thrust into something that they don't understand? Is it really choice if it is majority rule?

The word “rule” means to have “governing power, authority, or an authoritative direction for conduct or procedure” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 728), and illustrates the environment in which the teachers chose Core Knowledge. It was a limiting environment, even though there were several reform methods from which to choose. In contrast, a “choice” comes from choosing or “the power, right or liberty to choose” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 158), which are all democratic words indicating a true voice in the system of choice. Marjorie recognizes that she did not

have a voice in the process of choosing Core Knowledge due to lack of knowledge.

However, she decides to “go with the flow,” indicating that there is nothing she can do about it immediately except do her usual good job with instruction—throwing herself into the curriculum and making it meaningful for the students. Fullan (1991) calls this “false clarity” which “occurs when people think that they have changed but have only assimilated the superficial trappings of the new practice” (p. 35).

According to the teachers, the principal’s mind was already made up when he called the meeting, and they were there only to perpetuate the myth of a democratic system in the school. It’s not clear how they knew that the principal had already made a decision, and they were able to give me their opinion about the meeting. Since they could not choose in the sense of the definition above, they were not participating in a democratic system, but participated instead in a process that heightened their false consciousness about the new school curriculum. Perhaps their participation in this kind of process made them assume that the principal had already made up his mind. As Joanne states, they knew that the principal was already intent on what he wanted from the beginning. Carr and Kemmis (1986) describe this type of situation as “certain social mechanisms operat[ing] to bind people to irrational and distorted ideas about their social reality” (p. 96). The group of teachers was in a disadvantaged position from the beginning because they did not get to participate wholly in the gathering of information or in the vote. Critical theory seeks to show that this kind of “power-over” system is a disadvantage to the teachers by showing that their rights are being suppressed, and they are instead prisoners to the choices of the district or even the principal of the school. By

being prisoner to the process, they do not come forward to protest because they are convinced it will not do any good. Carr and Kemmis (1986) write:

In short, the role of the teacher is one of passive conformity to the practical recommendations of educational theorists and researchers. Teachers are not themselves regarded as professionally responsible for making educational decisions and judgments, but only for the efficiency with which they implement the decisions about how educational practice can be improved that are made by educational theorists on the basis of their scientific knowledge. (p. 70)

This “passive conformity” is the false consciousness that defines the teachers at Stuart.

They recognize this false consciousness, but they do not rise to do anything about it.

Although the teachers at Stuart did not want Core Knowledge, they were now working with a curriculum that they did not really support. In what ways did this affect how they were teaching Core Knowledge? Even though teachers told me that they did not want Core, they continued to teach it and accepted it as the curriculum for their classrooms.

The “change” has not really occurred, however, because the teachers really do not accept it intellectually in their hearts. By denying them the choice, the administration has taken away teacher control. Change had been packaged as the best option for Stuart, but the teachers have not had a voice in this change. The district wanted schools to choose a reform method, so those at Stuart had to choose something to teach. Hargreaves (1994)

writes:

The involvement of teachers in educational change is vital to its success, especially if the change is complex and is to affect many settings over a long period of time. And if this involvement is to be meaningful and productive, it means more than teachers acquiring new knowledge of curriculum content or new techniques of teaching. Teachers are not just technical learners. They are social learners, too. (p. 11)

So, in essence, there has been teacher involvement in the curriculum change to Core Knowledge in name only.

Once the teachers knew that they were going to have Core Knowledge at their school, they had to participate in the designated Core Knowledge training from the Foundation in order to learn about what they were going to teach. *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2001) defines “train” as “to coach in or accustom to a mode of behavior or performance; to make or become proficient with specialized instruction or practice” (p. 864). To “train” the teachers meant making them familiar with the behavior and performance expected of them in a Core Knowledge school. Once the school perpetuated the choice of Core Knowledge, then there had to be some type of training to make everyone feel competent to teach the curriculum. Aoki (2005) describes this process of training:

If the planners regard teachers as essentially installers of the curriculum, implementing assumes an instrumental flavour. It becomes a process, making of teachers—installers, in the fashion of plumbers who install their wares. Within this scheme of things, teachers are asked to be doers, and often they are asked to participate in implementation workshops on “how to do this and that.” Teachers are “trained,” and in becoming trained, they become effective in trained ways of “doing.” At times, at such workshops, ignored are the teachers’ own skills that emerge from reflection on their experiences of teaching, and, more seriously, there is forgetfulness that what matters deeply in the situated world of the classroom is how the teachers’ “doings” flow from who they are, their beings. That is, there is a forgetfulness that teaching is fundamentally, a mode of being. (p. 160)

This type of training ignores how teachers contemplate Core Knowledge, and it only focuses on the “how” of Core Knowledge. By conducting workshops in this way, the district forgets that teaching is about the teachers, as well as what they are going to teach. Such “training” ignores the spaces between, where teachers might contemplate and begin to live Core Knowledge. Without this space, Core Knowledge is lost in the “training process.” Core Knowledge cannot inspire teachers, but it can only weigh them down with additional worries and cares about how to get everything done.

Without a democratic choice, it is necessary to “train” teachers about what is expected in a Core Knowledge school. Those who came to train teachers at the school coached them on how to come to Core Knowledge, but they did not really be-come Core Knowledge. Applebee (1996) would characterize this curriculum development or lack of curriculum development as one that “reinforces this emphasis on characteristics of, rather than participation in, a tradition of discourse” (p. 30). The teachers did not participate in a conversation with each other, but they were talked “to” about Core Knowledge. For those who did not want to participate in Core Knowledge in the first place, this only perpetuated a fragmented view of Core Knowledge—one where they could not fit and could not make the pieces fit their classrooms.

“Inservice” is another name for training in schools, and is a term that is not found in the dictionary to apply to school training. However, “service” is defined in various ways, including “employment in work for another; work done for others as an occupation;” or most interestingly, “to repair or maintain” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 758). When the prefix “in” appears before the word “service” then it might mean “in, into, or within” (p. 429), which shows that the teachers have to spend several days working in-service to someone else and not for what they might need for the upcoming year. Teacher “training” or inservice is, then, an act of telling teachers what to do in order to carry out “repair” functions rather than “be-coming” Core Knowledge teachers. How is it possible to maintain their “core,” the heart of what they believe about curriculum or teaching children in the midst of such repair work?

Another related term is staff development, which is a term that questions how the staff is being developed and for what purpose. The teachers went through the motions,

received the materials, and planned the curriculum for the year, but they did not make the existential transition to being Core Knowledge teachers. Fullan (1991) writes:

Why should a teacher engage in professional development anyway? Presumably, a teacher would be attracted to the idea that professional development would expand knowledge and skills, contribute to growth and enhance student learning. But what are the costs? Will professional development make the job easier or harder? The rhetoric of innovation underestimates, if it does not totally ignore, the real costs of attempting something new. (p. 318)

Teachers question why they should participate in Core Knowledge training and how it will help them implement the curriculum. When teachers are focused on the “implementation” only, they are looking at the “why” of the curriculum and not how they can experience it or bring it alive for their students. The “rhetoric of innovation” ignores the hearts of teachers, and it does not seek to inspire them. Core Knowledge professional development cannot help teachers if they do not want to attempt something new. Training without true be-coming does not seem to be enough for success, and was not enough for teachers at Stuart. The Core Knowledge training did not inspire them, but it only sought to teach them how to think about Core Knowledge in a linear way: knowledge about the curriculum, implementation, and evaluation.

After the initial meeting about Core Knowledge, some teachers did not receive the training because they were not going to be teaching Core Knowledge, while others not receiving the training were expected to teach the curriculum during the 2003-2004 school year. This was because some of the teachers were hired after the training, and the same teachers would not be teaching Science or Social Studies—the two areas upon which Core Knowledge would focus. Sheila was not present at the training, and she felt even more lost because she was trying always to catch up. A persistent theme in her agitation was that she was not “trained” on how to teach Core Knowledge. When she worked on

her year-long plan, she had someone else do it for her because she did not have any idea of what she was supposed to do. Without the training, not only did Sheila feel lost, but she never “became” a Core Knowledge teacher. William also comments on his experience without training and having to cope with the new curriculum: “They bring in this new system, and they are giving you all this new curriculum stuff. They were doing what they have done in the past with certain other tests. For a teacher who knows nothing, now I’ve got to go study the Renaissance theory. I’ve got to go study this test. That just gets overwhelming.” The sense of having an overwhelming system does not bring teachers into the curriculum but continues to alienate them from Core Knowledge. Playing the constant game of catch-up from the training causes even more stress.

Regardless of whether they experienced training or not, Stuart Elementary was now considered a Core Knowledge school, and the principal and the district expected the teachers to teach the curriculum. The teachers responded differently to these expectations, and this curriculum choice continued to thread itself throughout all aspects of the teachers’ lives. Not only would the choice of Core Knowledge affect the teachers and the way that they experienced curriculum and training, but it would also impact their spaces and connections to classrooms. A new choice can mean new places to begin, new colleagues in grade levels, new classrooms, and new hallways to wander. The new curriculum meant changes in space that did not come immediately, but began to happen gradually. Teachers often identify schools as places where their hearts reside. But when choice is taken away, what is the heart’s response to this absence? The change in physical place can obscure the spaces for growing with the curriculum.

Taking the Heart Away: How Choice Affects Place

Dwelling, however, is the basic character of Being in keeping with which mortals exist. (Heidegger, 1953/1993, p. 362)

Change can look impressive when represented in the boxes and arrows of administrator's overheads, or enumerated as stages in evolutionary profiles of school growth. But changes of this kind are. . . just all top show! They are superficial. They do not strike at the heart of how children learn and how teachers teach. They achieve little more than trivial changes in practice. Neither do changes of buildings (like open plan ones) . . . unless profound attention is paid to processes of teacher development that accompany these innovations. (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 11)

Before my conversations, I thought about Core Knowledge places in a general way—such as all Core Knowledge schools across the nation. As I have worked with the teachers from Stuart Elementary—this one school has become my specific Core Knowledge place. This school is a small and more intimate place in my mind—a place for these Core Knowledge teachers to dwell and be and a place affected by lack of choice. As the choice to implement Core Knowledge began to affect the teachers at Stuart, there was training at the school, and the school building underwent a transformation. The place changed: spaces were created for materials; classrooms were transformed into houses and teachers began the transformation to Core Knowledge teachers in this place. Dwelling in this Core Knowledge place defined teachers' senses of being in positive and negative ways.

As the changes in place occurred, the teachers began to react and feel transformed by this change. Casey (1993) writes, “Your locus deeply influences what you perceive and what you expect to be the case. . . Your immediate placement—or ‘implacement,’ as I prefer to call it—counts for much more than is usually imagined” (p. xiii). In the case with these teachers, their “implacement” in a Core Knowledge space counted for much of

their experience with and response to this curriculum. I explore some of the initial reactions to a Core Knowledge place—different from Stuart Elementary before Core Knowledge.

As I began my conversations with the teachers, they brought me into this place with them. All of my conversations took place in classrooms or conference rooms at Stuart. I was surrounded by student work, teacher materials, chalkboards, chart paper with brightly colored writing and all of the other artifacts that constitute a classroom and a school. Not only did I talk to teachers, but I also was fortunate to see them teach Core Knowledge lessons. The classrooms came alive with activity, but what did I learn from these places? Were the classrooms and the schools places for Core Knowledge teachers to dwell? Or perhaps, did these places become empty spaces without heart? In what ways did the choice to work with Core Knowledge take the heart from these teacher places? In what ways did the places in which they worked define their experience with Core Knowledge? How were the teachers affected by place?

Halls and walls: Terrains of the heart and structures of place. Morris (1981), in his book titled *Terrains of the Heart and Other Essays on Home*, writes about his great emotional connection to place, particularly his home place. Terrain leads me to think about the “topography” of the earth—mountains, valleys and the other geographical features that define places on earth (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 845). We dwell in these outside places where we marvel at the mountains and the valleys—nature’s way of separating us or bringing us together. Casey (1993) writes that there is “. . . intimate interaction of body and landscape in the achievement of orientation” (p. 28). We are connected to these outside places by the ways that we orient ourselves to the

place, and we become connected with the terrain. Casey (1993) continues, “If I am to get oriented in a landscape or seascape. . . I must bring my body into conformity with the configuration of the land or the sea. . . The conjoining of the surface of my body with the surface of the earth or sea—their common integumentation—generates the interspace in which I become oriented” (p. 28). Casey writes about this connection with the earth where we become one with the terrain.

Similarly, there is topography to the heart—an organ made up of various passageways that carry blood throughout the body. We work in man-made places that mimic these outside places, that contain halls and walls to bring us together and to divide us from each other—like the mountains and the valleys, and the passageways that we use to travel between places. The halls and walls of schools provide the structure to the place where teachers abide by certain rules. Halls move us from place to place, and the walls are built to divide us into different areas—places where we are not to cross the threshold into another area. In schools, teachers know that walls separate them, and there are those teachers who do not want others to cross into their domain. What can we learn from those unspoken rules of halls and walls and what can they teach us about Core Knowledge at Stuart? I am reminded of the words of Robert Frost (1959), “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,” and “Good fences make good neighbors” (pp. 95-96). There is something about the culture of schools that makes teachers protective of the walls, and they decorate them as a way for visitors to see at a glance what might be happening in their classrooms. Although these walls might show what is going on in classrooms, they still serve the purpose to keep people apart. Those who abide by the boundaries of walls and halls make good neighbors to their fellow teachers.

If a visitor were to walk in the halls of Stuart Elementary, as I did for the first time, the atmosphere might seem welcoming and open. Students walk the halls with teachers and they chat with each other. Since Stuart Elementary is a Core Knowledge school, that fact is published on posters inside the front door and on various bulletin boards around the school. Those who visit a Core Knowledge school may recognize it as one because of the posters and the bulletin boards that proclaim it. These spaces on the walls are part of the characteristics that define a Core Knowledge school and make it recognizable as one. These are the surface markings and the things that one may see upon entering a school. Although these posters are visible to the eye, they do not always illustrate what is in the heart or the core of the school's identity. The external markings are a mask to enhance the appearance of choice on the part of the teachers. Joanne describes Core Knowledge at Stuart:

People have, you know, bulletin boards that have to be Core Knowledge. If you stayed in the afternoon, you definitely see Core Knowledge going on in the classrooms. If you asked kids about Core Knowledge they would be able to answer a lot of questions about it.

Even though Joanne was one of the teachers who did not vote for Core Knowledge, she enthusiastically tells me about the places you can find evidence of Core Knowledge around Stuart and how she has covered her walls with evidence of the curriculum and student work. This act illustrates another aspect of the "false clarity" that Fullan (1991) writes about because the posters and the bulletin boards are part of the "superficial trappings" of the new curriculum (p. 35). In visiting schools as a Core Knowledge consultant, I also have found myself suggesting that schools put up Core Knowledge signs if they are teaching the curriculum; now I wonder what those signs really mean.

The outward sign is not always an indication of the inner core of the Core Knowledge teachers.

For example, some teachers taught Core Knowledge and covered their walls with evidence of this and felt that they were portraying Core Knowledge accurately, but others struggled with what the decorations meant. The administration and other teachers press those who do not “decorate” to conform. Sheila describes how she finally put up a Core Knowledge bulletin board because her principal suggested that she put it up. “We did that bulletin board the other day at his suggestion. You have to fake it. And see I am not a faker. I hate faking. I hate putting something down in a lesson plan that I know darn good and well that I’m not going to do.” Sheila says that she adorns her classroom walls with products from teaching Core Knowledge, but when there is not material provided, she feels like it is a waste of time to only act like she is teaching some of the content. Sheila cannot bear the thought of “faking” something, of trying to be something that she is not, and she is one of the most outspoken teachers about not becoming Core Knowledge because she was told to. A “fake” is something that is “not genuine; one that is not authentic or genuine” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 308). For Sheila, to be a fake or to fake something in her classroom shakes at the core of her being, and by not being authentic, she is not being true to herself. Heidegger (1953/1996) warns against losing authenticity, becoming more “in the world” and losing sight of one’s Being, which appears to disturb Sheila. The bulletin board in her room is only an outward sign, but she sees it as symbolic of something deeper and more personal. Again, she consents to the bulletin board because it is a symbol of false consciousness about her ideas in relation to what is happening in the school. Sheila did not choose to select Core Knowledge as the

reform at Stuart, and she says that she would not have picked it. Although she did not choose Core Knowledge, she works in a place where she has to promote the curriculum without truly believing in it.

Before Sheila came to Stuart, she was at Smithfield school—also a Core Knowledge school, where she felt even more upset about Core Knowledge and how it was portrayed there. Sheila says, “What if Core just stops? What if they don’t have any more money to go on? We put signs all over saying ‘Core.’ We are going to teach Core here, but we are not going to give the teachers anything to teach with.” At her other school, Sheila also was dealing with “covering over” what she knew was at the core of the curriculum, and she identifies the problem as a lack of materials to teach Core Knowledge. She questions calling it a Core Knowledge school when no one teaches the curriculum. When asked to put up signs, she complied, but she did not see the point of using her time to post something that did not reflect her instruction.

Marilyn says she would be embarrassed to have somebody come into the school thinking that Stuart is a Core Knowledge school. She says, “Because people don’t do it, and what they do is only halfway.” Marilyn recognizes that the Core Knowledge signs posted in the hallways are not accurate representations of how Core Knowledge exists in the school.

In addition to the way the decorations on the school illustrate the tension within the teachers’ hearts about the curriculum, there is also an important change within the school structure that occurred the same year that the principal decided to bring Core Knowledge to Stuart. The decision to arrange the students into “houses” started as a way to rally students into a grade level family, whereby these houses were a grouping of each

different grade level. Marilyn describes how the houses were supposed to create a feeling of community:

Originally, the idea was to give house points and have contests between the houses. That has not transpired. It was just a little overwhelming with everything that has changed. I think that was kind of his goal, motivating for the students to get them into the house rallies and try to better maintain and control some of the students that needed more assistance and have them in a more central location. For example, the special ed. teachers come into one room and have a group of students versus having to be—you know split between 3 or 4 rooms or gathered, picked up and taken to a separate room all together. I think he had a good idea, but it didn't quite pan out the way that I think he expected them to.

What Marilyn later tells me is that the new houses meant a move for many teachers to a new part of the building so that the houses could physically be in the same part of the school. So, not only did the principal introduce this idea of new houses, but the houses meant a change in place for the teachers. This change became overwhelming when coupled with the change to the curriculum in the same year.

The house system displaced teachers on several levels. Some of them were not able to meet with each other because they were not in the same house. This situation made the house system hard for Joanne. She says, "We are never on the same planning time to be able to meet and collaborate and talk about any of the things we are doing in Reading and Math. It is basically before school and after school on our own time. And having to switch with this 4th and 5th grade makes it difficult too. So I don't like it." Being in houses has placed a burden on those teachers who like to collaborate with each other to learn more about Core Knowledge. Joanne does not have time to meet with her peers on the fifth grade level, and she is not able to meet at all with those who she worked with before. She describes the situation of not being near her partner from last year. "So we are going to do what we did last year. And we weren't in the same house or anything.

The principal said absolutely not. He said we had to work with our house. We had to teach more than one grade level, so we basically were told what we had to do.” The situation of having new houses on campus did not create a feeling of home. Instead, the houses created walls between colleagues and did not foster the sense of place that the teachers knew at Stuart. Teachers feel out of place with the personal curriculum choices, and then are then displaced to participate in the house system. Teachers become lost in their own terrain instead of working with peers. Palmer (1998) describes how teachers can be lost when only depending on their own curriculum expertise:

If I want to teach well, it is essential that I explore my inner terrain. But I can get lost in there, practicing self-delusion and running in self-serving circles. So I need the guidance that a community of collegial discourse provides—to say nothing of the support such a community can offer to sustain me in trials of teaching and the cumulative and collective wisdom about this craft that can be found in every faculty worth its salt. (p. 142)

Living in this imposed terrain without the support of other grade level partners left Core Knowledge teachers feeling lost and working in a space that did not reflect their curriculum choices.

What does it mean to exist in a place that does not reflect personal curriculum choices? Casey (1993) writes, “We can feel out of place even *in* the home, where *Unheimlichkeit*, the uncanny anxiety of not feeling ‘at home’ may afflict us” (p. x). If we think about schools as homes away from home for teachers and students, how must it feel to be a stranger in their own worlds? Without choice there is no place to be because the teachers are defined by a curriculum method in which they do not have any faith. However, what is the responsibility of teachers to act against Core Knowledge, if it is not their choice for a curriculum? How can teachers exist in a place if they do agree with Core Knowledge, or if they do not? Some teachers accept Core Knowledge into their

school because they don't have a choice, but they also are then coping with how that affects where they exist. In what ways do teachers define what they do by their surroundings? For Sheila, it means having to become something that she is not, even though she did not choose the curriculum.

However, the classroom personality does not always reflect someone who is not comfortable with Core Knowledge. When I entered Marjorie's classroom for the first time, I enjoyed looking at the beautiful pictures and items hanging from the ceiling that showed what the class had been studying in Core Knowledge. Marjorie explains how her kindergarteners have reacted to learning the Core Knowledge content:

I have seen they have gotten very interested in especially the American symbols. I have kids ordering books that we have in class on American symbols and actually a boy today, he had his mom buy this book on the Statue of Liberty and he read the book by himself to his mom. So now I say to mom, "You have to take him to see the Statue of Liberty." I had kids cutting out the magazines, symbols, like the Liberty Bell and bringing them to school, and cutting out different pictures of President Bush and somebody said, "I saw that man on TV that is President Bush." And they brought pictures to me.

Marjorie also makes writing and reading connections in her classroom with Core Knowledge, so her students are constantly hearing about Core Knowledge in the context of their lives at home and at school. It is as Aoki (2005) describes, "Moreover, teaching is understood not only as a mode of doing but also as a mode of being-with-others. Teaching is a relating *with* students in concrete situations guided by the pedagogical good" (pp. 361-362). The students bring in pictures of people and places that they have studied in Core Knowledge and Marjorie posts them all over the walls, ceiling and floor. For Marjorie, embracing Core Knowledge means that she is able to share it with her students and their space becomes shared in a Core Knowledge classroom. Marjorie shares her perception about Core Knowledge with me:

Personally, I really think that Core Knowledge has been really helpful, especially with my class with the learning. They like to dress up as Statue of Liberty and before I put up the alphabet, I used to have pictures that they drew and they drew themselves as the Statue of Liberty.

Marjorie's remembrance of the children dressing as the Statue of Liberty reminds me of the poetry unit that I taught from Core Knowledge. I remember the stories that I have told about students being connected to poetry through our work with Core Knowledge, and how our classroom spaces became a place for poetry and sharing poems. I am always brought back to the little poems written on pieces of paper that I would find around the room or the poetry books that the students brought from the library to share on "open stool" time. I still smile when I remember their dramatic readings (complete with props they had made). I am drawn back to the memories of the students and what they learned. Such memories provide ways to reflect on the meaning of curriculum. The spaces we create in our classrooms for students to share what they have learned reflect how we interact with the curriculum and share it with students. These are the hidden spaces, but when students are thriving, they are no longer hidden. Students and teachers then share the spirit of learning in the open space of the classroom. Defining spaces, decorating them and then closely observing what is there provide some insight into the choice of Core Knowledge. Some teachers will give in to the change; others will accept change and celebrate it in their classrooms, and others will not let it define them, their instruction or their space. Teachers need not conform to Core Knowledge if they do not agree with it by changing their space to reflect something they do not accept. However, those who do celebrate Core Knowledge should bring forward that celebration in their classroom space.

Moving out and moving in. In addition to personalizing a space, another aspect of being in place is moving within it. This constant moving can define physical spaces or mental “movement” work with Core Knowledge as well. Whatever the move, it can cause concern and apathy as described by Marilyn as she shares teachers’ feelings about Core Knowledge. Marilyn notes that some areas of resistance to Core Knowledge come from teachers who resent constant change:

Core was brand new to us last year, um, no one knew anything. You finally learn stuff last year, and got switched, almost all of us, to new grades, new rooms, new places, new people. And, um, there is no accountability, so why should I learn something all over again because a lot of the people have the attitude of “I’m not doing it again because next year you are going to move me again and I’ll have to do it again and if you don’t care this year, you are not going to care next year”—you know? I mean it’s kind of like the cyclical effect.

Marilyn describes a situation of moving with regard to physical places and having to adjust to mental moving, as well, regarding the content to be taught. When teachers do not have a true choice in the curriculum, they are dis-placed from the beginning: their content, their rooms, their walls and hallways. The irony of the situation at Stuart Elementary is that even though Core Knowledge is supposed to transform the school, the teachers’ anger and angst make it messier than ever.

Advocates for Core Knowledge in the school may label these teachers who resist the new curriculum as difficult. Resistance may be the only way to assert some control over the curriculum choice after the principal implements it without true teacher input. The word resistance means to “oppose or retard motion” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 712). The idea of resistance here might mean to try and stop or slow the very movement that the curriculum choice has brought to Stuart. Although they are now being moved in the school, some teachers resist in order to stop the movement—

physically and mentally. Although others may describe them as difficult, these teachers only may be reacting to moving away from a home place, and resistance is their way to respond to forced choice. For Sheila, it is a matter of physical and mental discomfort of moving. Sheila deals with the issue of how she is going to approach Core Knowledge again the next year and how she is going to feel about moving. She shares with me that she feels comfortable in her room, and the thought of moving makes her uncomfortable. Being dis-placed will only continue to contribute to her challenge of teaching Core Knowledge.

In order for a change of place to be meaningful for teachers, they have to accept the change and choose to move. Unfortunately, choosing a new curriculum often means moving and beginning anew without engaging the hearts of the teachers. If the original choice of Core Knowledge was not meaningful for teachers, then everything that follows only changes the surface—the walls, the bulletin boards and the hallways, not a change to the core of the teachers' beliefs. The choice only covers up what teachers are feeling inside, and although they might accept the change and begin to teach Core Knowledge, they struggle with how the curriculum fits in their classrooms. When they are handed the curriculum and expected to teach it, this affects their existence as Core Knowledge teachers. Often, new curricula in schools are the result of searching through a litany of reforms for the one that will solve all problems, and moving from choice to choice only continues to deteriorate the hearts of teachers—whether they really see it happening to them or not. In what ways do teachers choose to see or not?

Heidegger (1953/1996) writes:

When curiosity has become free, it takes care to see not in order to understand what it sees, that is, to come to a being toward it, but *only* in order to see. It seeks novelty only to leap from it again to another novelty. (p. 161)

Although Heidegger writes that we can explore and be curious about our sense of Being in these places of in-between and uncertainty, he also warns about curiosity—curiosity that moves us from place to place in a flurry of excitement to find out about the next “new” aspect of our lives. Educational reforms like Core Knowledge may be one of many that are brought forward in schools and given to teachers without thought of how the change might affect them. Fullan (1991) writes, “The difficulty of learning new skills and behavior and unlearning old ones is vastly underestimated” (p. 129). I came across Heidegger’s quote in Reynolds’s (2003) writing about the “curriculum of curiosity” (p. 46). He describes how teachers get lost in the flurry of learning and unlearning and forget to be still with their hearts for a while. Heidegger’s idea of curiosity “leaping” from one novelty to another reminds me of the words of the teachers at Stuart who are moving from place to place and changing from year to year. The implementation of a curriculum choice for the school causes movement, and constant movement disrupts Being and caring (Reynolds, 2003, p. 46). Movement constantly uproots teachers and students from place to place while they are dragged by the next new idea. This movement changes the personality of a classroom during the school year and also changes the personality of the school.

Casey (1993) writes about constant movement: “Still more dire is the experience of being *unplaced*, which constant movement brings with it. Not only may the former place be lost but a new place in which to settle may not be found. With increased mobility and range comes increased risk, above all the risk of having no proper or lasting

place” (p. xii). Although teachers are moving within the school building, there is stress that comes with being *unplaced* and not knowing where the permanent place will be—being caught in the cycle of school reform and not knowing where the wheel will stop.

I experienced such a move when the classroom in which I was to teach was still under construction on the first day of school. As a teacher I worried about being in a large room with six other classes and the way that experience would shape my class for the year. We had the continued stress of having to move again when the classroom was finally finished (two weeks later). The next year, I had to move from one classroom to another, and still the next year had to move again. Teachers’ lives are characterized by movement and unrest, and Casey (1993) writes about not being able to settle in a new place. It is the settling and the chance to be still and make a home that teachers miss in this flow of reform. Moving often is connected with reform such as Core Knowledge and causes the teachers to have added stress of *unplacement* in addition to the lack of knowledge to learn the reform. Hargreaves (1994) attributes much of this fast movement from one thing to another to the change from modernity to postmodernity. He writes:

Schools and teachers are being affected more and more by the demands and contingencies of an increasingly complex and fast-paced, postmodern world. . . . Schools and teachers . . . cling to bureaucratic solutions of a modernistic kind: more systems, more hierarchies, more laid on change, more of the same. (pp. 23-24)

As teachers are expected to make choices that conform to the fast-paced world of change, what do they lose at their core? This system of forced choice for teachers traps them in a hierarchical world of schooling. Curriculum becomes an agent that flattens their curiosity and excitement about teaching. The principal of Stuart Elementary chose Core Knowledge for this school. Living with this type of choice means that the teachers are

defined by Core Knowledge instead of defining it from their own core. Their hearts are closed and their core is covered by a curriculum that they did not choose.

Being Defined by Core Knowledge: The Shuttered Heart

. . . And I shall broadcast, saying nothing,
the starry echoes of the wave,
A breaking up of foam and of quicksand,
a rustling of salt withdrawing,
the grey cry of sea-birds on the coast.

So through me, freedom and the sea
Will call in answer to the shuttered heart.
(Neruda, 1962/1970, p. 429)

When the conversations with Core Knowledge teachers, the time spent in classrooms with them, and the writing lay before me, I was eager to uncover the “core” found in their stories, and I felt ready to receive their inspiration. I anticipated the opening of shutters—mine and theirs, and felt a connection to Neruda’s poem, the “Poet’s Obligation,” where he sees his mission to arouse those contained in “prison cells” of everyday lives and the monotony of their jobs (p. 429). He wants to remind them of the smell of the sea and what lies ahead. He ends his poem with a call to their “shuttered” hearts. The images of shuttered hearts bring forward a picture of darkness because shutters close out the light and envelop the room in shade. We close the shutters to keep out the world, whether it is the light, the interactions of others or self-illumination. We also close the shutters to keep ourselves inside where it is safe—inside the darkness, in the inside world.

Teachers also may close shutters—or the classroom door and remain in the dark. Teachers may not close the shutters themselves, but they may be closed for them when they are not given opportunities to learn. In what ways do teachers cope with being

defined by Core Knowledge? In what ways do they deal with feeling deficient in Core Knowledge? When teachers close the shutters, they are in the dark, but they also may strive to find the light or the possibility of what lies ahead. When we stumble around in the dark, there is possibility for discovery—to find the hidden spaces that house the heart, the core of Core Knowledge. While the dark can be scary, it is the dusk, the place between darkness and light that holds the promise for the teachers, the place where they can become Core Knowledge—the place before the sunrise.

The word knowledge comes from the Middle English derivation *knowleche* which means “learning or erudition” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 472). For us to know, we must first learn, and for teachers to truly know Core Knowledge, they must have an opportunity to learn the content that comprises the Core Knowledge curriculum. Without learning, they do not have the “familiarity, awareness or understanding gained through experience or study”—connected with truly knowing (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 472). One idiom associated with knowledge is to be “in the know”—“possessing special or secret information” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 472). In what ways does someone cope with not having all of the information, and what emotions are evoked when someone is thought to be left out of the group? Who chooses what information is known by all? One of the first reactions to being left out is anger and stress. Without the knowledge to feel confident in their teaching or without the knowledge of what the curriculum is about, anger may then define teachers throughout the school year.

Blinded by Anger: Losing Sight of Core

One reason for teachers' anger is the steady, perplexing changes they experience throughout their careers. Veteran teachers live through a constant barrage of "restructuring" and "reform" that arrives with each new wave of power, either in the central office of the school system or in the city or state in which they happen to teach. (Nieto, 2003, p. 65)

Strong reactions to change are not new in education or in any other profession, and teachers may feel anger when they feel that they have lost control. The reaction to change is one of anger due to not having the knowledge they need to teach. Some teachers react by closing up the shutters and trying to weather the storm, while others rage forward. However, the constancy of change is one that is difficult to deal with as a teacher, and it comes from many different directions—particularly curriculum reform.

Reynolds (2003) writes:

The attempt to insist on the modernist, scientific, logical, technical, rational answers to the problems of curriculum/education have done nothing but exacerbate the problem. They have attempted to improve on a type of hierarchical education befitting the corporate order, which has left us with students who leave school with full heads and empty hearts. (p. 43)

Without studying Core Knowledge closely, we can miss its potential influence on the lives and souls of teachers and the anger that ignorance of the curriculum can generate.

Reynolds's language of "exacerbating the problem" also brings forward images of becoming angry about a problem that will not go away.

Marilyn describes some teachers from Stuart in our conversation:

I think some people give up after a while. Why bother? They are going to change it anyway. You hear that all the time at staff meetings. Why bother? They are going to change it in two years. By the time I learn it, it will be different. We did that 12 years ago, they are just coming back with it now? You know, why bother?

The teachers ask, "Why bother?" and that seemingly simple question is really at the heart of the "shutter" problem. "Bother" is a word that describes a "constant state of

disturbance,” and that disturbance is constant movement for teachers (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 104). Disturbances move us and although the movement may be subtle, it is always disturbing the current state. When teachers ask why bother, they are asking why they need to move again. Why should they disturb what they are trying to understand? Why can't they remain still for a while and think about Core Knowledge or the curricular reform that came before? The teachers Marilyn describes are tired of cyclical changes that don't go anywhere, and they wonder why they need to bother with learning again. They seem to feel lost in a system of reform that has no compassion for them and lost in a curriculum where they do not have the knowledge to be experts in their craft. Once lost in the system or a reform movement in schools, some teachers may lose their sense of being. Perhaps arguing against these reforms is a way to try and keep some feeling of sanity—some feeling of being—in a constantly changing world of curriculum. Perhaps arguing against Core Knowledge is the way to keep some stillness in the constant world of disturbance.

Sheila expresses guilt and anger on behalf of the students who she feels she is not teaching. “I'm more familiar. I'm more comfortable with it (other subjects, such as math, that do not include Core Knowledge topics) and I can make it more interesting and exciting—same with Reading. My mornings are so busy and they are so nice because that is when we have Reading and Math. The afternoons to me are just a complete waste of time. It makes me feel guilty and it drags by.” Hargreaves (1994) writes about many facets of teacher guilt in the classroom; his writing about teachers who care and those who are always striving to fulfill their professional obligations seem to describe Sheila. Hargreaves (1994) suggests:

Accountability and intensification provide a potent cocktail for inducing feelings of persecutory guilt—pervasive worries and fears that mounting expectations have not been or will not be met. But more than this, the pressing demands of accountability and intensification can fill up the scheduled time demands of teaching to such an extent that little time is left for the informal, interstitial moments to show care and concern: to fulfill the very purpose that many teachers feel to be at the heart of their work. (p. 149)

Sheila speaks about this very situation where she cannot cover the other subjects that she feels are essential to achievement on the tests, and she becomes frustrated about her lack of time or perceived lack of commitment to her students. Perhaps the anger that comes forward in Sheila's conversations is directly related to the guilt she feels about being defined by Core Knowledge. Sheila's concern about the students in her class shows her feelings about not teaching them what she feels they need to know to survive in their communities. Sheila tells me:

These kids don't even know their address and that is the truth. They don't know a thing about their city. They never even heard of the Red Cross. Today, we are doing this story on Clara Barton. I mean don't even have the Red Cross. They know nothing about their own country.

Although Core Knowledge advocates may argue that Sheila's students do need to have a broad background in literature as well as World and American History, and would argue that Sheila also should address these important topics with her students, she does not know how and struggles with how to help her students succeed. She is angry about the situation and ponders how Core Knowledge fits with her teaching and curriculum, and she also pushes against Core Knowledge. She has not accepted it quietly since that first meeting where it was chosen for the Stuart faculty. Sheila also is reacting to "being in the know"—which she has not felt since she first learned about Core Knowledge.

Without the knowledge to teach the curriculum, she is angry about her exclusion. In what ways does anger motivate Core Knowledge teachers? Does it drive them to work harder

and think more deeply about how to implement it in their classrooms, or does it cause them to close their classroom doors to change? In what ways do anger and lack of compassion for teachers' experiences affect Core Knowledge? Exploring the anger of Core Knowledge teachers opens up the door for another interpretation. Nieto (2003) writes: "Anger, then, is not always a negative emotion, especially if it is motivated by a deep caring for students, a hope for the future, and a vision of how it could be otherwise" (p. 74).

Heidegger (1953/1996) emphasizes the importance of realizing our own sense of being (our authentic selves), to explore that sense and cultivate it, instead of letting others in the educational system, school or district define teachers' ways of being. When others define teachers, they lose their real sense of authenticity and become immersed in the world. Heidegger (1953/1996) writes:

When Da-sein, tranquillized and "understanding" everything, thus compares itself with everything, it drifts toward an alienation in which its ownmost potentiality for being-in-the-world is concealed. Entangled being-in-the-world is not only tempting and tranquillizing, it is at the same time alienating. (p. 166)

These teachers are alienated from their anger, frustration, and vocal resistance, and sometimes they are alienated from the rest of the staff. These teachers see Core Knowledge as a negative part of the curriculum and they do not want to change to fit it in. Being defined by anger is one way that those teachers who still oppose Core Knowledge openly try to cope with their feelings about the curriculum. Sheila and other teachers that Marilyn describes still are struggling with the original idea of choosing Core Knowledge, and they are struggling to find a way to illuminate what this curriculum means.

One of the struggles that complicates their feelings of anger is the lack of collaboration about Core Knowledge. Without the chance to gather together, the teachers are missing one of the support systems for a new curriculum like Core Knowledge. The lack of time to gather together on a grade level continues to aggravate the situation and keeps all of the teachers blinded in their search for Core Knowledge. Some teachers express anger at the choice, and at how that choice is affecting them in the classrooms. Other teachers remain in the dark about how to implement Core Knowledge. They may have accepted the curriculum into their classrooms, but they are still in the dark about how to move forward.

Collaboration as a Myth: Wandering the Path Alone

Core Knowledge is definitely an advantage to those people who like to collaborate and who like to share ideas, because it makes your life so much easier when you have other teachers helping you and giving you their ideas and you are giving them yours. (Joanne)

Because even when that collaboration happens, more like when it's not planned, even by mistake—like we don't get together very often during planning time but like we'll all talk during lunch or something and even that helps about the things that we are doing. (Stacey)

Joanne describes the ideal situation of collaborating with Core Knowledge and Stacey then is able to give me a more accurate picture of how Core Knowledge teachers are collaborating at Stuart. I am reminded of part of a poem titled "Fire":

What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would

So, building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood. (Brown, 2000, p. 27)

With the logs being stacked too closely and not having the breathing space, I have a mental picture of teachers packed into small spaces, being “forced” to collaborate. This poem also calls attention to the importance of the space between—the important, hidden spaces where oxygen and breath reside and keep teachers moving and inspired. When packed in and not encouraged to have time to reflect about Core Knowledge, they have lost the breathing space, and the time together does not allow for growth, only suffocation from the flames. Teachers must have the breathing spaces in order to live and thrive with Core Knowledge, and building those fires to light the way requires close attention to the space for collaboration and how it encourages Core Knowledge. The collaboration space is lost or choked out at Stuart.

When I first began talking with these Core Knowledge teachers, they shared with me their concerns about not having background knowledge to teach the curriculum. One of the topics that came up in our conversations naturally, after the talk of stress in that situation, is how they try to walk the path of not knowing. Our discussion about collaboration was a way to try and get to a place where the teachers could find strength and support in each other and to form a learning community about Core Knowledge. In order to learn, the teachers also need to feel that they are “in this together” while tackling Core Knowledge topics. Mackley (1999) describes the situation with teachers in his district who did not have the background knowledge to teach the Core Knowledge topics and how they might solve that problem:

Even familiar topics, such as the American Revolution and the Civil War, were not ones that all our teachers felt prepared to introduce in their classrooms. Some preparation was required from all teachers. . . The question of teacher preparation time is universal among teachers who are considering adopting Core Knowledge. One answer is to develop a schedule that includes a common planning time for teachers at the same grade level. . . Teachers use the common planning time to share knowledge about good books and other classroom resources, to combine their thoughts about interesting activities and lesson plans, and to encourage each other when the going gets tough. (p. 28)

Mackley's description is one that often is tried in Core Knowledge schools because teachers are trying to find the way to get the knowledge they need to teach the Core topics. Often, administrators suggest common planning time to help teachers gather and share information. This common planning time or collaboration is seen as a solution for the problem of not knowing. Unfortunately, there are barriers to collaboration and the idea itself is sometimes misinterpreted.

To collaborate (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001) comes from the Late Latin, *collaborare* and means to work together, to cooperate reasonably (p. 174). If teachers are to collaborate, they should be able to work together, but this is not always the case. Joanne says, "And then there is a certain group of people that just like to do their own thing. They don't like for anyone to bother them or anyone to go in there to say anything to them." Dan says that he thinks there is a "resistance to that kind of community endeavor, that collaboration." Sheila comments, "I never see my other 2nd grade teachers, never." These comments from the teachers at Stuart characterize their feelings about collaborating because they have not had success with the time they spend working together. As I continue my conversations with the teachers, I notice that they do not have the time to collaborate, and some are frustrated with the process, so they feel they could accomplish more by themselves.

At Stuart, the most meaningful collaboration happens more by accident than planning on an individual basis. I notice that the teachers try to make time to be together, to work through the issues with Core Knowledge, but they are challenged to find the time or materials they need. Marilyn describes her idea of collaboration by saying, “We are kind of trading [materials] that way to try and make life as bearable as we can. We all have to be first at teaching something alone, but at least after that we can kind of get a little help from our friends and pass it around. We try to share the best that we can.” For the most part, the teachers at Stuart do not collaborate formally on their grade levels. Individual teachers share with each other, and they try to help those with whom they have professional relationships, but they don’t work together. This “collaboration by accident” appears to be the best way for individual teachers to cope with Core Knowledge.

Another aspect of collaboration that is revealing at Stuart is the afternoon meetings that occur once a month. These meetings, arranged by the administration, are considered Core Knowledge time, and they are voluntary. If teachers stay for the meeting, there is a stipend for attending. Marjorie explains the meetings:

But the good part about it is that every Wednesday—the second Wednesday of the month, we have the Core Knowledge staff development, and for two hours, we just deal specifically with Core. . . . So that has been very helpful.

Marjorie speaks about the Wednesday meetings positively because she finds them to be productive and helpful. For Marjorie, the commodity of time is one that is valuable enough to be given alone. The time does not necessarily have to be spent with other teachers. Many of the other teachers find that time spent during the meetings to be a waste. Stacey describes the situation at Stuart:

I think when you sit down with a group of people that they want to force collaboration. So it’s some kind of meeting, like it’s a faculty meeting or some

kind of meeting like that, maybe before it officially starts or maybe even during, when it's forced collaboration people try to get off track and voice their opinions about all this stuff that you are not going to get anywhere. Why do you even bring it up? And then I think. . . when you sit down with people you want to collaborate with you kind of get off track, you talk about your own thing.

Stacey's frustration with collaboration at her school is steeped in the fact that she cannot get work done with her grade level and with the school. She calls it forced collaboration, and it does not work with Core Knowledge content, but it only causes more frustration with trying to find the path to knowledge and understanding. The competing voices that are trying to get the meeting "off track" are like the logs, stacked so closely that meaningful conversation cannot start.

Another important aspect of this conversation to realize is that two teachers have such different views about what is happening, which means that no one is hearing teacher voices during the meetings. These monthly meetings are meaningful to some and not to others. Joanne's comments about the meetings tell about an important element that is missing from these gatherings for some of the teachers:

Well, we have had a lot of time when they just give you time to get into the closet. I mean people come in and show us different activities we could do, but it wasn't very meaningful to me because it was on magnets, and I had just finished the unit, and I had just done all those activities. So it was kind of like sitting there, like "okay."

Joanne's comments reveal another aspect of planning for Core Knowledge at Stuart: the Core Knowledge closet. Many Core Knowledge schools have storage space where they keep the many materials for teaching Core Knowledge units. I had not thought about the idea of a Core Knowledge closet being a difficult place until I began to talk to the teachers at Stuart. The image of a closet is one of a small, enclosed space, and when I think about a closet, I think about it being dark. The image of closet is constraining, and it

does not seem to be a place where meetings can happen. Closets are not conducive to collaboration space. So, when teachers are given time to go to the “closet,” they are missing the point of being together.

Not all view the closet in this way. Marjorie, who spoke to me earlier of the benefits of the meetings, says, “A lot of the times, they just give us the time to plan, to meet with our grade levels, to share materials, to go through the closet, to make lesson plans.” Marjorie’s view of the closet is one that encourages productive work with Core Knowledge. However, most of the teachers find isolation by being put in the closet. The closet is a place where teachers have to be alone in their search for Core Knowledge. Being in the closet is not always a detriment, but for the teachers at Stuart, it is not usually a place of collaboration.

The Core Knowledge meetings do not always end at Stuart with time in the closet, and in the context of gathering together, meetings can have different meanings for different teachers. Faculty meetings occur in schools across the country. Martin Buber (1967/1973) explores the idea of meetings, and uses the terms “mismeeting” or “miscounter—to designate the failure of real meeting between men” (p. 22). Buber reflects on his meetings experiences with those throughout his life. When there is a disconnection between what is said and what is heard in meetings together—whether between two or many, then the meeting has been a failure. If there is not a true understanding about Core Knowledge and a true understanding of how it weaves into the teaching and learning in classrooms at Stuart, then the faculty meetings about Core Knowledge cannot be times of true being and thinking together. There is a wall between what is being said and what is being heard about the curriculum. While there can be

meetings about issues on the surface of Core Knowledge, such as the logistics of teaching the curriculum, it seems that there cannot be collaboration without meetings where teachers are able to be together and talk “with” instead of being talked “to.”

I am reminded of a conversation that I had with Dan who described to me an encounter with the principal at a Core Knowledge faculty meeting. Dan’s poignant account seems to illustrate Buber’s idea of a “misencounter.” Not only is the encounter at this meeting interesting to consider because it shows that the teachers did not understand the content, but it also shows that the administration considers the mandatory, voluntary state curriculum to be the same as Core Knowledge. Dan describes the meeting to me.

And as **usual**, [emphasis] Mr. Hobbes is saying “voluntary state curriculum” [when talking about Core Knowledge] and you can see the question mark, big question marks over our heads—you know, like “I don’t understand what he is talking about.” And at that point, I think I just kind of, I gave up. I said, “Okay, look if we are at a Core Knowledge meeting and we are talking about curriculum and the voluntary state curriculum, and you ask me a question about the voluntary state curriculum, I assume you mean Social Studies.” You will have to explain it. And at that point, everyone was like, yeah, what are you talking about, I don’t understand. So then he’s like, Aha, you know, there is a disconnect between what he was talking about and what we were thinking while he was talking. He said, “Okay, I guess I should be more explicit when I’m talking about it.” But then you know, if you’re paying close attention that is just a symptom of what the problem is. We got further in the conversation, and we started talking about assessment. Again, you’re referencing the curriculum when you talk about assessments, and think Social Studies, Social Studies, Social Studies, again, it’s Language Arts, Math for him and Social Studies for us. We don’t understand. I don’t understand.

When I was reading Dan’s account of the meeting, I thought that the passage was confusing and hard to interpret. However, as I continued to think about the description of the meeting, I found that Dan’s words tell the story of the confusion and the frustration of the teachers. They are thinking about Core Knowledge, and the curriculum is being equated to the voluntary state curriculum that they already know. They cannot understand what is happening in the meeting. This “mismeeting” is an example of how the teachers

cannot communicate with each other to facilitate collaboration, and they cannot understand what is happening in the administration's meeting.

Without teacher input and collaboration, the meetings are another example of training to teach the faculty what to do. In what ways could these meetings change if they were meaningful to teachers? As they are structured now, they only frustrate some teachers and provide time for others to work independently. Barth (1990) writes, "I find that staff development is least effective when planned, premeditated, and deliberate. When principals set out to train teachers, run workshops, conduct inservice training or direct faculty meetings, I see only modest professional change come to teachers. On the other hand, I find professional development most likely to occur as a consequence of teacher and principal imaginatively pursuing regular school issues and functions together" (p. 59). The teachers at Stuart with whom I conversed do not feel they are having this kind of collaboration in the workshops, and they are not contemplating Core Knowledge.

Hargreaves (1994) describes the contrasting forms of collaboration:

Collaboration can be a device to help teachers work together to pursue and review their own purposes as a professional community, or it can be a way of reinscribing administrative control within persuasive and pervasive discourses of collaboration and partnership. Collaboration, in this sense, can be a burden as well as a blessing. (p. 17)

To think about collaboration as a burden is to think about another obstacle between the teachers and understanding of Core Knowledge. One of the problems with forced collaboration is that it can cause more frustration between teachers instead of the partnerships they need to form to make Core Knowledge successful.

Collaboration and planning time are two elements of successful Core Knowledge schools that are well publicized as ways to make the schools successful. Principals often think about these factors when trying to make Core Knowledge work at their schools. When these two valuable assets of collaboration and time are squandered, the teachers are back at the starting point. “Contrived collegiality can lead to the proliferation of unwanted contacts among teachers, which consume already scarce time” (Fullan, 1991, p. 136). Forced collaboration does not promote a feeling of relationships between teachers. It leads the system to view teachers as objects and not people who have to forge their own relationships. Collaboration cannot be forced for the sake of saying that it is present in schools, and collaboration cannot be faked so that it “seems” as though reform is working. It must cause teachers great stress to have something forced upon them that is supposed to make life easier on the surface, yet it just adds more weight to the already heavy load. Instead of being put into situations where they must collaborate, it seems that teachers would be much more creative in an atmosphere where they could reflect with each other and improve their Core Knowledge units and teaching skills.

The word colleague means to be “a fellow member of a profession; associate” and comes from the Latin *collega* (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 174). To be fellow members with others in a profession sounds much better than to be forced to be together. It brings to mind working in concert instead of being stacked together haphazardly. That is why the word collegiality has a much different feeling than collaboration. The two words both indicate a desired situation in schools, but helping teachers become colleagues to teach Core Knowledge brings about far different results than forcing them to collaborate together on a project. Forced collaboration compounds a

situation of not knowing and encourages teachers to close the shutters to further progress in learning Core Knowledge. The curriculum and the teachers cannot thrive in this type of atmosphere. Forced collaboration squelches the fire of knowledge and continues to build walls instead between the teachers and deeper understanding.

Behind Closed Shutters: A Pedagogy of Not Knowing

Last year, we started Core, we knew nothing about Core as a group as an entity. We were given the test, the writing, the Core assessments; we were given these assessments that other people who had written them, and we were also brand new, and it was overwhelming for us. (Marilyn)

When the principal chose Core Knowledge for Stuart, the teachers had little background in what the curriculum was about. Marilyn reflects back to the first year with Core Knowledge when the faculty did not have background with the curriculum and the city was testing the students to see how they were progressing with Core Knowledge. There was constant pressure to perform with a curriculum that people did not know well. The teachers were “in the dark” about what was expected of them in instruction and what was expected of the students in their classrooms. Being in the dark can be a scary and unsure place to reside—for teachers as well as students. We continue to look for the light to lead us.

Marilyn tells me the first reaction to Core Knowledge instruction in her room:

When you are given just a book and 8 grade levels are in the same book, you know there are not a lot of pieces in the puzzle in there. You have 5 bulleted items and okay, you have 6 weeks. Okay, I could cover those 5 things tomorrow. What do I do with the other 5 weeks and 4 days? And you know there is no [plastic] tub [containing the materials to teach the unit]. There is no magic section at the library or the hot topic on the internet. It’s just search and discover.

To search means to look for a place of meaning and a place of light in the darkness of unsure times. For the Core Knowledge teachers, they had hoped they could find the light

at the end of the tunnel, perhaps in the *Core Knowledge Sequence*, but they were floundering with issues close to their hearts: how to start with Core Knowledge, how to move forward with a curriculum that was not their choice, and how to educate themselves about the background of Core Knowledge topics. These questions kept them in the dark, and the teachers were not thinking about the dawn after the night or the being found that often comes from being lost. Although the Core Knowledge Foundation and the district trained the Stuart staff, the teachers still felt like they were not ready to implement the curriculum. Teachers did not feel empowered with only the book as their tool, and they also did not feel as though they owned the curriculum, since it was a fragmented process without their input into bringing the curriculum to Stuart.

Nieto (2003) writes:

Besides thinking and writing about curriculum, another matter of enormous consequence in the intellectual lives of teachers is the question of how they develop expertise. That is, how do teachers learn, or keep learning, about the craft of teaching, about their students and about their subject matter? (p. 85)

Educational researchers (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Nieto, 2003; Schulman, 1987) write about the lack of subject knowledge for teachers and how that lack of knowledge can affect classroom instruction and enthusiasm on the part of teachers. Lack of subject knowledge presents a particular problem with the Core Knowledge curriculum because the subject topics are specific and require a deep knowledge in World and American History and geography. Stacey asks, “How are you going to start”? William observes, “And Core kind of just says you should know this from what you learned in your teaching, and if you don’t remember, you got to go back and start learning it all over again.” In what ways do Core Knowledge teachers react to that lack of content knowledge? How does this lack of knowledge keep them behind the shutters and in the

dark? Can Core Knowledge teachers teach the curriculum without knowledge of the topics? Does only a cursory knowledge make them feel as though they are able to teach Core? Perhaps they realize that all the work, tears, guilt and stress will lead them nowhere but deeper into the darkness.

Van Manen (2002) writes about searching for meaningfulness through writing and “dwelling in the space of the text” (p. 245). His journey into the darkness of writing makes me think about the journey of darkness in teaching. He (2002) writes, “The writer must enter the dark, the space of the text, in the hope of seeing what cannot really be seen, hearing what cannot really be heard, touching what cannot really be touched” (p. 245). It seems to be the same journey for the teachers as they search for the meaning of Core Knowledge in their instruction, and they realize that perhaps their searching and working will not lead them there. It is almost as if they are working to find the light, but always chasing the shadows.

Marilyn’s search is for the knowledge that will equip her for teaching Core Knowledge. She shares, “So it wasn’t too bad as far as the Reading and the Math, because you could go to the library and find things. But Science and Social Studies—finding things on those topics at that time was like, what?” If they are not prepared, teachers find the task of educating themselves all over again daunting and perhaps unreachable. Marilyn was working at another Core Knowledge school before she came to work at Stuart Elementary. She discusses how she tried to cope with the new curriculum at her first Core Knowledge school: “I didn’t have anything, so I was just working one week at a time. They gave us resources, but there is only so much reading you can do in one night to cover seven hours worth of stuff.” And what if that reading and searching

does not lead to the understanding that teachers seek? How do teachers educate themselves about curriculum topics they don't know anything about, and how do they continue the search for meaning when they are not sure that they will be able to find it?

Some teachers do not try to throw themselves into the new curriculum, but find ways to cope with what they already know. The search for the light is too daunting, and it seems only too hard to stay where they are and work from there. Dan who is navigating his way through his first year as a teacher has learned:

There's not enough time for one teacher to do that. I think that I'm starting to learn that what other teachers do even when I go to look for help—I'm starting to learn that the answers are: Well, you know, you can't do everything, you can't understand everything, and not everything is going to be perfect, so what **don't** you need to worry about?

What powerful lesson has Dan learned from his peers who do not feel that they can continue the search for the light outside the closed shutters of Core Knowledge? In what ways have these teachers coped with the darkness of not knowing about Core Knowledge? They have decided that they can't know everything and they only can focus on what they don't need to know—or perhaps cannot face. The light they seek for the curriculum may not exist, or perhaps the light will reveal what they do not want seen.

There is also frustration on the part of teachers who don't feel like they are getting the background knowledge they need to shed light on their instruction. Sheila's voice indicates her frustration at the system:

. . . and the lack of knowledge on the part of the teacher. I don't know Japan. . . I tell them what is in here and you know, understand it enough to get it across because to go on any further. . . Math I have a teacher guide. . . I'm more familiar. I'm more comfortable with it and I can make it more interesting and exciting—same with Reading.

The frustration of not knowing what to teach with Core Knowledge makes these teachers feel uncomfortable. In what ways does this affect the classroom climate? When teachers are not knowledgeable about content, they are less likely to be able to make connections in the classroom—which is the way to extend learning with students. Darling-Hammond (1997) writes:

Teachers need more than formulaic or procedural understanding of the core ideas in a discipline and how these help to structure knowledge, how they relate to one another, and how they can be tested, evaluated and extended. Teachers also need to be able to use subject matter knowledge flexibly to address ideas as they come up in the course of learning. (pp. 294-295)

Marilyn describes this kind of situation in her classroom when she is not knowledgeable about curriculum topics from Core Knowledge. She says:

Like how much can it [the curriculum] stretch without it looking formed into something totally different? And that is where we now have come to the picking and choosing. And we were just talking about it yesterday, is that you know the stuff that I don't feel comfortable with, going into detail. I say it, mention it. I might like exactly tell them what the book says and move on. And I am very honest with my kids. You know, I will tell them very seriously, and a lot of teachers don't have the courage to do this. But I'm not going to lie to them. I tell them day after day. I don't know what I'm talking about but this is what the book said.

Marilyn's comment about relying on "what the book said" indicates that she relies on the materials in her classroom for knowledge instead of her own firsthand knowledge. In preparing for the class, Marilyn does not have time to commit the things that she reads to her own heart and to reflect on the reading, but instead she uses what she reads in books. Marilyn is an honest person, quite straightforward with me during our time together, and she is not afraid to tell me of her struggles and challenges with Core Knowledge. The original choice to bring Core Knowledge to Stuart, then, translates to the teachers having to make a choice about what they can then live with in the classroom.

In what ways has Core Knowledge defined them as teachers? For Marilyn, she has to deal with the stress of not “knowing” **what** she needs to teach and then not “knowing” the background of the concepts she has to teach. Darling-Hammond (1997) writes about the teacher as a “skillful pedagogue” who “figures out what a particular audience is likely to know and believe about the topic under study and how learners are likely to hook into new ideas so as to create productive learning experiences” (p. 295). Marilyn is unable to create these experiences with unfamiliar Core Knowledge content because she does not begin with enough knowledge to make connections for her students. She shares with me that her students often have to make their own connections because they may be more knowledgeable about a Core Knowledge topic than she is.

In Marilyn’s classroom this year, she has the brighter students who have scored higher on standardized tests. She describes this class: “Well, I think I have the better of the situations because I do have the high kids. We have a lot of conversation, a lot of background information that these kids come to the table with that makes my program better.” She continues by saying, “They [her students] have really run the show and I just have become the facilitator. Okay, they need a book, and then I’ll go get it. I’m the go-getter. You know, and they run the joint.” Marilyn is able to compensate for her lack of knowledge by actually relying on the knowledge of her students. This does not reduce Marilyn’s frustration about the situation in her classroom, but she does admit that it makes her work with Core Knowledge more bearable.

The type of situation that Marilyn describes also works in reverse. She talks about other classrooms in relation to hers:

It is hurting the other two houses because they have the lowest children with less background information, less experiences, less ability to make the connection.

And no one, I mean students, not teachers, but no one there can kind of spark something, or to lead something or to throw out an idea for them to piggyback on. They are all kind of in that baseline, flat mode. There isn't anyone there to kind of pick up the ashes in the fire and to stoke it up a little bit. The teacher does that, and a few kids, that happen to be the bright ones.

In contrast to what she is going through, Marilyn describes the grim situation when neither the teacher in a classroom nor the students are sparked and motivated by the content. Marilyn's reference to the house system describes the situation at the beginning of the year when the principal created grade level houses. In the first section of this chapter, the teachers described how the houses were displacing them physically, but Marilyn also describes here how the houses may create an environment where the students are not able to learn from each other. The houses originally were created to group students according to ability. How can children survive when the teacher is not motivated to teach the content and is then just struggling to keep the fire alive in classrooms? The reason that Marilyn and the other teachers become frustrated is because they are good teachers, and they do not feel the connection with their students through Core Knowledge. This dis-connection is hurting everyone, including the teachers who don't have knowledge yet and are not able to connect with their students.

For example, William told me that he struggles with Core Knowledge because he wants to customize his units of study to the way he teaches and the way his students learn—to be the “skillful pedagogue” that Darling-Hammond (1997) describes. He says, “So now, if I was teaching Black History in February, I would want to do my own style of Black History, and you know. I put on shows. I have assemblies—sing-along with some types of songs. I just could have the freedom of just playing with that on its own.” William likes to encourage his students to play, sing and think about themselves in the

context of the whole world. He does not feel that Core Knowledge gives him the freedom to do that, or he argues that no one has taken the time to help him learn how to do that. Instead, he feels that Core Knowledge keeps him busy trying to learn about the curriculum and not teaching as he knows it. Palmer (1998) writes, “Bad teachers distance themselves from the subject they are teaching—and in the process, from their students. Good teachers join self and subject and students in the fabric of life” (p. 11). By teaching in the dark, the teachers are unable to make the connections to their students and this is affecting them profoundly. Teachers like William are worrying about how to make the connections and find the light.

Teaching in the dark with Core Knowledge can mean that teachers struggle to light the fire of understanding in their classrooms with the students, as well as trying to bring forward their own understandings. One way the teachers cope is to water the content down, as Stacey describes: “Yeah, right now, we are doing a unit on the Constitution for 2nd grade. I’ve been using books, but it’s really rich content for 2nd grade, so I’m trying to water it down so that they can understand it.” Marilyn participates in the same kind of ritual when she describes a Core Knowledge Science unit with scientific content:

I understand it, but I can’t figure out how to water it down for them to understand it. And I don’t have enough of my own information to feel safe and secure in watering it down. Like I think I could water it down, but I’m not sure that my watered down version would be totally truthful.

In order to deal with not having background knowledge, Marilyn and Stacey are doing what they can to make connections with their students. They are “watering” down the material, and the students are not getting the rich knowledge as a result. Why do the teachers think in terms of “watering down”? Are the teachers more afraid that they do not

have the knowledge than the students? Not having the knowledge is a reflection of the teachers' own identities. Not having the knowledge to teach Core Knowledge, then, becomes a mirror to their ability and what they know and don't know. The teachers' frustrations at not being able to bring their students the knowledge they need are reflected in the extra work of making it understandable.

These many ways that Core Knowledge teachers deal with their lack of knowledge show their frustration with aspects of implementation of this curriculum and their desire to connect with their students. Between the frustration of not knowing and the place of light and understanding, there is a space of growing. This time of growth is painful and is reminiscent of the growing pains that students experience as they learn and change mentally and physically. However, the hidden space is the growing time where teachers are filled with the spirit of learning. When remembering "spirit" as related to the Latin *spiritus*, meaning "the breath of life," I am reminded of how vital it is to attend to matters of spirit in the classroom—particularly for teachers. This between-time for Core Knowledge teachers is important for their growth as professionals. It is also a time for soul growth.

Palmer (2001) calls this part of teaching the time that teachers connect "soul and role" (p. 133). He writes, "Sadly, our professional training with its mythology of objectivism treats soul and selfhood not as assets but as liabilities, dangerous sources of subjectivity that would taint the work professionals do" (Palmer, 2001, p. 133). With this view of soul, it is not surprising that the teachers at Stuart struggle through this time. Even though this time of growth is a struggle, it holds great potential. The Core Knowledge teachers must address their fear of not knowing without "watering down the

material,” and facing their own weaknesses. Within the pedagogy of not knowing there is a pedagogy of possibility, and this space can help teachers to grow to a place of professional understanding and celebration.

Opening the Shutters: A Pedagogy of Possibility

As good teachers weave the fabric that joins them with students and subjects, the heart is the loom on which the threads are tied, the tension is held, the shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight. (Palmer, 1998, p. 11)

But the unanticipated turns of the unfamiliar road or the sudden rapids or changes in the river tides provide newness, inviting reflective thought and action. Meandering makes the familiar strange and the strange familiar. It allows me to see the old in new ways; it permits a stranger to become a friend. (Berman, 1998, p. 171)

When the shutters are closed or the classroom door closed, teachers feel the loneliness and the stress of not knowing. The time alone or without knowledge can be a time of fear. However, as the Core Knowledge teachers flounder and wander lost, they may journey to the light of knowledge and understanding. As Palmer describes the beautiful fabric on a loom that is stretched tight, the tension is an uncomfortable place, but it yields a wonderful masterpiece. Berman (1998) describes the meandering that leads her from the marked path, but in her strange surroundings, the things that she knows become clear again. The journey with Core Knowledge may be characterized by stress and darkness, but it also may develop into a place of understanding and growth for a teacher.

One of the feelings brought forward by the teachers’ experiences of not knowing about Core Knowledge is the feeling of *Angst* described by Heidegger. *Angst* is the feeling that brings forward the opportunity for learning. It is the tug of war that tension so often creates in life: the feeling of being out of control, yet using that feeling to

explore the place between comfort and anxiety. How can those familiar situations of stress and frustration lead teachers to a fuller life? Heidegger (1953/1993) writes:

What oppresses us is not this or that, nor is it everything objectively present together as a sum, but the possibility of things at hand in general, that is, the world itself. When *Angst* has quieted down, in our everyday way of talking, we are accustomed to say “it was really nothing.” This way of talking, indeed, gets at what it was ontically. Everyday discourse aims at taking care of things at hand and talking about them. That about which *Angst* is anxious is none of the innerworldly things at hand. (p. 175)

Teachers often define themselves by what is expected or often demanded from them by the educational system. We all immerse ourselves into the “worldliness” that Heidegger writes about, and that worldliness often defines us and keeps us from realizing our authentic way of being. Heidegger writes that stress comes not from something concrete, but from the unknown. He explores this anxiousness about “nothing” or insignificant events as anxiousness about how we exist in the world:

The world, however, ontologically belongs essentially to the being of Da-sein as being-in-the-world. So if what *Angst* is about exposes nothing, that is, the world as such, this means that *that about which Angst is anxious is being in the world itself*. (Heidegger, 1953/1993, p. 175)

So, by worrying we lose the opportunity to observe ourselves and think deeply about Being in that situation, and we forget to think about how we might grow from the experience. We are prey to how the world defines us. We miss thinking deeply about Being, learning from reflection, and we are struggling with our personal “unknowns.”

Marilyn describes her thought process when she does not know something about Core Knowledge, and it seems to illustrate what Heidegger writes about *Angst*:

Well, the first time I look in the book, I get all—first of all, the first time I look in the book, I get mad. I get mad that I’m stupid, when I don’t have a clue what that means. . . then when I go back to it a second time, well then, I like face it as a challenge, and it’s not going to beat me. And so then I like read every piece of

research and book store hunting and internet searching that I can, to prove it to them and myself that I'm not stupid.

Marilyn is judging her ability based on what she feels she should know or what Core Knowledge thinks she should know to teach the students. She is putting herself under stress to become what she is currently not—knowledgeable about Core Knowledge. What could Marilyn learn from this experience to help her think about her teaching? In what ways could she turn toward this experience? Marilyn goes back to the situation and tries to turn it into a success, and she does not state it here but probably has learned more about the Core Knowledge topics, as well.

Meier (2002) writes that adults can model this way of not knowing for students and can encourage the asking of questions to find answers. Meier (2002) writes, "And confusion is essential—if uncomfortable. It's the frequent outcome of allowing ourselves to pursue our curiosity more deeply, to pay attention to the unexpected" (p. 14). Although Marilyn is confused by Core Knowledge and frustrated, she can also use this experience as a time to learn about her students. Marilyn might also use the time to think about this not-knowing feeling in relation to her students.

Heidegger writes that we can learn much from *Angst*, but instead we turn away from it because it is uncomfortable and we shutter our hearts. The times of *Angst* are times of tension, like the threads being stretched tight across the loom. *Angst* ultimately is related to Being, and being anxious about something can lead to a deeper understanding of how to relate to that event. Because we normally turn away from events that make us uncomfortable, we miss the opportunity to study how we react to situations and think about them more deeply. It is in this time, that the possibility emerges for success and strength. Aoki (2005) also describes such a situation with teachers who live in the tension

between the curriculum as plan and curriculum as lived. Although the Core Knowledge teachers with whom I worked told of their many struggles as they got lost in the Core Knowledge curriculum, they also shared their stores of success and their wandering back into the light. Core Knowledge teachers ultimately grow from their experiences with the curriculum. Their stories tell a tale of discovery in the time of meandering.

Joanne, who did not vote to bring Core Knowledge to Stuart, shares with me her delight at one World History unit she taught. Her students reacted when a visitor came into her room: “They wanted to tell her everything they knew. They just wanted to share everything, American Revolution—anything that they could tell her, they wanted to.” Joanne felt proud that her students could share new content that they had learned with Core Knowledge, and she also felt proud about all the work that went into learning about the history concepts as she crafted them into units.

One recurring theme from teachers who shared their classroom successes with me is that students enjoy learning about interesting content presented in a knowledgeable and interesting way. When teachers are able to learn and know what they are teaching, it presents a far different picture than teaching in the dark. The light of knowledge illuminates their classrooms and their faces as they tell me their stories. Joanne later shares with me that the curriculum the city adopted was really boring and that Core is “much more right and I think the kids enjoy it.” She later taught a unit on the Five Pillars of Islam, which is in the 4th grade Core Knowledge content. She realizes that the students were deeply involved in what they were learning when she saw them take ownership of their projects. “We learned about the Five Pillars of Islam. These kids—they were amazing. They really took hold of it because it was during the war and they could really

understand you know why things were happening.” Her class was able to make a personal connection with the content, and they were successful with that unit of study. Joanne had the time and interest to read and learn more about Islam so she could engage her students meaningfully. To illustrate how this light can fade, Joanne tells me about the stress she feels this year because she is not as prepared as she would like. She did not get to teach Social Studies again this year, so the preparation that went into her successful unit on Islam is tucked away in a box as she tries to re-learn what she needs to know for this year. As quickly as teachers and students dance in the spirit of learning, they can find themselves without the spirit—their hearts are heavy again. In what ways do teaching and learning make their imprint on the hearts of teachers? Why are these memories the most poignant? As teachers share with me their successes, I see that the well-being of the students remains at the center of the success or the center of the frustration.

William, who is struggling with what he needs to know for Core Knowledge and the preparation of the units, tells about how he views the positive aspect of truly learning Core Knowledge:

Oh, yeah, well you know with Social Studies and Science wasn't really taught in this school, and they had all these books that we were using from way back when, you know. Everybody just did the Constitution. They did that for 4 or 5 months. And everything was just pick what you want. So Social Studies was all over the place. And now, that they are doing the Core, it is definitely good for it to be nailed down even to have books and series on it, I think has progressed. You know, they are trying to make it better and Core is a great starting block on trying to get everybody formalized.

William talks with me about how Core Knowledge has given a sense of direction to a staff of teachers who did not know what to teach for Social Studies. They were not thinking about teaching history and geography. Now the teachers feel more empowered to write units based on Core Knowledge topics. As William tells me later, when teachers

have the knowledge they need to teach these units, they thrive and make connections with their students. When they don't have the knowledge, it only becomes dark again. When these Core Knowledge teachers have been able to dwell in those moments of tension, they have found rewards of working with the curriculum.

Palmer (1998) writes, "The courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and student and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require" (p. 11). If teachers can live in the tension of not knowing, perhaps they can see the rewards of the beautiful tapestry. Searching for the familiar path from the known to the unknown, or to find sources of light, requires questioning and thought. As the teachers search for their identities within the curriculum, the search leads to questions of knowing and not knowing. The way out begins with questioning as a way to light the path.

Questioning as a Way to Knowing: Searching for the Light

Every questioning is a seeking. Every seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought. Questioning is a knowing search for beings in their thatness and whatness. (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 4)

Heidegger writes that we question to seek deeper knowledge. There are teachers who accept Core Knowledge without questioning it, others who question it first, then accept it, and still others who continue to try and find their place in the discussion. Questioning is part of our being and our search for our relationship to others; our world is deepened through questioning and the dialogue that follows. Part of the journey from not knowing to knowing involves questioning along the way.

Gadamer (1960/2000) writes, “The essence of the question is to have sense. Now sense involves a sense of direction. . . A question places what is questioned in a particular perspective” (p. 362). Teachers should always question what is happening in schools and in their classrooms, because questioning leads to a deeper knowing. Gadamer (1960/2000) writes that “Only a person who has questions can have knowledge. . .” (p. 365). Core Knowledge teachers who continued to ask questions were seeking the answers they needed to be more knowledgeable of what was happening in their classrooms. Teachers should show resistance to power that seeks to deprive them of their sense of being. In what ways do questions become silenced and contribute to an alienated teacher presence? How might this alienation become a source for re-thinking? These questioning teachers taught Core Knowledge, but they were never content to accept it without thought and contemplation.

This questioning and wondering about Core Knowledge were particularly evident with Dan, a first year teacher who found that he was asking many questions about this curriculum in relation to his classroom practice. Dan particularly was concerned about the curriculum and how to use it to benefit his students. When I met with Dan for the first time, he brought some student work to show me. His students had been trying to compare and contrast the kinds of dwellings for Native Americans by drawing pictures and writing brief constructed response statements, and Dan was distressed at how much trouble they had with the assignment. The content of the lesson was Core Knowledge, and he was busy trying to make connections in his mind about the Core Knowledge content and skills that he wanted the students to master. He opened his careful cataloging of the papers,

where he kept them together and laid them on the desk—opening his heart, as much as the classroom work. He treated the papers just as gingerly.

After showing me the work, Dan says, “So when I see something like this, I’m really (sigh) you know, being a first year teacher you know. You have students who are falling behind or [aren’t] up to the grade, you’re like, oh my gosh, what did I do wrong? What am I not doing right in the classroom?” His initial work with Core Knowledge left him wondering about what the curriculum meant and his place in teaching Core Knowledge. An avid reader, Dan had been studying about Core Knowledge, but he still was asking questions, as he explains to me:

And you know, having trouble with this, I sat down with principal in the middle of December, the end of December, saying, you know, what is the purpose of Core Knowledge? So the principal’s answer is the reason we are using Core Knowledge is because it’s been shown to increase the Language Arts and Math performance of the students. I’m like okay—you know that’s like giving somebody a machine and saying okay, this is what this machine does and now your job is to make this machine work. And knowing the purpose of Core Knowledge isn’t enough to understand what you need to do with it to make it really perform. . . . What do the lessons need to incorporate? What kind of creativity do you put into a Core Knowledge lesson plan to make it really be all that it can be—above and beyond what you would in just a regular lesson plan? What would make it tie in with the rest of your curriculum better? How does Core Knowledge increase the Math and Language Arts scores? . . . So, I mean, the last month or so, I’ve been kind of wrestling with what am I doing? What is the big picture with Core Knowledge and why—what do I need to do to make it different and why doesn’t anybody really have a decent answer?

Dan’s question, “What is the big picture with Core Knowledge and why” had not been answered at this point. Thinking back to how Core Knowledge was brought forward as a curriculum at Stuart reveals why Dan is asking this question. He is struggling as a first year teacher with a curriculum that does not make total sense in his classroom. While Dan understands the basic tenets of Core Knowledge, he is struggling to ask the questions that will help him understand. He is beyond the “how-to” questions and well into the

bigger concepts regarding his instruction. Dan's questioning comes from a place of not knowing about Core Knowledge. He was not at Stuart during the Core Knowledge training, and he does not feel that he understands the curriculum. The principal's answers do not satisfy him. His use of the word "wrestling" indicates what a struggle he is having.

Dan is not alone in his struggle with Core Knowledge and questioning its meaning. William also questions Core Knowledge, but he started asking questions before it was implemented at Stuart. I find this interesting because William was the only teacher I met with who talked about having questions before teachers actually voted on bringing Core Knowledge to Stuart. While others talk about their resistance to the curriculum, they did not bring these questions forward before they voted on the new reform, or at least they did not share those experiences with me. William had been teaching math exclusively at a higher grade level, and now he felt that he was going to have to teach Core Knowledge sometime in the future. The new curriculum loomed in the distance like a storm waiting to drop on what William had worked so hard to build in his teaching repertoire. Although the switch to Core Knowledge did not affect him immediately, he was concerned about the future. He says:

[I said] I don't want to teach it. Let me keep the math until I figure out how to get all the Core stuff because I know the first year: it's kind of like test time. Everybody is running around like chickens with their heads cut off. Everything you did last year, you only have to do half of that. And then those headaches—I didn't want any part of it.

Not only did William question the initial adoption of Core Knowledge, but he also did not feel satisfied with the answers he received, and thus he was distanced from the conversation. What strikes me about William's reaction is the honesty and the straightforward emotion in his response to Core Knowledge. William's initial questioning

led him to the conclusion that he could not be a part of Core Knowledge, and it brought forward the dialogue that should surround curriculum. Curriculum development should be about conversations and questioning instruction. Applebee (1996) writes:

I offer a vision of curriculum that redresses that balance, placing the emphasis on the knowledge-in-action that is at the heart of all living traditions. . . . When we take this metaphor seriously, the development of curriculum becomes the development of culturally significant domains for curriculum, and instruction becomes a matter of helping students learn to participate in conversation with those domains. (p. 3)

In what ways can we encourage students' conversations in the classroom if we are not encouraging teacher conversations about curriculum? Curriculum should inspire debate and insight instead of stopping the discussion. Although William was not eager to change his place in order to find meaning and a new identity in the curriculum, his questions reflect his concern with stumbling through the uncertainty of a new curriculum. His concerns also raise the importance of having the conversations about this curriculum before accepting it and viewing Core Knowledge as curriculum, differently. Applebee (1996) writes that this type of openness is critical in discussing curriculum: "If the conversation is to be effective, all participants must honor a tacit agreement to cooperate in carrying the conversation forward rather than to obstruct or interrupt it" (p. 52).

Although William is questioning the new curriculum, he is still thinking on a more technical level of how to find resources and teach the content; he is not yet struggling with the deeper questions. Jardine, Clifford & Friesen (2003) suggest that teachers need to keep having faith in themselves as professionals and in the job of helping students succeed: "Hope lies in learning how to ask new questions" (p. 91). Teachers ask many questions, but what might their questioning miss? When teachers are not trusted with questioning the broader concepts of curriculum, they are relegated to

worry about the more mundane issues of teaching. Teachers cannot get beyond questioning the “how-to’s” until they are encouraged to do so. This is illustrated in William’s admission of going into the Core Knowledge closet to think about what he is going to teach next. He says:

I’ve been in there to figure my way on through. Just sit in there and read stuff. There is a lot in there. Again, if I’m going to teach it, I have to figure it out. If it has, you know, the Civil War, or read poetry, if there is this unit you are working on things like that.

William’s conversation about the closet brings me back to the first reference to the Core Knowledge closet as a way to avoid collaboration. When I was writing about collaboration, I described the Core Knowledge closet as a way to catalogue resources at Stuart. Not only is William not participating in collaboration with his fifth grade peers, as I described before, but this time, William is trapped in the closet searching not only for the meaning of Core Knowledge as a curriculum, but literally for the materials to teach so he can feel like he has been able to translate the language of Core Knowledge into teachable practice.

When discussing curriculum, Jardine, Clifford & Friesen (2003) theorize that academic disciplines have to be questioned by all of us. They should not be accepted as finite and unchanging, and they should not be taught that way in schools. When teachers question Core Knowledge and their place in it at Stuart, they are living the curriculum, rather than merely implementing it. Jardine et al. (2003) write:

Thus, our children and the experiences and questions they bring are not problems we need to fix or stop or remedy. Rather, if such experiences and questions are treated well—treated, that is, as they pertain, not to the psychology of the question-asker, but in regard to how they might open up our human inheritance—they are basic to the health and well being of these inheritances, because these inheritances must remain open to the future if they are to remain living parts of our world. (pp. 85-86)

Teachers' questions should not be silenced, but they should be celebrated as a way to explore Core Knowledge, and in order to teach it with passion and in order for students to make it their own, teachers need to be able to live their questions. These questions seemed to be feared in schools. It is as though not addressing them will make the situation of having Core Knowledge at the school easier. Conversations that are animated are filled with questions that can be lived and contemplated. "Curriculum ceases to be a thing, and it is more than a process. It becomes a verb, an action, a social practice, a private meaning, and a public hope" (Pinar, et al., 1996, p. 848). By contemplating curriculum in this way, by asking questions and having the "complicated conversations" (Pinar, 2004, p. 185), we start to view Core Knowledge with a different lens instead of seeing it as a thing. Unfortunately, many districts and schools view Core Knowledge as a "thing" to be handed to teachers, and thinking about why this happens opens another facet of viewing Core Knowledge.

Curriculum as Thing: Lost Spirits in the In-between

Talking about curriculum is another way of talking about the educational practices of certain institutions. This means that it is not on the teacher's shelf that one looks for the curriculum, but in the actions of the people engaged in education. . . It is not to describe and analyze an element which exists apart from human interaction. (Grundy, 1987, p. 6)

[It] is like a piece of evidence of why you know you can't just have the principal say, "Here's Core Knowledge. We're going to be a Core Knowledge school. Here are the books. Here are some people that did it last year. Talk to them and see how to do it"—to me, who doesn't know the difference between Core Knowledge, Direct Instruction. I haven't experienced those things. So here's Core Knowledge, and use Core Knowledge isn't enough because to me it is the same as any other curriculum I would get. (Dan)

Many schools are filled with programs and materials that district offices and administrators give over to teachers with the hope of improving student achievement, and

teachers' bookcases and hearts sag under the weight of the curriculum "things." Grundy (1987) writes that we need to look beyond those things and open ourselves up to teachers' feelings in order to have a deeper understanding of curriculum—beyond thing. It is the giving and taking of Core Knowledge to and from teachers that characterizes it as a thing—an object to be traded or bargained. I have written about how teachers at Stuart feel when they are without the knowledge to teach Core Knowledge, or they have not been consulted about bringing Core Knowledge into their school. When only dealing with Core Knowledge on its surface, as a curriculum plan, the teachers are forgotten and Core Knowledge has little chance to succeed. Focusing on Core Knowledge as a plan instead of what experiences it may allow students and teachers to have together objectifies it for teachers and removes the opportunity to inspire and inspirit teachers. I propose that most Core Knowledge teachers initially approach the curriculum as plan. In chapter one, I wrote about my initial experience with Core Knowledge as plan. However, can Core Knowledge as plan become Core Knowledge as lived?

Aoki (2005) distinguishes between curriculum as plan and curriculum as lived experience, and he writes about the tension that exists between those two types of curriculum, while describing the 5th grade classroom of Miss O:

The first of these, the curriculum-as-plan, usually has its origin outside the classroom, such as the Ministry of Education or the school district office. But whatever the source, it is penetratingly and insistently present in Miss O's classroom. This curriculum-as-plan is the curriculum that Miss O is asked to teach the Grade 5 pupils who are entrusted to her care. (p. 159)

His description of curriculum-as-lived-experience is quite different, as Aoki (2005) writes:

The other curriculum world is the situated world of curriculum-as-lived that Miss O and her pupils experience. For Miss O it is a world of face-to-face living with

Andrew, with his mop of red hair, who struggles hard to learn to read. . . and some 20 others in class, each living out a story of what it is to live school life as Grade 5s Miss O knows their uniqueness from having lived daily with them. And she knows that their uniqueness disappears into the shadow when they are spoken of in the prosaically abstract language of the external curriculum planners who are, in a sense, condemned to plan for faceless people, students shorn of their uniqueness, or for all teachers, who become generalized entities often defined in terms of their performance roles. (p. 160)

The distinctions of both situations are stark when they are described together, but often curriculum as lived becomes lost in the world of curriculum as plan as teachers struggle to keep up with what is expected of them and their students, or it may become hidden behind closed doors. In what way can Core Knowledge be experienced beyond curriculum as plan? The loss of these experiences is profound for students as they try to make meaning of Core Knowledge topics that they study. I am struck by Aoki's description of the shadows where the uniqueness of each student disappears. The darkness of the shadows brings forward the darkness of the shuttered classrooms, but it also brings forward the promise of light as it takes light to create that space of darkness. The tension of the shadow can hold promise for Core Knowledge teachers to reveal spirit.

Both curriculum as plan and curriculum as lived are realities in schools, and Core Knowledge may have qualities of both kinds of curriculum. As a plan, Core Knowledge is specific and lays groundwork for teaching certain topics in the classroom at each grade level. However, teachers at Stuart tell me, that Core Knowledge also offers the possibility—the pedagogy of possibility—for students to express themselves and experience their lives through the curriculum. For Core Knowledge to be experienced as lived, the teachers and students have to find that spirit in the hidden spaces in the classrooms. Unfortunately, at Stuart, curriculum as plan has taken over many aspects of

Core Knowledge, and has provided obstacles to teachers who are trying to provide those experiences to their students. The teachers view Core Knowledge as another thing.

Young (1998) writes that curriculum is often defined as a thing—not as a connection *to* teachers, but as something defined *by* teachers. “Most writing and research concerned with curriculum unavoidably treats it in some way as a topic, thus affirming its external reality rather than explaining it as socially produced” (p. 24). When talking about curriculum and Core Knowledge, we have to think about the “people engaged in the actions,” as Grundy writes, and we cannot only view Core Knowledge as a curriculum handed over to teachers and then forgotten or measured in relation to performance only. In what ways do teachers feel the emotion of being handed one more thing? In what ways do they work with curriculum when they see it only as thing and not beyond the thing-ness? Stacey sums up how she feels when the curriculum is handed to her, “I don’t know if Core Knowledge does it more than anything else because with most curricula you are handed and that is what you are supposed to teach.” When schools and curriculum developers don’t include teachers in the decision about what to teach, they treat them as parts of a school machine instead of critical partners in education. Aoki (2005) describes this type of situation when he was teaching school:

More significantly, how was I to know that in teaching reading as a mere skill, I was being caught up unconsciously in a technological ethos that by overemphasizing “doing” tended toward a machine view of children as well as a machine view of the teacher? Within this ethos, was I not understanding people, teachers, and children not as *beings* who are *human*, but rather as *thing beings*? (p. 358)

When curriculum is characterized as “thing,” then we teachers and students are reduced to “things,” as well. This significantly reduces our “being-with” students in curriculum and enhances teachers’ views of curriculum as only skills and ways to evaluate students.

We need to view Core Knowledge beyond its thing-ness, and we need to explore the essence of what makes Core Knowledge successful.

Heidegger's question, "What is a thing?" brings forward those other possible questions that teachers might ask when dealing with Core Knowledge and curriculum in general. Teachers must think about their relationship to Core Knowledge. Heidegger (1935-36/1967) writes:

We must ask. For a long time there is first something much more preliminary: we must *first* again learn how to ask. That can only happen by asking questions—of course, not just any questions. We chose the question, "What is a thing?" It now turns out: the things stand in different truths. What is the thing such that it is like this? From what point of view should we decide the being-a-thing of things? We take our standpoint in everyday experience with the reservation that its truth, too, will eventually require a foundation. (p. 14)

Teachers must ask questions about curriculum to more deeply understand it, and those should be the "moving questions" that Ellsworth (1997) describes. To figure out what some-thing is, in this case, Core Knowledge, teachers must think about how they interact with the curriculum. In what ways do their everyday experiences with Core Knowledge help them to see the curriculum more clearly or to help them think more deeply about it?

"Heidegger is not saying that a thing is something subjective. . . This 'between' is not as though first we and things could have existed separately and then interacted. Rather, what a person is always already a having things given, and a thing is already something that encounters" (Gendlin, 1967, p. 258). When Heidegger writes that things stand in different truths, then he is explaining that things rely on a connection with people interacting with them. So, when thinking about Core Knowledge, teachers cannot truly regard it until they think about their interaction with the curriculum. What is the "between" when thinking about Core Knowledge? What is the essence of the between

place that defines this thing? What are the questions that teachers have in the place between Core Knowledge as an idea and Core Knowledge as a document; between Core Knowledge as a concept and Core Knowledge as materials?

The Thing-ness of Curriculum: Between the Curriculum and Document

Martin Buber (1970/1996) writes about the relationship between I-Thou or I-You and I-It, and this relates to Aoki's description of human beings versus "thing beings." Buber (1970/1996) explains that human beings experience the world, and they react to those world experiences within their hearts. He explains that these world experiences are I-it experiences, because it is not an experience between the world and person. Instead, the experiences happen within one's heart. He writes, "The world as experience belongs to the basic word I-It. The basic word I-You establishes the world of relation" (Buber, 1970/1996, p. 56). Aoki fears that experiences with teachers and children will become I-It experiences—ones that are only one-sided, instead of I-You experiences, where teachers can establish relationships with children in classrooms. Buber (1970/1996) explains that these relationships constantly are changing, when he writes, "Every You in the world is doomed by its nature to become a thing or at least to enter into thinghood again and again. . . . The It is the chrysalis, the You the butterfly" (p. 69). The "It" provides opportunity for growth and development in relationships. As Dan explains when describing his first experience with Core Knowledge, just having "It" handed to him does not further his understanding of that program or of curriculum in general, but only causes confusion. He feels like a "thing being" instead of a teacher. Being handed Core Knowledge does not further the relationship between Dan and himself, his principal or the other teachers. Instead, he experiences confusion and anger at the lack of information.

Viewing Core Knowledge as thing further complicates the situation of teaching the curriculum with inspiration.

Heidegger (1935-36/1967) writes that people have many different reactions to “things” in their lives. “One may say that it makes sense to use and enjoy things in our reach, to eliminate objectionable things, to provide for necessary ones. . .” (p. 2). I have questioned why teachers accept curriculum as a thing—instead of a connection to their instruction or an extension of themselves. Perhaps characterizing curriculum as a thing is easier, and it is simpler to regard curriculum in its “thing-ness,” not having to ponder the deeper meaning of Core Knowledge. Perhaps we are able to think about curriculum as thing because it is easier to categorize it as something we can deal with or cannot tolerate. To view curriculum as thing is to view it as something to be ignored instead of thought about—which takes time and effort on the part of all educators. However, what deeper meaning is lost in this view, and what does it mean to education if we have committed to the easy way out instead of posing the difficult questions? Ellsworth’s (1997) “moving questions” bring us to a new place in our thinking about curriculum. She explains her questioning, “I try to make possible and thinkable questions that I believe can set into motion ways of thinking and teaching that have otherwise become rigid, solidified, stuck, sloganized” (p. 12). The words, “rigid, solidified, stuck and sloganized” may be adjectives that characterize things—unchanging things. What are we missing in our conversations about curriculum when we regard it only on the technical level and not beyond? What questions are teachers refusing to ask to move them to a new place when talking about Core Knowledge?

I use the *Core Knowledge Sequence* to begin exploring these questions of the in-between while talking about this curriculum. The *Sequence* is a specific plan, and it was compiled to give teachers a list of content to teach in each grade level. When Core Knowledge is seen only as this technical document and not seen in its essence by teachers, then the *Sequence* book becomes only a document without the teachers' voices and interpretations. Heidegger (1971/1975) writes, "What could be more obvious than that man transposes his propositional way of understanding things into the structure of the thing itself?" (p. 24). Framers of curriculum documents often present those documents in technical ways, such as curriculum plans, sequences, or handbooks that teachers must use in classrooms. Marilyn and Joanne have described Core Knowledge as a document literally handed to them. Seeing Core Knowledge only as this technical document and not having conversations about successes with this curriculum or developing their own understanding of the curriculum shows only one side of knowing Core Knowledge. The understanding comes from thinking about the structure of the thing, instead of teachers' interactions with the curriculum. That space usually has teachers completely wrapped up in the technical document. Heidegger (1971/1975) writes about this search for the meaning of a thing, "What in truth is the thing, so far as it is a thing? When we inquire in this way, our aim is to come to know the thing-being (thingness) of the thing. The point is to discover the thingly character of the thing" (p. 20). This thinking about Core Knowledge goes far beyond thinking about it as only a document. What might be shown to teachers if they think about curriculum in this way? What is absent from their conversations about curriculum, especially Core Knowledge?

Buber's (1970/1996) writings about I-You and I-It also discuss absences in the discussion. Without the relationships that happen in an I-You world, teachers cannot grow and develop. Teachers may wish to remain in the "it" world of Core Knowledge, one that does not challenge them to think more deeply about the curriculum. Buber (1970/1996) writes:

They induce man to consider the It-world as the world in which one has to live and also can live comfortably—and that even offers us all sorts of stimulations and excitements, activities and knowledge. In this firm and wholesome chronicle the You-moments appear as queer lyric-dramatic episodes. (p. 84)

The it-world is one that is easy to occupy, and one that does not challenge teachers to think about what they may become. Buber's description of the attitudes in the it-world remind me of the many faculty meetings where teachers view reforms as something that will pass—perhaps those "queer, lyric-dramatic episodes." They believe that those episodes will pass and not cause them to think about how they might interact and view curriculum instead of dismissing it. The absence of the interaction between teachers and curriculum and teachers with other teachers will eventually take its toll on those in education. Buber's book suggests that it would take a toll on us as humans when he writes, "And in all the seriousness of truth, listen: without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human" (Buber, 1970/1996, p. 85). In what ways do teachers begin to address this absence? Administrations and district offices expect teachers to implement Core Knowledge, but it is troubling to think about curriculum as implementation only. Implementation's technical meaning does not characterize how teachers and students should exist together, but it characterizes curriculum as something that is a tool to fix school problems.

Unfortunately, teachers may view that tool as another impediment to teaching and learning in their classrooms. When teachers view curriculum as thing, then they lose the connection with the curriculum because they have stopped thinking about it as part of them, but rather as something a-part from them and away from them. When they begin to think this way about Core Knowledge, then it loses its meaning and purpose in the school, and it also loses its potential to create multiple paths for meaning. Core Knowledge becomes lost in the tension filled place and the teachers do not embrace it, but they push it away. Teachers' classrooms are filled with many things, and they often rely on the books, materials and lesson plans to fill the day. How do these teaching "things" crowd and obscure the real work of curriculum, particularly Core Knowledge? By looking more closely at how Core Knowledge teachers think about the things that they need to teach Core Knowledge, might help them recognize how they see Core Knowledge as the materials they need instead of a curriculum with which to engage.

Teaching Things: Between the Curriculum and the Materials

Marilyn describes her first look at Core Knowledge: "I wasn't there when it started, but when I got there it was the talk of the town. It was the new thing and the only thing and the best thing. 'This is going to be the answer to all of our prayers' is how it was viewed." Marilyn describes Core Knowledge and reforms as things—things that were going to make the school better. Educators are looking for answers in the continuing questioning of school reform. What will be the next program to work? In what ways can we implement this program at the school and make it successful? In what ways does "implementing" in a technical sense cover up the lived experience with Core Knowledge? Teachers question the futility of this exercise, and they want more explanation. What

does it mean to implement Core Knowledge, and how does implementing it cover up what teachers have the potential to create by teaching Core Knowledge?

The word “implement” used as a noun means “a tool or utensil” and the verb means “to put into effect” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 427). To think about a tool or utensil makes me think of the dissection of this curriculum, or a splitting apart into smaller pieces, not a bringing together that Core Knowledge might encourage. The Latin *implere*, “to fill up” may be a more accurate use of the word “implement” at Stuart (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 427). What is the administration seeking to fill the school with and at what expense to the teachers? Schools may implement or “adopt” a program. The step of adopting something new often precedes the actual implementation. The Latin word, “*adoptare*” means “to opt for,” and to adopt means “to take up and make one’s own” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 12). The teachers at Stuart did not have an opportunity to make Core Knowledge their own, despite the school telling them that they had to adopt this curriculum. Marilyn describes her thoughts about adoption of any program in a school:

Having to adopt means that the city tells you that have to do it and they adopted it, and so you adopt it. For example, take the Houghton Mifflin Reading series. They chose it and it was the best and so it is the best reader and we are going to do it. That is having to adopt it. You don’t have a choice. It comes down and you get the books in your room. You go to summer school; you know the week training in the summer. There you are. Do it.

Adoption and implementation in the way that Marilyn describes seem to describe Core Knowledge at Stuart accurately, and it also describes Core Knowledge as a “thing.” The teachers view Core Knowledge as “some-thing” that “comes down”—complete with the materials to teach it. When teachers see curriculum as a thing that they have to adopt, it does not bring forward thoughts about adoption as a relationship with something new in

the classroom, but it seems forced. Teachers also are focused closely on the tools or other things they will need to make the curriculum work. Teachers at Stuart begin to identify with the tools needed to teach Core Knowledge as a way to define how successful they can be.

Tools to teach. Heidegger (1953/1996) discusses the use of tools in the lives of those who rely on them to complete a job. “A useful thing is essentially something in order to. . . The different kinds of ‘in order to’ such as serviceability, helpfulness, usability, handiness, constitute a totality of useful things” (p. 64). Those who do jobs rely on the things that make their jobs easier. Heidegger emphasizes that it is important to think about our being and to think about ourselves in relation to the world. Part of understanding the world around us is to think about how we do our jobs and what tools enable us to do them. Thinking deeply about these questions can help us think about our being. In the case of Stuart, Core Knowledge as a thing has been forced on the teachers and they have to adopt it because the city adopted it. The teachers at Stuart talk about Core Knowledge as something that takes much of their time, and they are “filled” with the emotions that come from trying to question and find answers to lead them from the uncertainty of not knowing. The teachers are looking to the things or tools that will make their jobs easier—the useful things, that Heidegger describes. Core Knowledge is part of the technical curriculum at Stuart—another part of the way that the district closely monitors what they teach. The teachers do not regard technical curriculum as something they view favorably. In the past, technical curriculum has caused them many worries.

Grundy (1987) describes the technical aspect of curriculum, and she writes about how this view of curriculum emphasizes things, which she highlights as the “objectives.”

She writes, “The technical interest objectifies reality, that is, it regards the environment as an object. This objectified environment includes the pupils who become part of the learning environment. As objects in the learning environment their behaviour and learning are managed by the teacher” (pp. 29-30). The word “object” is defined in the dictionary as “something perceptible to the senses; a material thing,” so that the words object and thing can be used interchangeably (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 584). When we objectify curriculum, as Grundy describes, it becomes a power relationship, where one person holds the power to know something, and the others have to learn what is expected of them. In this kind of power relationship, curriculum like Core Knowledge, becomes focused on accomplishing objectives or things, and this defines the power relationship because someone is always trying to win approval for this process—whether it is the teachers trying to please central office, or the students trying to please the teachers.

This type of power relationship is evident at Stuart with Core Knowledge, and it is one of the concerns at the school. In what ways does objectifying the curriculum affect teachers? William describes how he views the objectives for the state:

I know that I’m on schedule and I know when I’m off. I know how to meet the objectives. I feel confident more and more that I can pick things off and keep on going. There are so many different things. So when I’m doing my math, I just keep thinking, I’ve just got to keep on moving on. But when you finally find something you know how to do, you don’t want to get rid of it (laughter).

William’s comments show how much easier it is to view Core Knowledge through the “objectives” lens or viewing the curriculum as a thing, instead of viewing Core Knowledge on a deeper level. William and I had many conversations about how the objectives and the teaching manuals provided by the state gave him a sense of security

and comfort. Without having to think too deeply about creating the curriculum, he was able to feel that he was preparing his class for the test by knowing that he could “check off” the objectives he had taught. William liked being “told” what was expected of him and then to apply his teaching talent to accomplishing those objectives. He put much thought, however, into how he taught in his classroom. As a talented teacher, he was often preparing lessons that would stimulate the thinking of his class. By knowing what was expected of him, he felt that he was freed to focus more on instruction.

Viewing the curriculum as a thing to be accomplished was more preferable to William than Core Knowledge, which in his mind did not have the specific schedule of objectives to be accomplished by a certain date. Although Core Knowledge is content specific, the curriculum does not have a schedule of objectives. William trusts the state objectives to keep him on track. Although William and I discussed this idea at length, I still had trouble understanding his reasoning. For me, the objectives seemed to dictate what should be taught and how. As I explored this more with him, he admitted that it was easier to know what was expected, to plan and to evaluate the class based on these objectives. William also was concerned because he did not have any of the concrete “things” to help him teach Core Knowledge. He says, “Then Core came in, just a book. So I constantly said do you have a resource book? Do you have a box with the teacher’s guide with the worksheets that everybody seems to have from kindergarten on up. Do we have that box? Do you have the box? It would be easier for me to continue instead of having just a book.” By listening to William, I am reminded of the problems in viewing teachers as only “implementers,” and how that gives them such a dependency on materials to perform their craft.

Aoki (2005) describes the perspective of this teacher: “It is a process-product model that may be appropriate in a commodity-production world, where implementation is understood as a reproductive task. The teacher as implementer becomes a mere reproducer, a person reduced to a technical practitioner. . .” (p. 362). When teachers think of themselves as technical practitioners, then the tools that they depend on become vital in their jobs. It is difficult for them to think about how they are going to be able to do their jobs without tools. They are removed from their craft as teacher. In William’s case, his reaction to Core Knowledge shows how he has come to define his success as a teacher by the tools he needs instead of the thinking about using the curriculum. Heidegger (1953/1996) writes, “World itself is not an innerworldly being, and yet it determines innerworldly beings to such an extent that they can only be encountered and discovered and show themselves in their being because ‘there is’ world” (pp. 67-68). In his mind, William feels that the world of Core Knowledge is defining him as a teacher, and this frustrates him. The *Core Knowledge Sequence* opens up a space for William and other teachers, where there is a question of what they need to teach. When William looks at Core Knowledge, he asks questions about how he can work in this curriculum. He asks where he is in the curriculum, and he wants to know what he needs. He immediately sees the spaces in Core Knowledge that are lacking the tools for him to be successful. He needs these things. Heidegger (1953/1996) writes, “In any case, *a useful thing* of some sort is at hand here. But we discover that usability not by looking and ascertaining properties, but rather by paying attention to the associations in which we use it” (p. 68). Therefore, when William thinks about those useful things that he needs, he also needs to think more deeply about when and why he is relying so deeply on these materials. Why

does he have to lurk in the closet alone to find the things that he needs to teach Core Knowledge? What can be learned by Core Knowledge teachers when they think about the materials that they **need** to teach? The situation of having and needing these tools may open up a way for teachers to think more deeply about the Core Knowledge curriculum. Those empty spaces could be the places where teachers can grow with Core Knowledge. Brown (2000) writes in a poem that “Emptiness invites, encourages. . . Clean closets. Leave the tables bare. Throw open windows. Emptiness invites” (p. 26). Teachers may throw open the windows of their hearts and their classrooms to those things that will fill them with new insights about their practice with Core Knowledge. Unfortunately, teachers that focus on what tools they need often are focused on the goal of preparing students for a test looming in the distance.

Tools for the test. This situation of being without tools to teach Core Knowledge becomes more complicated when William and the other teachers begin to think about concrete objectives for testing. Once the teachers began to teach Core Knowledge, a curriculum with specific content but without objectives, William thought that this would take more time, and he was stressed by the lack of objectives. Although I tried to explain Core Knowledge in its true sense, the sense that would promote William to create his own guiding concepts for his own units, he was able to sum up his frustration and illustrate the true state of Grundy’s power relationship. He says, “You can do anything you want because there is so much, and you’re saying there is no right or wrong, but other people are saying there is a right or wrong.” Although I tried to reassure William that Core Knowledge could work within his creativity, he explains to me that the district does not view it the same way. That is part of the tension between what teachers want to

accomplish with Core Knowledge and what is expected from them in the power relationships that often exist in school districts. Unfortunately, teachers, then, do not practice the freedom that Core Knowledge gives them to write units because they are too dependent on what the district expects from them—in the form of objectives. When curriculum is imposed on teachers, they may not use the power they have to relate to the curriculum or make it their own, but they are always reacting to the devices documenting Core Knowledge—such as testing, having to tediously document what they are teaching, or having observations.

Young (1998) describes curriculum in this way, “I shall suggest that the curriculum needs to be seen not just as something *imposed on* teachers’ and pupils’ classroom practice, but as a historically specific social reality which teachers *act on* and thus transform” (p. 23). Young (1998) names this “curriculum as fact” (p. 23). He sees this curriculum as one that keeps teacher and students from realizing themselves in the curriculum. When the curriculum is unchangeable, it becomes a tool of power for the administration. By testing the students and the teachers, the administration can keep its hold over those who are teaching. Also, teachers lose the freedom to create and grow with the curriculum because they are not able to see themselves in the curriculum. It becomes something that has been passed down from on high and does not contain the teachers’ fingerprints. Grundy (1987) calls these objectives part of the technical curriculum, object-ives (object, relating back to the focus on things, not teaching) (pp. 28-29). Grundy (1987) writes:

One of the key words is “objectives.” The etymological association of this fundamental curriculum concept and “objects” is interesting. The technical interest objectifies reality, that is, it regards the environment as object. This objectified environment includes the pupils who become part of the learning

environment. As objects in the learning environment their behaviour and learning are managed by the teacher. (pp. 29-30)

Therefore, by objectifying the curriculum and focusing on things, the students become things as well, only manipulated by teachers instead of interacting with them in the classroom with curriculum and learning.

One way that administrators make sure that Core Knowledge teachers are teaching curriculum as thing is to test the students. The first year that teachers taught Core Knowledge concepts at Stuart, they were tested every quarter on the curriculum topics. This testing left the teachers upset about the use of control and being told how to teach Core Knowledge. Stacey describes the testing process, “I think they actually told us, they gave us a timeline that we were supposed to follow, because then they were doing the unit tests. We had to make up a unit test and then they gave us a quarterly assessment that we had to use.” The teachers were not only being given quarterly assessments that they had to use in their classrooms, but they also were making their own assessments to use with their classes. This testing event placed a great amount of stress on the teachers every quarter because it was measuring what they were supposed to be teaching with Core Knowledge.

Because of this testing, the teachers began to focus on the curriculum in such a technical way that they lost sight of Core Knowledge as it related to their students, except to make sure that they could pass. Stacey says, “I remember last year, they said, ‘Here is the quarterly exam you have to give.’ You are looking at this and thinking that the kids are going to fail—like I didn’t teach them *this*. They will do fine on the test I taught them or what I taught. It was stressful. It just was crazy.” The district did not trust the teachers to give the tests that they made in their classrooms, tailored to what their children had

learned. What is most alarming to me about this was that treating the curriculum as thing meant that it had removed all of the people from the process—the teachers were not using tests that they had made, and the students were not taking tests on material that they had learned. However, teachers were making the quarterly assessments for the grade levels, but not on the realities of their classrooms.

Stacey started to theorize about why the district would do this. “Maybe they were trying to be helpful? I don’t know why because we had to do double the work then. We had the tests given to us, and then we had to make a test.” I cannot imagine a situation that would make Core Knowledge more stressful to teach. William describes the situation to me through his eyes:

So last year when they went through that whole process of the tests and trying to teach—which to me really started giving me a negative feeling about it. Because they bring in this new system and they are giving you all this new curriculum stuff. They were doing what they have done in the past with certain other tests.

William notes the negativity and the stress that can come from objectifying curriculum and removing the people from the conversation. The Core Knowledge curriculum and testing become additional hurdles, other “things” to overcome. The teachers had begun to see Core Knowledge as an impediment.

What teachers want is to teach Core Knowledge topics and be able to use their creativity to choose activities and ways for students to connect with the curriculum. However, what districts often want is a way to ensure that their investment in the new curriculum was worth the money and effort. The teachers at Stuart continued to struggle with this idea of Core Knowledge as document versus a living idea that they could cultivate in their classrooms. When teachers see curriculum in this way, they are focused on Core Knowledge as a document—as a curriculum with large holes that need to be

filled with tools and testing objectives that direct them on how to teach. When returning to Pinar's (1975) idea of curriculum as *currere*, the educational journey, the view of Core Knowledge is much different. The teachers need to view the curriculum as a journey to be experienced, rather than an absence of materials. If teachers can view Core Knowledge in this way, their experiences jumping over the hurdles that impede them will be much different.

In-between the Air and the Ground: Overcoming the Hurdles

Sailing through the air
Over the obstacle, you
Fly, 'til the ground comes. (Grove, 2005)

The word "hurdle" can mean two entirely different things depending on whether it is used as a verb or as a noun. As a noun, the word "hurdle" means "an obstacle to be overcome" (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 416). Marilyn describes the background knowledge of Core as her hurdle:

So it's definitely the background knowledge that has been the biggest hurdle, and I can't even say to get over because I don't know if you ever get over it. It's always there in front of you. It's just a matter of finding a way to get around it, through it, or just ignore it and hope it goes away!

Marilyn views Core Knowledge as a hurdle to overcome, and she sees it as a physical impediment to teaching in her classroom. When treating Core Knowledge as a hurdle, Marilyn is viewing the curriculum as a thing—an obstacle that impedes her from teaching. Marilyn is dealing with a lack of knowledge by picking and choosing, or possibly even ignoring the content. I have been writing about curriculum as thing, and when teachers view curriculum as this hurdle to overcome, they begin to deal with the hurdle in different ways. Marilyn addresses the different ways of thinking about Core Knowledge as a hurdle when she thinks about trying to get around it. When Core

Knowledge teachers think about Core Knowledge only as something to get around, they do not experience that thrill of sailing through the air, but they only feel the hard ground as they deal with the curriculum. Marilyn often converses with her grade level team to see how they are trying to manage the content. When using the word hurdle as a verb, it means “to leap over, to overcome, and to surmount” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 416). In what ways do teachers react when they see Core Knowledge content as an obstacle to keep them down, instead of something to challenge or inspire them?

The American Heritage Dictionary (2001) also defines the word obstacle as “one that opposes,” and the word is derived from Latin *obstare*, to impede or *ob*—against, and *stare*—stand (pp. 585-586). An obstacle is something that prevents teachers from taking a stand and in this case, the teachers view Core Knowledge as what impedes them, something that keeps them from taking a stand against what they know is right in their classrooms. When viewed in this way, curriculum is not lived, or it is not lived in a positive way.

When jumping over hurdles, one is temporarily suspended in the air, even if it is for just a moment. In that moment, one can be ground-less. That moment above the hurdle is the moment of the in-between or the “zone of the between” (Aoki, 2005, p. 161). It can be a moment of fear as the ground rises to meet us, but it can also be a moment of clarity. I began thinking about the process of jumping over a hurdle when Marilyn first described Core Knowledge as a hurdle she has to sometimes navigate. Aoki (2005) writes about that place for teachers that is between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived, and its potential for being a place of great growth. When Core Knowledge teachers are contemplating Core Knowledge as only a document or in

relation to the tools they will need to teach it, then they can also use this in-between time and place to think about how they are relating to the curriculum. Aoki (2005) describes the teacher, Miss O:

Miss O understands that this tensionality in her pedagogical situation is a mode of being a teacher, a mode that could be oppressive and depressive, marked by despair and hopelessness, and at other times, challenging and stimulating, evoking hopefulness for venturing forth. (p. 162)

When teachers treat Core Knowledge as a thing instead of a curriculum, and then, they themselves are regarded as things, as parts of a machine, they lose the moments of exploration and discovery. Aoki is able to describe this type of situation when teachers and curriculum are regarded as things. He writes:

Our Miss O knows that some of her colleagues who faithfully try to reproduce the curriculum-as-plan are not mindful of the lived situations, and that in so doing, they are unaware that they are making themselves into technical doers. In so making, they embrace merely a technical sense of excellence matched by a sense of compliance to the curriculum-as-plan, which exists outside of themselves. They tend to forget that gaining such fidelity may be at the expense of the attunement to the aliveness of the situation. (p. 162)

There is much to be lost for the Core Knowledge teachers who only teach the curriculum as plan. When the teachers become the “technical doers,” they have become things and lost their sense of connecting with the curriculum and their students.

Sheila says, “I don’t like it because I don’t feel that I know enough about it to get everything across.” Sheila copes with the situation by going through the motions of teaching Core Knowledge but not actually immersing herself in the act of teaching and learning with the students. The teachers’ voices show that being aware of the content of Core Knowledge is not enough. Being given the resources and the inservices does not provide enough muscle to keep the heart beating. Teaching in this in-between place could be a place of great growth, but it is a difficult place to be. At Stuart, there is not much

support in the way of colleagues and collaboration, so this in-between is lonely and sometimes secluded. While teachers work in the Core Knowledge closet, they are working through their issues with Core Knowledge alone. Nieto (2003) discusses how teachers “keep going” when struggling with issues of curriculum and instruction:

. . . teaching is not a question of skill and knowledge alone, but a matter of how to take what one has studied and learned and fit it meaningfully into a thousand different contexts, to think about how to connect particular subject matter with specific students and concrete situations that are different from all others. (p. 87)

This process is hard work, and even when Core Knowledge teachers speak enthusiastically about how they have been working with the curriculum, none of them would doubt the incredible struggle and effort that got them to a point of feeling somewhat successful.

Perhaps if the teachers felt a part of Core Knowledge, and it was not characterized as another hurdle to overcome in their minds, they would teach it with spirit. In his conversation with me about Core Knowledge, Dan talks about how he is upset because the curriculum was handed over to him and he did not have time to think about what he was receiving. He notices that there is something absent in the experience. He missed out on the training, where he was to receive the “knowledge” about Core Knowledge, but he also did not have the time to be with the curriculum before he was expected to teach it. Without this reflection, Core Knowledge remains at the most basic level, another thing in Dan’s mind because he only views it at the surface, as something else he has been handed. To view Core Knowledge more deeply, Dan has to make a connection to the curriculum on another level—an experiential one. Dan’s comments also show that without time to reflect on curriculum, there is no difference in his mind between Core Knowledge, Direct Instruction, or any of the other curricula that may be in the schools.

Lack of distinction between these programs shows their thing-ness more clearly because they are regarded by Dan as all the same, instead of acknowledging how teachers respond to them in multiple ways as they use them in their classrooms.

Dan's experiences with Core Knowledge include his search for the meaning of the curriculum and his place in it. When some teachers view Core Knowledge as a hurdle, they begin the questioning process. I found Dan's experience enlightening because he truly was on a search for meaning, and what he found seems to underlie the vexing issue of focusing on things in schools instead of people. Dan's connection with Core Knowledge was troubling to him in the beginning of the school year, and he continued to question the curriculum and why it was brought to Stuart. He found the space between the plan of Core Knowledge and its lived experience intriguing because he was one who liked to ask questions about the curriculum and find out how he might work with the students and Core Knowledge.

Unfortunately, Dan found that the main reason Core Knowledge was brought to Stuart was for the money it could provide. The teachers at Stuart researched Core Knowledge as part of a grant, and Dan realized that the focus was on money and not the curriculum. Focusing on the money and materials from the outset of bringing this curriculum to Stuart laid the foundation for a mis-focus on what is important with the teachers and students at Stuart. As I begin to think about the need for money and resources in schools, I cannot deny that these are necessary parts of running a program. However, Dan's reaction to finding out that this program was driven by money provides an interesting insight into his discovery process. Dan shares with me his experience about questioning why Core Knowledge is at Stuart:

I want it spelled out. I don't understand. Again, we are having all these conversations. It's the money that came along with that book and all the other books with it that allows us to do professional development like we are doing today. It has nothing to do with the Core Knowledge curriculum as it is printed on the page. It is the funding that comes along with it. It lets us buy materials to do activities. It lets us buy—it lets us pay for professional development time to talk about how can we incorporate reading and math into our Social Studies plan, units, whatever. And that was it. That was the light bulb for me about—I completely understood. It became clear it's not, at least in my mind, the conversations—it's not the curriculum, and it's the dollars that come along with the curriculum. And for me that was a huge change in my understanding of what's going on at this school.

Dan's reaction to finding out that money was driving the curriculum made an impact on him that was lasting throughout our conversations. Dan was still hoping that teachers could teach the Core Knowledge curriculum because it was the best thing for them and the students, but he found that there was a different motivation. Dan's focus was on the money and how it was changing the atmosphere at Stuart. He says:

Since that point, when we talk about Core Knowledge now, I have in my head a dollar sign. And I understand who is thinking about things beyond academics. You know, he's [the principal] not thinking about that this makes the kids smarter. He is thinking that this gives us more tools to make the kids smarter. And you know since then, our conversations have leaned more towards the money process, what happens with money at the school.

Dan returns to the concept of needing the tools to make kids smarter instead of thinking about what teachers and students can work on together to have a community in the classroom. When Core Knowledge is approached in this way, the curriculum is viewed differently by teachers. Dan has lost his original wonder and interest in the curriculum by learning that the hurdle he is supposed to get over is lack of money. Core Knowledge is viewed as a way to fund the school instead of how the curriculum might change the school. Starting with a foundation of money causes the focus of the curriculum to be goal oriented instead of focusing on the well-being of students. Administrators seem to ask

what we can do to make students succeed, instead of what we can do to ensure the growth of students and teachers in these classrooms. This view is problematic, especially for one novice teacher who was trying to find his way with curriculum. Dan's comment about this revelation was "That, it hurts a novice, naïve teacher too to hear that in some respects. There is a string somewhere that just breaks, you know?". The heart strings break when hearing that the focus is on the things instead of the students. Viewing Core Knowledge as a curriculum thing that only supports the "economic and political goals of others" completely separates the teachers from the curriculum (Pinar, 2004, p. 187). Core Knowledge becomes another thing that is supporting the central office goal of students scoring well on tests.

Although Dan lamented this conversation about money and bringing it into schools, I was captured by his comment about questioning what happens in schools, and he reminded me of the ride through the air when overcoming these hurdles in education.

Dan says,

But I haven't stopped thinking about it [why Core Knowledge is used at Stuart]. I don't think that's **the** answer. It's a very good answer, I think. It's pragmatic and it gets the job done, but I still haven't stopped thinking about the original question, what it's for, how can it be used, what is its part in the big picture? It's not like I heard that answer and said, okay, I can stop thinking about it now.

Dan can continue asking questions and thinking about Core Knowledge. His questioning is what helps teachers overcome the hurdles that they face in teaching and thinking about curriculum. He also has learned a lesson of looking at the hurdles of teaching. Dan continues:

I'm sure that he [the principal] thinks it is a very good curriculum, but that the "how" of it is that it happens because there is money there to now have professional development and buy materials. It's going to make me ask questions—more questions in the future when I get answers like that because

now I know that—it is not as simple as that. There is not a one to one connection between the use of a curriculum and the method of its effectiveness.

Dan's lesson learned is that he has to continue questioning curriculum and continue to learn about what is going on in schools. Dan continues to explore the space between the air and the ground.

Searching the In-Between for Answers

Rest

Between our words
there is a rest,
a space like
that between
two notes,
where what
was sounded last
still hangs
suspended
in the spirit air,
within the heart,
and that
which soon
will sound
is yet unknown,
a simple possibility. (Brown, 2000, p. 42)

Brown's words bring forward so beautifully some of the themes in this section and from this chapter. The words that I spoke about Core Knowledge with the teachers at Stuart still hang with me in the air around me as I write. Those voices are floating in the spirit air, but the spirits themselves also continue to suspend above the teachers. Continuing sounds that are yet to be made about Core Knowledge are unknown—are out there waiting to be spoken. A beginning has been made—a sounding has been brought forth from the heart's core of teachers' experiences with the Core Knowledge curriculum.

This chapter has shown the insights I gleaned from the conversations with teachers at Stuart, and I have brought forward themes that I saw intertwined with the words of those with whom I talked. I remain intrigued with the idea of the in-between—what is lost there, what can be found there, and the possibilities. For some it is the resting time that Brown articulates in her poem—a bridge between what was said and what can be said in the future. I find that I am thinking about those teachers’ spirits that must be floating around those in-between places and how I can call them back to the hearts of teachers to be grounded with them in teaching Core Knowledge. In education I imagine that we want teachers’ hearts filled with the spirit of teaching and learning. I think about how I can bring forward what I have learned from the teachers at Stuart to enrich what others might know about Core Knowledge. What have I learned and in what ways can it be used? This space is my rest before I begin the work of chapter five, where I begin to think aloud about some of the pedagogical possibilities.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDING HEARTS AND SPIRIT AGAIN

As soon as we have the thing
before our eyes, and in our hearts
an ear for the word, thinking prospers. (Heidegger, in Krell, p. 343)

I began this journey with a question: What is the lived experience of teaching the Core Knowledge curriculum? I think about the Core Knowledge teachers at Stuart and around the country—many of whom I have met as I travel and work with Core Knowledge schools. Core Knowledge teachers can be lost in spirit, and when they are, there is no way to continue with Core Knowledge or any other curriculum in the school. Teachers may seem connected to curriculum, but they are only going through the motions. In what ways can lost hearts and spirits be found, and what can be done about keeping teachers' hearts enthusiastic about Core Knowledge? Perhaps the questions that are most in need of asking are: Is Core Knowledge capable of heart? Should it continue in schools? How might it be re-thought? First, however, it is important to think about what is missing in Core Knowledge schools. These missing pieces lead to missing people in the curriculum process: namely teachers and students. In this chapter, I will bring forward the themes written about in chapter four and begin to reflect on pedagogical possibilities.

Through this work with phenomenology, I gather deeper understandings about teaching the Core Knowledge curriculum. I use the metaphor of the heart to open up the meaning between what the teachers were telling me and the experience of teaching Core Knowledge. It is in their hearts that I have found more understanding of the Core Knowledge curriculum and how teachers' voices are essential in the conversation about this curriculum. Through the heart, I have been able to see teaching experiences with

Core Knowledge more deeply, and I understand how the school environment can affect teaching Core Knowledge.

This work starts with an invitation to come on a journey to explore the experience of teaching the Core Knowledge curriculum. During this time, I reflect on my heart and spirit in working with Core Knowledge. Teaching the Core Knowledge curriculum is a personal experience for me, and I carry those lived encounters with me. As I talked with teachers from Stuart, I realize that they put their hearts and souls into teaching, as they shared their stories with me. In the beginning of this work, I asked the question, “Will reforming eventually lead to a loss of form and a loss of heart?” (p. 78). Chapter five is dedicated to thinking more deeply about that question and encouraging those who work with Core Knowledge to observe and listen more closely to teacher stories. I also think about changes that might be introduced to the Core Knowledge curriculum in schools and what the Core Knowledge Foundation might do to support these efforts.

In chapter four, I uncover themes in my conversations with Core Knowledge teachers, and I continue to think about those themes in the context of the Core Knowledge curriculum. What have I learned? In what ways do the themes that I have discovered hold promise for the Core Knowledge curriculum and for the teachers who teach it? Van Manen (1990) reminds me that “Phenomenological text succeeds when it lets us see that which shines through, that which tends to hide itself” (p. 130). I discuss ideas about Core Knowledge in this work that have not been closely studied before, such as thinking about the choice of Core Knowledge; being defined by Core Knowledge; opening teachers’ hearts to the curriculum; and considering Core Knowledge as a “thing.” Although there have been complete studies written about Core Knowledge in

terms of testing results and implementation in schools, this work brings forward another aspect of the curriculum—one that may have hidden itself before. I speak more to those hidden aspects in this chapter and what bringing them out of hiding may mean for Core Knowledge teachers. Van Manen (1990) describes this kind of research and writing:

When we compare the pragmatic consequences of behavioral social science with phenomenological human science we note that traditional behavioral research leads to instrumental knowledge principles: useful techniques, managerial policies, and rules-for-acting. In contrast, phenomenological research gives us tactful thoughtfulness: situational perceptiveness, discernment, and depthful understanding. (p. 156)

I try to accomplish what van Manen describes beautifully, a more “tactful thoughtfulness” about Core Knowledge. In the following sections I bring forward those ideas and begin to think about ways that they can be used in Core Knowledge schools. In what ways can Core Knowledge teachers voice their experiences with Core Knowledge? What can be learned from hearing these voices while bringing Core Knowledge into a school? Where are the places that Core Knowledge teachers can gather to share these stories, and how does space in a school affect how teachers live with this curriculum? Finally, I begin to think about issues of power and how Core Knowledge might be more openly addressed in a school instead of burying it under many other things that teachers are asked to do. I begin by returning to the voices of teachers and what they have to say about Core Knowledge.

Returning to Stories of the Heart: Hearing Teachers’ Voices

To understand teaching, therefore, either as a researcher, administrator, or colleague, it is not enough merely to witness the behavior, skills and actions of teaching. One must also listen to the voice of the teacher, to the person it expresses and to the purposes it articulates. Failure to understand the teacher’s voice is failure to understand the teacher’s teaching. (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 249)

I return to the idea of teachers' voices that describe Core Knowledge experiences, because through such listening, we are able to understand what is happening with Core Knowledge—literally and more deeply. I began chapter two in wonderment about whether or not teachers could find the strength to tell the Core Knowledge stories. Hearing their own voices has a profound affect on the teachers themselves. Kreisberg (1991) writes, "In developing their own voices, individuals begin to become authors of their lives, thus voice and action are intimately linked" (p. 116). For months, I spent time in the classrooms of teachers at Stuart while they spoke in their own voices about Core Knowledge. I found a deeper understanding of what they were experiencing by listening to them. However, those voices did not seem to echo in the school outside of meetings with me; in fact, there was an absence of teacher voice. I write about the "appearance" of choice and how the act of choosing the Core Knowledge curriculum did not come from the teachers themselves; instead, it was chosen for them. The teachers did not find the strength to protest this silencing of their voices. What is truly absent when teachers' voices are not heard? What happens when administrators hear the voices of teachers, but they don't listen to them? *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2001) defines "absence" as nonexistence (p. 3). Feeling absent or overlooked promotes feelings of not existing. In what ways can teachers truly embrace a curriculum, such as Core Knowledge, when they have been made to feel as though they don't exist at a Core Knowledge school? In what ways must this affect them in their hearts?

There were other absent voices outside the initial meeting about Core Knowledge. One example of feeling absent occurs when Dan explains to me that he was talking with the Language Arts coach at Stuart. He was trying to find an answer about Core

Knowledge, but the conversation quickly changed to Language Arts instead of focusing on Core Knowledge's connection to Language Arts. There was no connection between Core Knowledge and what was happening in the classroom, and Dan felt that the coach's impulse was to explain away Core Knowledge. Dan explains, "I think that she really did not understand that I was questioning her about Core Knowledge and the relationship between Core Knowledge and Language Arts. She jumped too quickly to the Language Arts answer. So I was a little disappointed with that." When the faculty lacks a common understanding about Core Knowledge, the curriculum that is supposed to be a major component of instruction in the school, dialogue cannot ensue, and in essence, teachers become voiceless.

The word "voice" has many definitions in the dictionary, and one of the most poetic is the musical derivation, "one of the individual parts or strands in a composition; a medium or agency of expression" (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 910). When imagining teachers as the individual strands or notes in a composition, they become an integral part of the composition of Core Knowledge. If voice is an agency of expression, then it is vital for voices to be heard. In what ways does it affect teachers if their expressions are not being recognized? In what ways does this affect the teaching of Core Knowledge if teachers are expressing opinions about the curriculum only to be dismissed? Hargreaves (1994) writes about the importance of voice in reform when discussing the vision of a school. He writes that the "individual parts or strands in a composition" must be heard in unison and behind a shared idea of what will succeed in a school. In the case of Stuart, this is the Core Knowledge curriculum. Without voice, the teachers are acted upon with reform ideas. Hargreaves (1994) writes:

We have seen that a world of vision without voice is equally problematic. In this world, where purposes are imposed and consensus is contrived, there is no place for the practical judgment and wisdom of teachers; no place for their voices to get proper hearing. A major challenge for educational restructuring is to work through and reconcile this tension between vision and voice; to create a choir from a cacophony. (p. 251)

To create such choirs, those within the hierarchy of schools, as well as outside, need to listen for the songs that teachers are willing to sing about their experiences. United together, teacher voices can sing a mighty song. At Stuart, the lack of teacher voices and stories contributed to the difficulty with Core Knowledge's acceptance and use.

Dan's story highlights an essential part of introducing Core Knowledge into a school. Everyone on the faculty should be knowledgeable about the curriculum and ready to discuss how they can use it in their instructional program. The administrator should make sure everyone is speaking the same language about Core Knowledge, and at the same time, be given the opportunity to question what this language means. It is a basic, but necessary part of the success of this program. All people on the faculty, even those who are not classroom teachers, should learn about Core Knowledge and have a voice about whether or not it will work in their classrooms.

Without the direct voices of teachers, it is impossible to understand what is happening with Core Knowledge. To be heard, teachers must be given a space to dwell together with colleagues and friends. When teachers are given a place to tell their stories, schools can empower them to experience Core Knowledge on their own terms, instead of holding power over them to do what they are told. Hearing stories of the heart can show the possibilities with this curriculum. Administrators must open their ears to hear about what is happening with Core Knowledge and work in concert with teachers to address concerns and celebrate successes together.

Telling Core Knowledge Stories: True Conversations

I start with my own story because I believe that all teaching is ultimately autobiographical and that it is a process of evolution. It is only through reflection on that evolution that we can understand our motives, aspirations, and even success or failure as teachers. (Nieto, 2003, pp. 9-10)

Most often, the stories teachers tell are partial and uneven, anecdotes exchanged in the teachers' lounge, jokes passed in the hallway. I take teacher lore to be in part an attempt to apprehend the ragged tales teachers tell, an exercise in making them accessible to teachers themselves as well as to others who care what teaching is, what teachers do. (Ayers, 1992b, p. 155)

Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here. (Kidd, 2002, p. 107)

The voices of Core Knowledge teachers gather more resonance when they are blended with what their students are learning. I include examples of those stories woven throughout the text of this work, and now I seek the pedagogical implications for practice. First, a troubling question must be addressed: How can school encourage communication of these stories when teachers do not feel comfortable sharing them?

When I ask Joanne if she would ever think about protesting or speaking up when she wasn't happy about a curriculum choice, she says "I don't think it would have done a bit of good." In some instances with Core Knowledge, teachers reach a point where they don't bother to speak out anymore. Their stories have been silenced. There is a saying, "Confession is good for the soul," and I would also say that it is good for the heart. Hearts grow when they are nurtured, and listening to the stories of Core Knowledge teachers can help them grow personally and professionally, as well as provide lessons for those interested in journeying down the same path.

I realize that there is not a way to "force" teachers into meaningful conversations about Core Knowledge—particularly when they have not been encouraged to talk

together before. I also realize that suddenly thrusting teachers into situations where they are playing games or participating in team-building exercises without a foundation can have an opposite effect—alienating them to a greater extent. However, school administrators can provide time and some guidance in beginning these conversations, and they can promote an environment in the school that encourages questioning. Meier (2002) describes how the environment in schools might change if teachers begin to admit their confusion about topics in teaching:

There is no way to get around it: the willingness to take risks, ask questions, and make mistakes is a requirement for the development of expertise. We can learn secretly, but at a price. If we act as if we take it for granted that there's never (well rarely) a "dumb" question, just occasions when it is hard for us to understand where we're each coming from, then we can more readily go public with our confusions. (p. 14)

If teachers can open their hearts and admit their questions and confusions, then teaching Core Knowledge can be a journey together instead of a secluded trip. In what ways can schools make those opportunities more available? In what ways can teachers share their practice with Core Knowledge? Administrators can provide teachers with a quiet place to gather. Many schools don't have the space for a formal teachers' lounge, but finding a place for teachers to congregate would be a first step in helping them come together to work and talk. Also, schools can provide teachers with opportunities to gather outside the school—whether at a retreat, a district space or dinner to gather away from school.

I think it is helpful to pose discussion topics about Core Knowledge in the early stages of this conversation. For example, teachers may bring a favorite Core Knowledge lesson for discussion with the group. I would hope that eventually teachers would generate their own discussion topics. Issues of curriculum and instruction should be openly discussed and debated. Encouraging these discussions could bring teachers back

into the conversation about curriculum and other issues of interest at the school. By providing these opportunities, teachers feel more valued for what they have to say and feel comfortable to come forward and say it.

There also should be a plan built into the school structure for teachers to participate in the initial decision making about Core Knowledge. Teachers should be able to talk about issues of teaching and learning. For example, when it was time to vote for Core Knowledge, the faculty did not have any information about the possible curriculum methods before the vote—except for short presentations by a small team. The entire faculty should have been made aware of the situation and should have been involved in gathering information about possible reform methods. This was not the time to give the job to a small committee for such a monumental shift in the culture of the school. Faculties should be trusted to gather this information and present it to their colleagues. Perhaps the administration could allow a sign up sheet for different small groups to be in charge of educating the rest on reform methods. Before discussing the options, all teachers should have a chance to speak about the methods. Books and articles could have been made available for groups of teachers to read and report back to the faculty. These book studies would have been an excellent use of faculty meeting time. The teachers could post large pieces of paper in the meeting area with the curriculum choices listed and construct a graffiti board to write spontaneous comments or questions. Reforms should not be “sprung” on schools, and decisions should not be made with only half the information. Instead, the reforms should be researched and grow from the inside. Teachers should be questioning the reforms from the beginning, but they need information and time to make informed decisions. Once the teachers participate in these

reform decisions, the same forums for discussion should be used to follow the progress of the reforms. Teachers' stories about how they are working with Core Knowledge are critical to observe how the curriculum is truly progressing.

Ellsworth (1997) discusses modes of address in her work on pedagogy, and she describes communicative dialogue as a process that should be closely studied in classrooms. I also would say that communicative dialogue should be an ongoing project between teachers, and telling stories is part of this project. Ellsworth (1997) writes, "It [communicative dialogue] needs to hold the participants of dialogue in dialogue despite the constant change of view and interests that threaten coherence through difference" (p. 89). Telling stories of Core Knowledge experiences can hold the participants together in their differences through the conversation. Teachers should share stories in the spirit of making inquiries into their practice with regard to Core Knowledge.

When teachers start telling such stories, those in positions of power may stifle this process because once teachers begin inquiring about their practice, they challenge what is happening in schools. I was amused by Dan's characterization of his behavior in faculty meetings when he asks questions about what is going on during the meeting. "And I think, I am more verbal at the meetings, so I say, you know what? I don't get it." Dan has realized that being verbal at meetings and during conversations about Core Knowledge is not usually accepted or condoned at Stuart or many other schools. Schools are often environments that encourage teachers to "go with the flow" instead of challenging decisions and opening up new topics for conversation. This attitude requires changing; teachers need to be allowed to question and discuss, if any genuine reform is to happen in schools.

If teachers have different views about Core Knowledge, they should be listened to and taken seriously, thus allowing more conversation. Schools need to be places where teachers are actively involved in the decision making, informing themselves in the process, and realizing that decision making cannot always be quick and painless. The variety of voices and concerns should add to discussion and not be regarded as too messy to encourage. Schools need to be prepared to engage in “complicated curriculum conversations” (Pinar et al., 1995). There are ways to facilitate differing voices of teachers and not have conversation turn into a battle of wills. Administrators should encourage conversational meetings for the faculty at the beginning of the year to engage in critical examination of curriculum possibilities. When encouraging conversational meetings, administrators should recognize that there is not just one conversation, but a variety of voices and backgrounds that need representation in this meaningful conversation (Applebee, 1996). Applebee (1996) writes, “A curricular conversation comprises a series of such discussions taking place over time—weeks or semesters or even years” (p. 44). When teachers and administrators learn how to talk together and practice listening, it will promote an environment of shared responsibility and help to reduce power struggles that squelch conversation.

By thinking about Core Knowledge before it came to Stuart, I believe that the teachers might have foreseen many of the issues that arose for them. They might have known that they were lacking in background knowledge to teach many of the subjects if they had closely studied the curriculum. They would have questioned how to solve that problem. They might have addressed any lingering issues of anger about the decision

making structure in the school. They would have thought about the problems with collaboration and how to remedy them.

By encouraging an environment of inquiry about Core Knowledge, teachers are able to reflect on feelings that are generally not expressed. When these emotions have a place to come forward, they are not bottled up and impacting instruction. I would encourage schools to begin thinking about Core Knowledge before it comes to the school. However, since I visited Stuart after Core Knowledge was in place, I found that teachers were telling me current stories about working with the curriculum. An environment of inquiry also can encompass discussing the curriculum at the school and working through any problems together. I listen to a story from Joanne when she describes teaching a Core Knowledge unit for the first time:

I try to do an experiment with them, and I would go out and buy resources. For chemistry, I did physical and chemical change. We did stations, and they went from station to station in the cafeteria. They had to test whether they thought it was a physical or chemical change and why. They started throwing things at each other. I was almost in tears, and I have come out of there in tears several times because I spend my own money a lot of times. I'm getting things and these kids—they can't handle it. They can't handle reading the experience. They can handle reading out of the textbook and taking notes. At times we do experiments with them and think that would be fun for them, but they can't handle doing it. And it just disappoints me.

I am struck by Joanne sharing with me that she was brought to tears of frustration by this experience. When I first met Joanne, she did not seem to be someone reduced to tears, and she was not someone that I thought would feel frustrated in this kind of situation. In that conversation, I learn how she was struggling with buying resources for Core Knowledge units and then struggling with behavior problems, as well. These are not aspects of teaching Core Knowledge that might come forward in the middle of a rushed faculty meeting, but might come forward in meaningful discussion about what is

happening during the instruction of Core Knowledge units. During Stuart's weekly Core Knowledge meetings, the teachers could suggest a topic for discussion, and Joanne might have been able to talk about resources or behavior issues related to Core Knowledge. Having teachers critically examine these issues could yield possible suggestions for help or spark a meaningful discussion about how to deal with these issues.

Another interesting story that I heard is from Marilyn, and we stumble on the subject when she is telling me about taking Core Knowledge field trips with her classes. She shares this story with me:

I admit it breaks my heart that we have to get these kids to go to places that are literally around the corner. But if you don't do it, they are obviously—they are obviously never going to get there with their family. So take them. Maybe the spark will be enough to ignite a little fire that next year when they hear about the War of 1812, or they hear about Francis Scott Key, that there will be enough there for them to finally make a connection all on their own without you starting from scratch again. Take them, show them and then they will get it. And they will be like, oh yeah, now I know what you are talking about. See it, and do it. We go somewhere that they haven't been before. Last week we went to the historical society. This Friday, my two science classes are participating in a citywide science fair.

Marilyn's comments about lighting a spark for Core Knowledge are telling. In the context of this story, I hear her care and concern for the children. She watches out for their general well being as well as teaching them what they need to know. Maybe that question of "what they need to know" requires a deeper look, however. In that brief moment of sharing a story about field trips, Marilyn opens up a different side of herself as a Core Knowledge teacher and the need for student field trips linked to the Core Knowledge content. In order to help Core Knowledge succeed at this school, Marilyn sees the importance of bringing the students into the community and the community into the

school. Marilyn also shares with me that she not only takes her students from her class out into the community, but she also takes the students from other classes.

I begin to think about how important this story would be to share at a faculty meeting or at a district board meeting because it highlights how important diverse learning experiences are for students. Core Knowledge is a curriculum that has a heavy emphasis on American and World history topics. In order to bring these topics to life, student field trips are an excellent way to learn about some of the history concepts. It highlights the need for work with Core Knowledge on all levels, not just in dealing with the curriculum, but also with extracurricular activities and other aspects of school life. Supporting the student field trips means that the students have another lens to see the content. Marilyn's conversation about field trips and other ways to enliven the curriculum would also make an excellent topic for school discussion. One Core Knowledge meeting could be devoted to finding and sharing local places of interest that connect with the Core Knowledge curriculum and the students' lives. The teachers could schedule student field trips or faculty retreats to these places. Marilyn's story could spark an idea for a pertinent and interesting Core Knowledge faculty meeting.

Telling stories and asking questions is messy and not easily contained, and that is not often welcomed in schools. In these two stories about Core Knowledge at Stuart, the reader can find issues that go beyond the telling of the story: issues of money for resources, issues of money for field trips and planning to help students have experiences outside of the classroom as well as in the classroom. The everyday problems and insights about Core Knowledge come from stories of Core Knowledge teachers. Ayers (1992a) writes:

Who can say what teachers think they are up to, what they take to be the point of what they are doing, what it means for teachers to teach? To say that teachers are the ones who understand, know, and can say seems so obvious that it is beneath reporting. But in the often odd, sometimes upside-down world of social research, the obvious news must be reported and repeated: The secret of teaching is to be found in the local detail and the everyday life of teachers; teachers can be the richest and most useful source of knowledge about teaching; those who hope to understand teaching must turn at some point to the teachers themselves. (p. v)

Core Knowledge teachers must be heard in the context of teaching the curriculum. How does the community and those who are interested in Core Knowledge find the information to improve the teaching of the curriculum? They must ask the Core Knowledge teachers. Teachers themselves would be some of the first to proclaim that they do not have any more time to ask the thoughtful questions that need to be asked about Core Knowledge. Thoughtful questions are ones that go beyond recall, and I imagine teachers asking probing questions and having time to come back to them together. Questions might include: How do we see our students and teachers currently working with Core Knowledge? How is Core Knowledge affecting our school culture? What benefits is Core Knowledge providing and what challenges are we having? How is Core Knowledge changing teachers and instruction? Should Core Knowledge be continued? How might it be changed? I pose a few examples, but questions like these should be thoughtfully considered by a staff and then each question should be discussed. Each question should be addressed by everyone on the staff, including teachers, instructional aids, coaches, and anyone else who will work with Core Knowledge. Core Knowledge should be more than a name or something proclaimed on a banner; it should be carefully considered by the teachers as long as it remains on a campus. From these questions come the stories that I bring forward in this section, and the stories lead to more conversation and ways to address concerns.

Situations in schools that hamper the story sharing need to be addressed. The responsibility to make decisions in schools should be shared amongst all those who work there. This type of situation means that principals need to focus on hearing from teachers and providing them with open avenues of communication—such as email or open office hours. Principals should pick one morning a week where they can be in school buildings for coffee and meet with teachers. Keeping an open door and then receiving teachers through that door helps to build avenues of communication—particularly about the Core Knowledge curriculum. Two of the teachers tell me that they did seek out more information about Core Knowledge from the principal, and he was open to talk with them, suggesting books to read and more conversation. I applaud his efforts, and I believe that he should have then opened up those questions to the entire staff to encourage dialogue between teachers.

Those who research and are interested in Core Knowledge must begin to hear the voices of those who teach the curriculum. They are telling rich stories about what happens when it is brought to schools. They are telling rich stories about how they deal with the curriculum in their classrooms. For these reasons, teachers need to have places in schools to tell stories and their space needs to be respected and nurtured. Teachers also need to have a space to teach Core Knowledge and feel empowered by their teaching.

Learning Spaces

Lived space (spatiality) is felt space. . . we know that the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel. The huge space of a modern bank building may make us feel small, the wide-open space of a landscape may make us feel exposed but also possibly free, and just the opposite from the feeling we get on a crowded elevator. . . As we walk into a cathedral we may be overcome by a silent sense of the transcendental even if we ordinarily are not particularly religious or churchgoing. . . In general, we may say that we become the space we are in. (van Manen, 1991, p. 102)

I am affected by the space that I occupy, and I can relate to the story that van Manen tells about cathedrals. After traveling to different destinations, one of my favorite places to visit is a place of worship because of the looks on the faces of those who enter these incredible buildings—Renaissance churches in Florence or cathedrals in London. I am touched by what van Manen says about knowing the transcendental in these places, and I relish seeing that recognition on people’s faces. As I traveled in Italy, I found that the words for the city square in Siena, *Il Campo*, meant “heart of the city.” It was the space where the people gathered in the center of town, with the small streets branching off like arteries through the alleyways, and it filled me with a sense of history of the country. *Il Campo* is the heartbeat of the city, with people gathering at cafés, shops, and the city hall to conduct business or to be married.

I see schools as the heart of communities, and I am struck by the same awe when I visit them. I see children and teachers being there together. I love the smells in a school of glue and construction paper, of lunch in the cafeteria, or of pencils and erasers. I am connected to schools through conversations with those who are in them, whether it be teachers or students. I become the space when I visit schools—and I return to being a teacher by listening to a child read a story to me, helping with a math problem, tying a shoe, or fixing the glue bottle. Teachers also should feel this love for schools, which they may not if they are alienated from the space they occupy in school buildings. It would be wonderful for teachers to capture the experience of awe when they enter a school building. Capturing a sense of awe means that teachers might regard school buildings as their sacred spaces. I believe that if teachers are valued for the tremendous responsibility they have for children in those places, they can begin to remember their purpose. People

become the space in which they dwell. If this is true, then what must it be like to occupy a space that does not encourage collaboration or conversation? What must schools be like for those teachers who sprint to their cars as soon as they hear the final bell? What must Core Knowledge schools be like for those who are intimidated by the curriculum because they don't know enough about it, or feel that they were not consulted before Core Knowledge came into the school? Spaces are critical to consider when thinking about the future of Core Knowledge because they convey meaning to teachers and students.

In chapter two, I write about learning spaces and how deeply those sacred spaces affect teachers. Lack of them may cause a loss of enthusiasm for being a Core Knowledge teacher, if the curriculum is not supported in the school. Teachers live in those spaces for the majority of the day during the school year, and they take home those experiences of what happens in those spaces. When working with student teachers, Jagla (1992) poses the following question about space:

Imagine. Picture this: You have the opportunity to design your own school. A dream? Sure, go ahead. Do you use a big building or a small one? Do you use a building? How many classrooms do you have? What do they look like? Do you have classrooms? . . . These are the types of questions I posed to student teachers as I proposed to “teach” them to be teachers. (p. 61)

Jagla writes that she sees the importance of having teachers be able to imagine. It is profound that she uses an example of space. I found that I started to think about how I would design a perfect school—a teacher's dream. In this section, I start to think about how to design those spaces on a smaller scale—the teachers' classrooms. Teachers need sacred spaces so that they are able to share stories of trials as well as successes, ask questions, and think out loud together about Core Knowledge, mentioned in the previous section. What might be learned about Core Knowledge in these reflective places? What

can teachers learn from these experiences? Providing these spaces for reflection is important for teachers to grow professionally—particularly with Core Knowledge.

Place or lack of it affects the Core Knowledge curriculum as is evident at Stuart. It is a lack of place, as well as changing places that affect many aspects of teaching Core Knowledge. I have written about the idea of housing students and teachers of different grades together at Stuart. Although the house system was not directly connected with Core Knowledge, it directly affected the planning and teaching of the curriculum because teachers had to cope with not being near colleagues with whom they shared ideas for Core Knowledge units. One of the more vexing problems with the houses is that the new system displaced teachers to different areas of the building and away from those with whom they worked the previous year on Core Knowledge topics. Joanne says to me, “But the way it is set up, it’s just hard because I’m not near my grade level partner.” Joanne was upset because she was not near her colleague from the fourth grade, and she was also teaching a different subject within Core Knowledge, which means that she could not use her Core Knowledge units she wrote the previous year. Maybe some change is good, but to feel displaced without experiencing implacement (Casey, 1993) keeps teachers disconnected from themselves and each other.

With the house system, the teachers split up so that there are different grade level representations in each house. For that to happen, entire grade levels were divided, and although teachers enjoyed being with different students, they struggled in this new place. Another problem in this move was that teachers prepared for work in one grade level and were moved to another. Marilyn describes this situation to me:

When the summer was here, see, I was a 3rd grade teacher, so I did pull a lot of adding to and fixing up my 3rd grade stuff. But I had no idea [that I was moving to

a new grade level]. We just assumed—stupid us. We just assumed that I would be teaching 3rd grade. We knew we were having this house thing, so we didn't understand that it was you can't go out of your house. You know, we still thought, okay, we are in this house, but I can switch with another 3rd grade Science teacher. Because you know, we had already worked out schedules, so we were ready for that. I just wish I had prior knowledge of the plan.

Not only was Marilyn moved to another grade level, but the teachers were told that they could only switch classes within their houses, so those teachers with whom they had collaborated over the summer were no longer able to gather together. In Stuart's new system, Core Knowledge teachers would be teaching different grades and different content. Marilyn uses a metaphor to explain how she felt, "Had I just known that it was going to be a different ballgame, I would have gotten different equipment. I thought I was playing baseball, and they pulled out the football here. And I didn't bring my pads. You know I just wasn't ready." This change in place was difficult for the teachers at Stuart, and it complicated the process of teaching Core Knowledge.

Joanne and Marilyn's stories show how they were affected by being separated from their colleagues and that their feelings about space were not heard or respected. To show that teachers are respected, they need to be able to design these spaces according to their needs. In my work with Core Knowledge, I find that teachers want to be near their grade level peers. For example, those who teach first grade want to be near each other to share materials and ideas. One aspect of the Core Knowledge curriculum is that it builds from grade to grade, so that concepts taught in the first grade are taught more in depth in the fourth grade. Not only would it benefit Core Knowledge first grade teachers to be together, but I think it would be beneficial for those grade levels that share content to be close, as well, grouping primary and intermediate students and teachers. This grouping

gives teachers the time to visit with those on their grade level and have students of different grades interact, which was the original intent of the house system at Stuart.

It is important for teachers to group themselves as they would like, and they also should design their classroom spaces to benefit their instruction of Core Knowledge. Schools should provide materials to teachers that they need for their classroom spaces. Since there is an emphasis on reading for information and enjoyment in the Core Knowledge curriculum, classrooms libraries should be filled with books about Core Knowledge topics, with novels, magazines and different types of literature. The content of these sources must be diverse with questions raised about whose knowledge gets represented in the libraries. Not only are books important, but technology is vital for teachers to do their jobs. Students and teachers should have access to computers, televisions, and presentation materials. It is important for students to begin learning how to use technology presentations in their Core Knowledge projects, to be able to research topics.

Teachers should be able to design their classrooms, and they should have the security of being in the same classroom with the same students. I know that numbers in schools necessitate occasional changes at grade levels, but teachers should decide how grade levels should be configured. Since teachers spend time learning the background knowledge for their grade level in Core Knowledge, it makes sense for them to stay at a grade level for more than one year and apply what they have learned. Other teachers might choose to move up each year with the same class, become knowledgeable about all grade level content and loop around again with another class. Teachers should be given options for their placements instead of having to move at the whim of someone else.

Teachers should be encouraged to think about these grade level configurations and be given the chance to try what they have suggested.

One of the chief concerns of Core Knowledge administrators and teachers is time to plan and time to interact with each other. The concept of time and not having enough of it to plan or to learn about Core Knowledge is key, and it is related to the issue of place that I discuss here. The concepts of time and place are related to taking care of teachers, as reflected in Heidegger's concept of care being essential to an authentic existence.

Heidegger (1953/1996) writes:

The irresolute person understands himself in terms of the events and accidents nearest by that are encountered in such making present and urge themselves upon him in changing ways. Busily losing *himself* in what is taken care of, the irresolute person *loses his time* in them, too. Hence his characteristic way of talking: "I have no time." Just as the person who exists inauthentically constantly loses time and never "has" any, it is the distinction of the temporality of authentic existence that in resoluteness it never loses time and "always has time." (p. 377)

In chapter three, I describe people who inauthentically, as ones who get caught up in the world without questioning what is happening around them. Heidegger observes that those who are not taking time to question and to be together are losing authentic time and are not able to recapture it. Those who are able to have authentic experiences, to be together in these places—whether it is teachers working together or spending time teaching students, see that as time well-spent. In order to take care of teachers and allow them authentic time to be together, schools should support this concept of places to gather as a way to support teachers' authentic ways to being.

Although teachers and administrators often discuss time in relation to Core Knowledge—time to plan, time to talk and time to teach, the issue of time must be linked to issue of place—where will they plan, where will they talk, and do they have places to

help them feel inspired to teach? It would be ideal for grade levels to have meeting rooms where they could come together and share resources. Middle and high schools seem more adept at bringing grade levels together in their own space. Often, middle and high school instructional departments have lounges dedicated to their discipline—language, science or math. Such as concept has potential with elementary school teachers, as well. Core Knowledge teachers could gather resources for their grade level and store them in workable places to share other resources. Having available computers in this space would then allow teachers to research topics further and duplicate these materials for their colleagues to read and discuss. This type of work space would make it evident to teachers that their work with curriculum is valued and important to the success of Core Knowledge. If this space is not available inside the school building, then teacher resource areas could be erected in portable buildings. Since the buildings are often divided in half, the grade levels that share information could be housed in the same resource area. Large tables and areas to spread out would be ideal for elementary teachers who often create projects and instructional materials.

In order for Core Knowledge to succeed in schools and for the well being of teachers and students, there have to be sacred spaces in schools—spaces for teachers to share ideas and materials and spaces for students to interact with their teachers in these spaces. I use a different definition of “sacred” to describe these places—“sacred” as “dedicated or devoted exclusively to a single use or person; worthy of respect; venerable” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 732). These sacred spaces cannot be customarily changed or closed without the input of teachers and the space should be respected by all those in a school. Casey (1993) writes, “To get into the spirit of a place is

to enter into what makes that place such a special spot” (p. 314). Teachers view classrooms and schools as places where they interact and make a mark on the lives of children. Meddling with the places erodes that feeling of awe and purpose that teachers might ordinarily feel. Places and feelings are connected closely, and the way teacher feels while working in a place with Core Knowledge will directly affect how they teach the curriculum and interact with the other teachers. As Stacey remarks earlier in this work, the teachers are forced into a system of “collaboration by accident,” as they only have time to visit while waiting for the copier or in the hallways. In what ways could their conversation be enriched if they could gather together in a place for collaboration?

If teachers want to have meaningful experiences while teaching Core Knowledge, then they need to view the curriculum as something that makes their classroom special, as well as other meeting places and the school as a whole. Valuing the places where teachers work helps them to know that they are valued, and what they do is valued. Schools need to respect the places where Core Knowledge teachers teach, but it is also important for teachers to communicate what they need in their space to have a positive experience with Core Knowledge.

Core Knowledge Communities: Having Everyone’s Heart in It

Teachers nurture each other by inquiring together: Teaching is uncertain; knowledge is uncertain; life is uncertain. It matters desperately that teachers and students abdicate frames of mind that value control and certainty over ambiguity and uncertainty. (Berman, 1998, p. 175)

Berman’s comment highlights situations in schools where it seems to be much more comfortable to be certain and follow the rules of control instead of thinking and inquiring together, as I have written about thus far. At one point in our conversation together, Joanne tells me that she often accepts the decisions of the administrators and

central office personnel. “I do, because I don’t like to be in trouble and I like to do what is expected of me.” In what ways can this affect Core Knowledge in schools if teachers are only doing what is expected of them and not finding themselves within the Core Knowledge curriculum? What does it mean for schools if teachers feel invisible?

When writing about Core Knowledge as the appearance of choice, I began to think about the deception in this kind of situation. In many instances in Core Knowledge schools, the decision to bring Core Knowledge into the school relies on a “consensus.” I agree that many decisions cannot be made unanimously, but the consensus at Stuart was revealed as a process that left many wondering if they had a vote at all. Kreisberg (1991) writes:

In many groups, “consensus” is reached because people submit to the will of a leader. They avoid asking the hard questions and bury their own strong beliefs. The problem with this approach is that it inevitably leads to alienation, resentment, and domination. It is based on *power over* rather than *power with*. (p. 129)

In a community, consensus still can be reached in a different way when group members voice their views and hear other positions with the understanding that not everyone will have the same opinion.

I would like to propose a different name for Core Knowledge schools and instead call them Core Knowledge communities—places where curriculum decisions are made together and each person in the school is supported. It takes effort to create a feeling of community, and everyone in the school needs to work toward the development of a community in order for it to come together. The components of community that I have mentioned, teachers’ voices and teachers’ places must come together to create this way of being. According to *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2001), communities can be

gathered into a common locality (that important place already mentioned); the dictionary also defines community as “as a group of people having common interests” (p. 180), which defines a group of teachers. A Core Knowledge community would be comprised of teachers who hold a common interest in the curriculum. The administrator would need to make sure, as mentioned earlier, that teachers are well informed about Core Knowledge as it affects their craft, and they would need to be thinking about Core Knowledge daily. A Core Knowledge community would work together for the realization of this curriculum, continually tweaking it to meet the needs of teachers and students. Members of a Core Knowledge community would not just turn their backs on the curriculum because they did not agree with it, but they would work to make sense of it before they agreed for it to come into the school, and continue to work at the process once adopting it.

Core Knowledge communities: Supporting each other. Sergiovanni (1994) proposes that people come together in communities because the “need for community is universal” (p. xiii). He continues, “A sense of belonging, of continuity, of being connected to others and to ideas and values that make our lives meaningful and significant—these needs are shared by all of us” (p. xiii). I would propose that teachers could agree on the tenets of a Core Knowledge community if they all had their hearts in the curriculum and knew that their views were valued and accepted. An exciting aspect of a Core Knowledge community would be that all teachers continue to support and help each other with the curriculum. There would not be as much worry about time and resources because there would be a caring community that would help teachers realize

the curriculum's potential. When thinking about forming these communities, it is important to remember that they can be formed or disabled by issues of power.

Kreisberg (1991) writes, "Virtually all serious discussions of empowerment emphasize the importance of community—of support and shared struggle in the process of empowerment" (p. 20). Kreisberg writes about the differences between "power-over" relationships and "power-with" relationships. Unlike the situation at Stuart, where the curriculum was chosen for the teachers, I envision a Core Knowledge community as one that empowers teachers to make decisions about curriculum and teaching. Imagine how much more meaningful Core Knowledge teaching and learning would be if it were centered in a Core Knowledge community! The attitudes of teachers in this type of community would change because they would be empowered to bring forward their opinions instead of being constrained in silence. And if Core Knowledge did not work as conceptualized, teachers could be empowered to rescind the decision. Instead of a school where Joanne would be forced to accept a decision with which she did not agree, she would be able to discuss Core Knowledge. Kreisberg (1991) writes, "Unlike power-over, through which the powerful person has the ability to impose his or her ideas, power-with is 'always revocable.' Group members consider ideas, but they may accept or reject them as they see fit" (p. 69). This would be a different situation from Stuart, where teachers told me that they felt the decision about Core Knowledge was already made when they came in the door for the meeting that afternoon.

In these Core Knowledge communities that I propose, the energy devoted to Core Knowledge would be positive energy. Teachers would be able to consult a library of books about topics that they are going to teach and then form discussion groups about

those topics. Topics would not be merely accepted, but critically examined. I propose university partnerships where experts in the field can come in and meet with teachers about different subject areas. University professors could model lessons about classroom topics. Since professors in education departments should be well versed in pedagogy as well as content, these professors could model diverse pedagogical perspectives while also focusing on content (an art lesson or history topic). If an institution of higher learning is not near the school, then I propose tapping the resources of the local high school. Often high school teachers may have deeper knowledge about their unique subject areas. Whatever the source, the power to learn about Core Knowledge topics would be generated and shared throughout the faculty. Not only would teachers come forward to talk about what they would need to learn, they would be empowered to find the answers to their questions—through a variety of resources and supported by the administration and district.

Once teachers feel comfortable discussing the Core Knowledge content throughout the year, I would propose a team teaching project where teachers would become experts on one aspect of the Core Knowledge curriculum and model lessons for their peers. Classes of different students could be combined, and students would have chances to work with older and younger children. Teachers in these communities should experiment with different evaluation methods—such as projects, plays, programs and other ways for the students to share what they have learned.

I focus on the search for Core Knowledge background since the teachers at Stuart worry about their lack of knowledge about curriculum topics, but I would also hope that Core Knowledge communities would be able to share what their students have learned. I

propose frequent assemblies where classes of students present a Core Knowledge program on what they have learned. These assemblies could be organized by grade level or for the entire school. Stuart tried a similar program for one year until the assemblies stopped the next year. The teachers did not seem to know why the programs stopped, but they spoke favorably of having the students teach each other. These programs are an excellent way to share Core Knowledge. Promoting a sense of pride in the curriculum makes the students eager to share what they have learned and promotes a sense of pride in their school community.

Teachers at Stuart are not having these kinds of community building experiences. William tells me that he feels emotional about working with Core Knowledge, because he knows that he is expected to teach a curriculum that he feels unprepared to teach—for a variety of reasons. He feels pressure from those around him, not support. When William talks with me about his experiences with Core Knowledge, one thing that bothers him is the feeling that he has to teach the topics or be penalized for not getting to them. He is concerned that he is not getting everything taught to the best of his ability. He says, “Because I guess I’m reflecting back to the principal, and I look at him. I see nobody else doing this [the unit I’m teaching], and we’re having too much fun doing it. So [I feel like when I am teaching Core Knowledge and enjoying it] that’s like wrong.” William feels that he has people looking over his shoulder at him while he teaches, and this observation is not supportive, but punitive.

In a Core Knowledge community, William would be encouraged to have fun with the curriculum and share his methods with other teachers. In a Core Knowledge community, teachers would work together instead of feeling like they were being

penalized for trying something different. Trying different methods of teaching and evaluation would be encouraged and shared with other faculty members. Sergiovanni (1994) writes, “In communities, for example, the connection of people to purpose and connections among people are not based on contracts, but commitments” (p. 4). A Core Knowledge community should be committed to Core Knowledge and not struggling to figure out how to perform for those in power-over relationships. In a Core Knowledge community, everyone who works in the school would provide a support network to encourage teaching and learning.

Core Knowledge communities: Focusing on time together. The experience of turning one Core Knowledge school into this supportive network might seem like a daunting task. I propose to think about this idea on a smaller scale and perhaps capitalize on something already happening at Stuart or another Core Knowledge school. One of the most rewarding aspects of working with Core Knowledge for me has been the opportunity to write curriculum with teachers. It is one aspect of Core Knowledge workshops that is extremely empowering to teachers, and also one of the ways that reluctant teachers accept Core Knowledge after they have fought against it during the adoption process at their schools. Teachers who have fought against Core Knowledge are often the greatest resources to consult about how it may work in schools. Schools need to learn to listen to those teachers who feel tension about the decision to implement Core Knowledge. They often have a keen sense of potential problems with Core Knowledge or teaching methods that might enhance its success. In a Core Knowledge community, consensus would need to be reached about the curriculum, but those who posed

arguments against it would be the first to be consulted about the change. This exercise helps bring teachers together in a community of professionals.

Becoming a curriculum writing community and discussing teaching practices is the same type of conversation I would like to see when schools decide to discuss Core Knowledge. Kreisberg's writing about the Educators for Social Responsibility in his book, *Transforming Power: Domination, Empowerment, and Education* is reminiscent of the experiences that Core Knowledge teachers feel while writing units. One teacher in Kreisberg's book shares her experience about writing curriculum:

None of us really knew what we were undertaking in writing this curriculum, and I felt maybe like I was doing something that was more than I could handle. But that challenge was exciting as well. . . . To me it wasn't a real commitment to the nuclear issue at that point, that became important, it was really the dynamic of this group that kept me going. (Kreisberg, 1991, p. 103)

Kreisberg's writing reminds me of some of the teachers at Stuart who had written Core Knowledge units and were enthusiastic about those experiences despite their problems with how the curriculum came to the school. They were enthusiastic despite the fact that some of them had been moved to grades where they could not use the material they had written. Joanne shares with me, "I figured that whoever was teaching it [the Core Knowledge unit] would be able to use it. All of our information is on the electronic learning community. So if you can get access to that, everyone's piece that they did this summer is on there." Joanne was happy with what she had written, and she was able to share it with others. She says, "I like to share, and people can share with me, I hope." That kind of sharing would define a Core Knowledge community.

Marilyn had a similar experience when she wrote units for a grade level that she thought she would be teaching before she was moved. Her units remain on the web to

share. Joanne told me that she wanted time to write Core Knowledge units, as it would help them keep from worrying about getting the work done. “We need to have time to sit and write our units. And then maybe we wouldn’t get so stressed this year. I think as an entire staff we’re stressed more than we have ever been.” Joanne realizes that the time to be together and write units on grade levels would help the school year flow more smoothly and develop a sense of community.

Technology opens a door for forming Core Knowledge communities in schools. With many teachers concerned about time, they can share units on school websites, post messages, and list references. In a Core Knowledge community, technology would be a key way to share and gain information about the curriculum. Stuart has an electronic learning community, which is a way that teachers can share information. This is one of the positive aspects of their Core Knowledge instruction. In the Core Knowledge community I envision, there would be a technology balance. I would not want Core Knowledge teachers using the website to avoid interacting with their peers, but I would want the computer to enhance their relationships with other teachers by helping them share information and ask questions. I envision teachers sharing different websites that would help with background information and instructional tools for delivering Core Knowledge. Teachers would not be hesitant to use technology because they would be well trained in the use of computers, scanners, and presentation tools. By planning technology training for Core Knowledge teachers, the administrator would be planning for enhanced engagement with the curriculum.

An absence of the learning experiences in a community can cause frustration. William and I discuss why he is frustrated with Core Knowledge, and he says that he did

not have any experiences like Joanne and Marilyn describe with creating units for the community at Stuart. William is working with the math curriculum at the school (which is not directly Core Knowledge related), and he is attending workshops with the district where he presents lessons he has written and receives feedback on his work. When he describes this workshop to me, I ask him if he feels empowered by his work with the math curriculum:

Exactly, you see with Core, I wish everybody could be taught like that [at the math workshop]. We wouldn't have that problem with so many teachers being lost. I'm reflecting back [on my lessons I wrote]. I feel confident, and I'm where I'm supposed to be. I'm taking my lesson plan to the conference with me to see where I am, to get good ideas. We are talking about what they are going to be doing next in three weeks, and I see the ideas, and I'm ready to go.

William would like to see more of a learning community centered on Core Knowledge. Although he gathers with others at the district level, he does not feel included in writing curriculum at Stuart. Joanne talks about the lack of time to gather as a community. "Our planning time allotment is 45 minutes every day, and once in a while we have a team meeting, but it is usually just to figure things out. I mean I don't really plan with my other team members—really not in my house." Joanne needs those opportunities to visit with her peers. Schools need to think about planning time beyond the structured short periods during the day.

In a Core Knowledge community, there would be a variety of times for teachers to meet. Teachers would be encouraged to think creatively about how to find time together, and the administrator would support these efforts. I worked with one principal who would promise money for substitutes for a half or whole day of Core Knowledge planning. Teachers could gather together on campus and share ideas for Core Knowledge instruction. Teachers would be encouraged to think about new ideas for times to be

together and suggest ways to facilitate those community meetings. When thinking about Core Knowledge planning, I would also suggest that adopting the Core Knowledge curriculum does not automatically produce collaboration. There are success stories of Core Knowledge schools that implement Core Knowledge and foster good systems and ideas of collaboration. However, that collaboration is not automatic. In order for teachers to begin working as a Core Knowledge community, they need to learn how to work together and be supported in finding time together.

One of the ways to support the idea of community would be to help teachers gather and write about what they want to learn. Sergiovanni (1994) suggests that the curriculum at a school can be a building block for organizing the school into a community. He writes, "Purposeful communities are characterized by unified action. Members link what they do to shared values, conceptions and ideas. Since members must work together, a plan for unified action is needed to help this transformation occur" (p. 96). If schools that work with Core Knowledge can use the curriculum as a basis for a common idea that drives the school, then communities may have a chance to form.

Community mindedness in schools helps to foster the collaboration that is often absent between teachers. Earlier I wrote about the struggle for teachers at Stuart to come together and have conversations about Core Knowledge. In Core Knowledge communities, I expect that the empowerment of teachers will lead to those teachers working together to strengthen their relationships. Miller (1992) remembers the time she spent with colleagues in her school:

I valued those communal explorations with my colleagues, those conversations interspersed between the clatter of the hand-turned ditto machine and the faceless voice of the public address system that inevitably disrupted the constant dissections of our teaching experiences. I had not only a sense of common

grappling with those experiences but also a sense of knowing that could only be easily communicated among those who worried and wondered each day about the often seemingly capricious processes of teaching and learning. (pp. 11-12)

Collaboration can bring teachers together, and working together toward a common goal can help form the bonds of community. The common thread that weaves these ideas together is giving teachers opportunities to communicate, as well as a place for that to happen. When a school is able to create this kind of environment, then everyone's hearts might be in the idea of teaching Core Knowledge. Until teachers are supported in their efforts with the curriculum, their hearts remain shuttered—closed to the experiences they may have.

Opening the Shutters: Attending to Closed Hearts

As we look within and examine ourselves, we will be better able to take care of the whole of every child we work with, to use our own empathy and compassion for children to dissolve the barriers between heart and intellect, and to help them develop their spirits as well as their minds. (Carlsson-Paige, 2001, p. 38)

I write about shuttered hearts in Core Knowledge teachers, and I'm troubled about the shutters being closed and how schools might help open them. There is anger among the Core Knowledge teachers at Stuart with whom I have visited about the decision to bring Core Knowledge to the school. Some teachers seem mired down in the anger and cannot get beyond it. Teachers at Stuart feel insecure that they do not have the background knowledge to teach the curriculum, and they do not know how to get that knowledge. They feel lost and alone on this journey as Core Knowledge teachers. When teachers are not able to attend to the professional obstacles, they are not able to open their hearts to Core Knowledge. In this section, I write about some of the ways to attend to those closed shutters. I focus on ways to support teachers who are frustrated with Core Knowledge and ways to keep Core Knowledge teachers engaged.

Some teachers are reluctant to try new things in their classrooms. Kessler (2001) writes, “Our hearts can also become blocked when we are attached to a particular plan, technique, or approach in the classroom. If we can keep our hearts open, we can see the unique needs of our students and discover entirely different ways to reach our larger goals” (p. 123). I would propose that teachers should remain open to new horizons with Core Knowledge instead of closed to new ideas. Schools in this type of situation should help teachers understand their anger and learn from it. This is a difficult thing to do when schools and districts have ignored teachers. It is easier for them to regard any new idea with heightened caution. If teachers can experience inspired places, perhaps they can deal with some of the problems that keep them from opening up to Core Knowledge or any new program.

Avoiding Anger, Embracing Spirit

Just allowing ourselves to become conscious about our defenses helps keep the heart open to others. Reflection and contemplation can help us scan our hearts and acknowledge difficult feelings to ourselves. (Kessler, 2001, p. 122)

I say the following words aloud while thinking about Core Knowledge: spirit, heart, and love. I imagine the reaction to using those words while talking about Core Knowledge or while writing a dissertation about Core Knowledge. What might these words have to show about teaching Core Knowledge? What might be learned about the experiences of Core Knowledge teachers when using these words? What are the connections? When I write about spirit, I mean to bring forward the emotions that are connected with adopting Core Knowledge. Glazer (1999) discusses this concept of spirit in his writing on spirituality in education:

This book articulates an approach to integrating spiritual development and learning rooted neither in church, state, religion, nor politics. Instead, the heart of

learning is revealed within each one of us: rooted in spirit. By moving inside to the core of our experiences—and working out from there—the apparent duality of “sides” is pierced; the hyperbole and sandbags can deflate; and the real work of integration and healing can begin. (p. 1)

I think about spirituality while contemplating Core Knowledge. The curriculum should be viewed through the heart of learning in addition to thinking about it in a technical fashion. After having conversations with Core Knowledge teachers, I begin to recognize how these matters of spirit can provide a basis for deeper understanding. I also find that it is easy for me to think about how I would handle such words in my Core Knowledge classroom, and I see a bridge between Core Knowledge and matters of spirit. What might help Core Knowledge teachers also see that bridge?

While studies may concentrate on the successes and challenges of the Core Knowledge curriculum, I also feel it is important to experience the emotions related to bringing Core Knowledge into a school like Stuart. Schools that want to adopt Core Knowledge must attend to the spirit of those teaching and working with the curriculum. Anger about Core Knowledge is a strong emotion that causes professional teachers to distance themselves from the conversation about Core Knowledge. I believe that in schools there is a tendency to ignore those who are angry about the new curriculum or to place them at another campus. However, my experience with the teachers in this study shows me that there may be hope for attending to the spirit of teachers in Core Knowledge schools.

I remember the words of Sheila, who makes strong comments about Core Knowledge. At one point she says, “I’ll be absolutely honest. I don’t know anything about it, and I don’t want to know. I don’t care about it.” She also describes Core Knowledge as, “horrible, absolutely horrible.” When I listen to Sheila’s tape, I am struck

by the anger in her voice about Core Knowledge, and her frustration with the curriculum. As I think about her words and the way she uses them, I began to see her in a new light. Nieto (2003) writes, “Let’s forget the sentimental view of love and think instead about how love becomes visible through teachers’ daily work” (p. 37). So, I went back to my work with Sheila to see if I could find evidence of her care for students through her daily work. I was struck by one of the definitions that Nieto provides regarding teaching as love: “Love, then is not simply a sentimental conferring of emotion; it is a blend of confidence, faith and admiration for students and appreciation for the strengths they bring with them. It is some of these same qualities that make for effective teaching” (pp. 37-38).

Sheila’s story is one to hear because she was hesitant to visit with me and to talk about Core Knowledge. Initially, she was not open to hearing any more about the curriculum. I learned what Sheila felt about Core Knowledge, and how she might have dealt with her feelings of anger and avoidance with the curriculum if she had been heard. Although Sheila is struggling with anger that she held about Core Knowledge, I also realize that she is struggling with her desire to help and foster learning in her classroom. She works to help her students. By helping Sheila with her work and helping her to learn about Core Knowledge, she would have been a much more effective Core Knowledge teacher. It took a while for Sheila to warm up to the idea of talking with me, but she eventually gave me some ideas for fostering possible success with Core Knowledge through attending to spirit.

Sheila and I talk about meeting with those who could help her with Core Knowledge. Sheila says, “I feel it is my job to do certain things, but if you want me to do

something new, then it is your job to teach me how to do it.” Part of the reason that Sheila feels insecure with Core Knowledge is that she did not have the background to teach it. This is the main reason that she is angry about the curriculum in her room, and she was not able to attend the sessions that were organized after school. She is open to attending sessions on Saturdays, if they were offered.

Sheila’s conversation makes me think that if schools could attend to the spirit of teachers, they would be able to provide more existentially engaging ways to learn about Core Knowledge. Perhaps there could be more experimentation with scheduling in schools, putting the responsibility of scheduling with the teachers. Sheila’s emotional reaction to the curriculum needed to be heard. Most of her hesitancy seemed to grow from the fact that she did not understand the curriculum, and she was angry about it. She acknowledges that her anger makes her hesitant to ask questions about Core Knowledge. “So, I will work harder at doing better on this. I will ask for more help.” Although Sheila expresses frustration to me, she is also optimistic about the job she has, and she is willing to accept help with Core Knowledge.

In the time that I spend with Sheila, providing a place to talk and listen, her attitude with me changes drastically. I provide a place to hear her needs and wants. I only spend a short time with her, and I wonder how different her attitude would be if the school culture was structured to hear her needs and answer them. In the end, I believe that Sheila is concerned about the welfare of the students, and she is adamant about asserting her own needs, as well. Even though Stuart is a Core Knowledge school, Sheila tells me, “I would never teach anywhere but right here. This is why I came down here to work.

These [children] are our future.” Hearing a comment like that from Sheila is an opening of spirit, a place to help dissolve the walls of anger.

In a Core Knowledge community, dealing with feelings of anger and frustration would be another welcome way to relate to Core Knowledge. In schools, teachers would be encouraged to talk about their emotions related to Core Knowledge, as well as any pedagogical question. Bringing these conversations forward, either with each other or a facilitator, can provide a view of Core Knowledge through another lens. Holding this anger in one’s heart keeps the shutters of the classroom closed to Core Knowledge. While some teachers may be hesitant to teach Core Knowledge, the longer the shutters are closed, the more frustration they feel, and this frustration eliminates their willingness to communicate and remain part of the Core Knowledge community. Teachers who have built this barrier should not be asked to leave the school, but they should be nurtured by the Core Knowledge community to contribute their talents to the success of the curriculum. Providing ways to grow professionally may help these teachers come back into the community.

To Grow Professionally with Core Knowledge

Teacher burnout is related to overwork, but as much to the precious little provision in schools for teachers to replenish themselves and help replenish others. (Barth, 1990, p. 61)

Schools must stop pretending that merely presenting teachers with state standards or district curriculum guides will guarantee that all students have access to a common curriculum. (DuFour, 2004, p. 10)

Replenishing Core Knowledge teachers sounds like a meaningful proposition. In what ways can Core Knowledge teachers be replenished so that their experiences with the curriculum will be professionally fulfilling? When I suggest that teachers should teach

with an open heart, I mean that they should be open to new experiences with content and to their colleagues. It seems difficult for teachers to admit when they don't have all the answers, particularly with a curriculum like Core Knowledge. In this section, I focus on ways to engage teachers with the Core Knowledge curriculum; engage them professionally with each other; and engage them with those resources outside their schools.

There seem to be two phases to the misunderstanding of Core Knowledge at Stuart. First, teachers needed to know the theory of Core Knowledge, and they needed information about the curriculum. I suggest some ways that schools might provide information about Core Knowledge for teachers and empower them to ask questions about the curriculum in the previous sections. Once teachers are introduced to Core Knowledge, they want to learn the content before they start to teach it. There need to be more options in place for teachers to learn Core Knowledge content and have the professional discussions about the curriculum. Successful Core Knowledge schools find ways to keep teachers engaged with the curriculum. When teachers don't want to teach specific content, how might they be helped to understand it better? They are not challenging themselves or their students by shying away from teaching specific topics, but they need to be supported in this endeavor.

After learning the theory behind Core Knowledge and accepting it philosophically as the curriculum at their school, teachers need to be educated or re-educated in the topics in the *Core Knowledge Sequence*. Core Knowledge schools need to give teachers time to learn about the content and then think about it together. Nieto (2003) writes, "Viewing teachers as members of an intellectual community means understanding that teaching is

enriched not only by individual excellence but also by collective effort” (p. 90). There are ways to encourage this collective effort with Core Knowledge that could make teaching the curriculum more enriching for teachers and students at Stuart. Teachers need to be able to talk about Core Knowledge, share ideas and celebrate the successes of the curriculum. Encouraging these conversations takes time and commitment to help them flourish. The work of having teachers talk and learn together is one that can take time to foster, but the rewards last a long time. There are opportunities for teachers to know more about content and bring forward ideas about how to teach Core Knowledge.

Inspired places away from school. One way to stimulate conversations between teachers about Core Knowledge content is to provide them with different experiences to talk about the curriculum. Sometimes, a change of scenery can be a stimulant for talking about curriculum and instruction. One example of a change of scenery is professional conventions—particularly the Core Knowledge convention. Providing opportunities for teachers to travel to new places and meet with other Core Knowledge teachers is a way to encourage conversation about the curriculum and to provide teachers with an opportunity to network and share their knowledge.

At the conference, the Core Knowledge Foundation provides subject matter experts to present sessions on content. In addition to the teachers having a chance to present, they may also learn about content from a specialist in the field. At one Core Knowledge conference, I met a professor from California. He is an astro-physicist, and he was in town to talk with elementary teachers who wanted background about the origin of the universe and how to share this theory with their students. He explained to me the process about how he would talk with the teachers about their craft, making this concept

understandable for fourth graders. I was most impressed that this professor would travel the distance to work with elementary teachers, and that he seemed genuinely excited about sharing time with them. It illustrates the importance of cultivating the spirit of learning the Core Knowledge content so that teachers are able to present it to their students. This is a powerful experience at the conference, but there need to be more of these opportunities in the teachers' home communities. These kinds of experiences generate a professional spark for teachers of Core Knowledge.

The Core Knowledge Foundation schedules the annual conference for teachers to learn about their content area, and to meet and share ideas. Teachers present their Core Knowledge units they have taught, while receiving feedback from the group. These days at the conference are invigorating and a time for teachers to be truly present with their practice—something that happens too rarely in schools because of the lack of time and inclination for teachers to talk about practice.

An aspect of the conference that is essential for teachers is that they are able to have conversations about the content and their practice with teachers from other schools. These conversations are a time to talk about what works and what doesn't work in the classroom with Core Knowledge. It is a non-threatening environment because these teachers are meeting for the first time, and they are eager to hear about others' ideas and input. Since the Foundation holds the conference each year in a different location, teachers can find neutral ground on which to talk. They also can visit other cities with historical significance to enrich their knowledge. If schools expect teachers to have professional conversations about their practice, then they have to provide opportunities for them to model and learn how to have these conversations. The conference is a place

to begin to learn how to build professional dialogue, and the conference should continue to center primarily around teachers. Many teachers with whom I speak at the conference are asked to present their experience to the faculties back at their home schools. The sharing and conversation about the conference should include everyone at the school.

Joanne shares with me some of her experiences from the conference:

When I went to the Core convention, I met a lot of people that would email and share ideas. It was wonderful because we could pick which sessions we went to so I went to all the sessions of the things I hadn't taught yet. So, I could get ideas for my new units, and they gave us unit plans and they gave us projects that they did with the kids. Even if you don't use their unit plan exactly, word for word, you got a lot of good ideas from it.

Joanne learned that she could use the ideas from conference presentations, and she also networked to meet other teachers and share experiences with them.

There are appealing aspects to the Core Knowledge convention, and the most appealing is the emphasis on teacher presentations. Many teachers have not had an opportunity to present a unit that they have written or to talk about their practice at a convention. In Core Knowledge communities, teachers should be encouraged to present their work and receive feedback. Submitting a unit to present at the convention includes a written component. Teachers are encouraged to write a quality unit displaying their work. The writing process helps them to organize their thoughts and discuss their work with Core Knowledge. Teachers also have to organize presentations and travel with examples of student work. The looks of pride in their work and interest in each other's practice is one of the most fulfilling aspects of the Core Knowledge convention.

There is another area that I would include in the programming of the Core Knowledge convention. I would include a time for those who are critical of the curriculum to lead a discussion about their concerns with Core Knowledge. Not only

would the panel lead a stimulating discussion about Core Knowledge, but it would also provide information for teachers to take back to their campuses and debate with each other. If teachers are going to discuss Core Knowledge, they need to be knowledgeable about arguments for and against the curriculum.

I believe the critics of Core Knowledge would benefit from conducting panel discussions and then attending the teachers' Core Knowledge presentations. The critics I note in chapter one (Applebee, 1996; Grumet, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Peterson, 1995) have different views of the curriculum, and I think it would be educational to address their concerns at the conference. If these critics could converse with Core Knowledge teachers about their practice and attend their sessions, I believe they could gain more insight into the curriculum. Each teacher-conducted session should be followed up with another discussion with one of the critics. I believe those critics I mention would be impressed by the level of work and the variety of teaching techniques used to benefit students in Core Knowledge schools. I think it would be an interesting presentation for teachers to discuss the theory of Core Knowledge with these esteemed academics. Teachers could submit proposal papers and then be organized into groups that could address the concerns of the critics. For example, those teachers who wanted to discuss tensions between classes in society and the effects of Core Knowledge on different groups might meet with Ladson-Billings. Those who wanted to talk about aspects of organizing curriculum might meet with Applebee. Applebee (1996), whose criticism of Core Knowledge focuses on the list of topics to be taught without connection, might be surprised to see how teachers teach interdisciplinary Core Knowledge units.

By bringing these other voices into the discussion about Core Knowledge and encouraging teachers to talk with these experts about content and practice, it will encourage them to discuss Core Knowledge. Providing these opportunities away from school can enrich teachers' work with Core Knowledge and inform those who are critical of the curriculum.

Inspired places at school. After bringing teachers home from the conference, the daunting task is then to bring them together to discuss Core Knowledge content and other views of the curriculum. There is a challenge to make Core Knowledge professional development workshops meaningful for teachers. Loewenberg-Ball and Cohen (1999) describe the types of professional development that teachers often experience:

Participation in modal staff development is the professional equivalent of yo-yo dieting for many teachers. Workshop handouts, ideas, and methods provide brief sparks of novelty and imagination, mostly squeakily practical. But most teachers have a shelf overflowing with dusty vinyl binders, the wilted cast-offs of staff development workshops. Since professional development is rarely seen as a continuing enterprise for teachers, it is only occasionally truly developmental. (p. 4)

I feel the same way about the professional development opportunities for Core Knowledge at Stuart. I describe the teachers' feelings about the Monday afternoon Core Knowledge meetings. These meetings received mixed reviews, but I think they could have been structured differently to help teachers with their new endeavor of the Core Knowledge curriculum. Joanne shares with me:

Well, we have had a lot of time when they [the presenters] just give you time to get into the closet [the Core Knowledge closet]. I mean they come in and show us different activities we could do, but it wasn't very meaningful to me because it was on magnets, and I had just finished the unit. I had just done all those activities. I don't think that's meaningful because I can do that anytime. We stay here for two hours on a Monday afternoon, when I have a lot of other things to do.

Joanne was not the only teacher to have the same reaction to that workshop. However, Marjorie tells me how much she values the time to go through the Core Knowledge closet, and Dan, a first year teacher, tells me how much he values learning about those units that Joanne describes because he is literally trying to soak up all of the information that he can. I find it interesting to listen to Dan's description of the Monday meetings, because he has such a different perspective. When I ask Dan if he is learning about Core Knowledge at the Core Knowledge meetings, he says:

They are geared towards how we can utilize, or how we can employ activities and tools in our instruction that aid the Language Arts and Mathematics performance. So we talk about things like the activities that we are doing. Give us an example of an activity you are doing in your class. We will talk specifically about professional development on Social Studies instruction. A person came in, and he modeled one Social Studies activity that he does that is very flexible. It can be used in many different scenarios and so he talked to us for a while about things you want to target, ways you want to give the Social Studies instruction. He gave us an activity and he modeled a way to give instruction. And he gave us I think a 7th grade activity that he had done, but he led up to it, so we could see how the whole process worked. And how we can make our lessons interactive or incidental, "than here is a list of vocabulary words." We have also had professional developments that have been geared towards how you can teach better in general. How do kids learn?

Dan's reactions to Core Knowledge professional development days are different from Joanne's reactions. The different reactions to the Core Knowledge workshops illustrate the need for conversation about the content of the workshops and suggestions for change.

Sheila is a Core Knowledge teacher who tells me that she chooses to not attend the meetings anymore after her first experience. There needs to be consideration given to varying formats for bringing Core Knowledge teachers together in their schools. Although I believe the content of the meetings is valuable to some, they are not a good fit for everyone. Unfortunately, I think that teachers have been exposed to workshops without any substance, and when they are expected to work or express their own opinions

to make workshops more meaningful, they are upset that the workshop is about theory and is not “practical.” Core Knowledge teachers need to take responsibility also for what is happening in the workshops at the school. Teachers need the opportunities to think about their practice with Core Knowledge and to do so while designing their own workshops to further this purpose. Loewenberg-Ball and Cohen (1999) write, “Teachers are thought to need updating rather than opportunities for serious and sustained learning of curriculum, students, and teaching” (p. 4). The teachers at Stuart were not in need of this same kind of updating, time in the Core Knowledge closet or time alone in classrooms. They needed time to spend together, finding their way with Core Knowledge.

It has been a few years since I participated in a particularly memorable workshop for Core Knowledge teachers and university professors. The local university was going to pair teachers who were teaching Core Knowledge with a professor—an expert in the field. The professors were going to review theories with teachers that they were supposed to teach—such as the science of light and optics, physics, the history of Ancient Rome or Ancient Greece. These were topics that the teachers had identified as ones about which they needed more background knowledge. Principals and the university staff then organized a Saturday morning session, grouped teachers who might be interested in these sessions, and then facilitated it. I was going to help with a science session for 5th grade teachers, meeting with a physics professor. I still remember the reactions of the teachers in the group. Some were excited to be re-learning the scientific concepts, and others were just curious to see how the session would unfold. It turned into a productive morning because the professor decided to use teaching methods that teachers would want to use—hands-on and participatory. The results were meaningful conversations between

elementary school teachers and university professors about science concepts and teaching methods. The teachers left refreshed and ready to share what they had learned with their colleagues back at schools and with students in their classrooms.

I propose that these experiences would be the norm for professional development in a Core Knowledge community. Previously, I discuss bringing university professors into classrooms, but I also believe that classroom teachers should be welcomed into university settings as a form of professional development. Teachers should feel empowered to contact professors and engage in professional dialogue about Core Knowledge. I also believe that teachers should be able to use any university services for their research and professional development with Core Knowledge. University libraries, laboratories and classrooms would be at the disposal of teachers for professional development. Universities can play an important part in supporting teachers in their professional development. School districts should also listen to the voices of teachers and have teachers plan their own professional development, meetings and networking with other teachers throughout the district.

I believe that classroom shutters are closed so that teachers can teach what they know in seclusion instead of opening up to teaching Core Knowledge. Core Knowledge communities should draw those teachers out of their seclusion and provide a nurturing and dynamic place to learn about Core Knowledge topics. Unfortunately, Core Knowledge has a way of making teachers who are already unsure about their practice feel worse if they do not have the knowledge to teach the subjects. This lack of knowledge grows as teachers are not given a chance to enhance their professional content knowledge about Core Knowledge topics. Core Knowledge teachers need to have meaningful

conversation about the content and opportunities to explore how Core Knowledge may be connected throughout the disciplines in a school.

Routman (2002) writes:

As teachers start meeting regularly, typical conversations may be superficial and touch on all aspects of teaching. Initially, many teachers use the time to air their feelings about school life. Because they aren't used to "conversing," they may have to get these general concerns out of the way first. It often takes more than a year for meetings to focus on curriculum and improving student learning. (p. 34)

When talking with Joanne about professional communities and Core Knowledge, I could hear her answer with a more superficial response. I ask Joanne to describe if she thought Stuart had a professional Core Knowledge community, and she responds:

I think so because most people have you know bulletin boards that have to be Core Knowledge. If you stayed in the afternoon, you definitely see Core Knowledge going on in the classroom. If you asked kids about Core Knowledge they would be able to answer a lot of questions about it.

Joanne's comments about professional communities show that she is focused on the outside appearances of Core Knowledge—such as bulletin boards and teaching methods. Although it is important to know if the students can talk about what they have learned, it also is important for the teachers to be talking about Core Knowledge content during professional development.

Applebee (1996) suggests that "Treating curriculum as a domain for conversation leads to a new set of considerations in curriculum planning. What do effective curricula look like? How can they be shaped to foster sustained conversation?" (p. 51). Teachers can use these questions to discuss Core Knowledge and then plan units of study during professional development meetings. Applebee's ideas mesh nicely with the Core Knowledge content. In a Core Knowledge community, teachers would be encouraged to think about specific content in relation to broad ideas for students to learn. Applebee

(1996) writes, “By stressing *culturally significant* domains, I seek to ensure that education is organized around living traditions that look to the present and future, as well as the past” (p. 49). To begin these conversations about Core Knowledge content, teachers could use professional development days to think together about how they would bring forward these culturally significant ideas connected to the content. Asking these questions at faculty meetings would be an excellent way to get the conversation started.

Nieto (2003) writes about finding the way as teachers teach:

Good teachers think deeply and often about the craft of teaching, and the process of learning. They are not simply technicians who know how to write good lesson plans and use collaborative groups effectively, although this too is part of what they do. Above all, excellent teachers are engaged every day in intellectual work, the kind of serious undertaking that demands considerable attention and thought. (p. 76)

Although teaching does require bureaucratic tasks, the serious intellectual work that I propose happening in Core Knowledge professional development would be the questioning of curriculum and conversation about teaching and learning. These questions might include how Core Knowledge includes teachers and students in the conversation about curriculum, is Core Knowledge capable of heart, and should it continue in the school, or can teachers and students see themselves in the Core Knowledge curriculum. Teachers are always considering their craft and how to make it better. They should also consider the deeper questions about Core Knowledge and how to address those questions together.

This kind of attention to detail, intellectual work and thought is linked to teaching with an open heart. Teaching with an open heart is a difficult task for teachers, particularly when they already have opened their hearts to those students for whom they care and teach in their classrooms. To open their hearts to curriculum and to come

together with colleagues is uncomfortable for teachers. This can be another taxing experience, but it does not have to be. To help teachers learn together and form professional communities is to help them ease the load in their classrooms. To take that first step to inspired places is difficult, but it promises to help teachers become more at home in the experience of teaching the Core Knowledge curriculum. By helping teachers to find the spirit to learn and grow together, schools can help teachers address the anger and frustration about having Core Knowledge in their schools. Also, teachers can begin to open their hearts to what might be possible with Core Knowledge instead of closing their hearts to the curriculum. Reacting to Core Knowledge in this way requires looking at the curriculum differently and not regarding it as another thing, but as something to help teachers grow.

New Ways of Seeing: Exploring the Tension of Changing Heart

I don't think about it, and I guess I don't think about it because if E.D. Hirsch didn't come up with it, then some dude at the city office would have come up with it. Or some dude at the State Department would have come up with it. Somebody has got to come up with something somewhere and hand me a book or a packet or a notebook or notes, so I just take what they give me. I'm pretty much a good kid. I follow the rules. I do what you tell me and go with the flow. You know, do I always agree with everything? Would it have been my idea? Sometimes, but not always. (Marilyn)

That curriculum has become so formalized and abstract, so often distant from the everyday sense of conversation signals. . . how profoundly the process of education has been institutionalized and bureaucratized. (Pinar, 2004, p. 186)

Many times along this journey, I found myself wondering about the Core Knowledge curriculum. I wonder about those who are curriculum theorists (such as Aoki, Pinar, Apple or Applebee) and teachers—those vital, hard-working people who go to schools every day and teach the curriculum in classrooms trying to help children survive in this world. At first, Marilyn's comment does not seem strange. I have been

there, where I was just trying to keep my head above water, using the curriculum that was there. However, as I read more closely, there seems to be a gap between what I was as a teacher of curriculum and what I am as a student of curriculum. There are two discourse communities: the discourse of those theorists working in universities and the discourse of those working in schools. I do not propose to bring the two spaces together in such a way as to eliminate the vital importance of one or the other or eliminate the discourse that occurs between each, but these two curriculum places are related in thinking about curriculum as planned and curriculum as lived. I want to think about seeing those two curriculum places differently, and I want to explore the discourse of both places. As a teacher, I want to go into classrooms and work with other teachers and students, and as a teacher with a degree in curriculum theory, I want to continue to think about how I have been transformed by this work and how to talk to teachers about sharing in this kind of transformative experience.

As teachers, we focus on the plan, and it is not because we feel that is the most important part of classroom teaching, but because administrators and parents want teachers to have a plan and abide by it. Some views of curriculum foster that thinking, such as Tyler and Bloom. Other views of curriculum focus more on curriculum as lived, such as Aoki, Pinar, and Reynolds. These theorists might ask the following questions: Who do teachers think they are when they teach Core Knowledge? What is that experience like? In what ways are students experiencing the curriculum? I want to encourage conversations about Core Knowledge and move away from the institutionalized place of curriculum that Pinar (2004) describes where teachers expect it to be handed to them and not to think about what they are teaching. I believe that one

way to encourage that thoughtful work with curriculum would be to become teacher-researchers. As I write in chapter one and chapter two, teachers initially approach Core Knowledge curriculum as a plan. The situation at Stuart is no different. The teachers do not seem able to bridge the gap between curriculum as plan and curriculum as lived. Without the sacred spaces at Stuart to encourage community, time to reflect on the space between is not possible.

As I read Marilyn's words again, I am troubled deeply about how she feels when she discusses the origin of Core Knowledge. In my question to Marilyn before she begins explaining her view of the curriculum, I ask her what she thinks about when she contemplates the Core Knowledge curriculum. I want to see if I might get a deeper glance into what the Core Knowledge teachers at Stuart are thinking as they work with the curriculum. I am surprised when she starts by saying, "I don't think about it." I think Marilyn's comment shows that she is not focused closely on Core Knowledge as a theory. She is more focused on the ways that Core Knowledge affects her classroom. While spending time in Marilyn's classroom and observing Core Knowledge lessons, I know that she is a caring and competent teacher. However, she does not think about curriculum in a way that would require her reflection or continued conversation. She has been in schools districts for years, and she has seen many curricula come and go. I think about the Core Knowledge Foundation providing help along the way, and how I might approach Core Knowledge in the future to help teachers like Marilyn look at Core Knowledge differently.

A New Road: Changing the Focus of Teachers and Core Knowledge

For curriculum planners who understand the nuances of the indwelling of teachers in the Zone of the Between, the challenge seems clear. If, as many of us believe,

the quality of curriculum-as-lived experiences is the heart and core as to why we exist as teachers, principals, superintendents, curriculum developers, curriculum consultants, and teacher educators, curriculum planning should have as its central interest a way of contributing to the aliveness of school life as lived by teachers and students. (Aoki, 2005, p. 165)

I acknowledge that there is tension between the Core Knowledge curriculum as a thing in classrooms and Core Knowledge as an idea, and I propose that there is a need to re-focus what is looked for with teachers and their experiences with the Core Knowledge curriculum. Teachers need to be able to talk knowledgeably about Core Knowledge as a theory, and they need to have time to understand how it will change their classrooms. Teachers should be critical questioners of Core Knowledge. They should consider if Core Knowledge is right for their school, and if it should continue. Once introduced to a school, teachers should be involved in the process of evaluating Core Knowledge. Core Knowledge teachers need to be involved in theoretical conversations about the curriculum. By focusing on these questions and others that they ask, teachers may start to view curriculum differently—as something that they are a vital part of instead of something that is handed to them. I believe that the Core Knowledge Foundation may assist in this process through workshops and networking.

I suggest ways throughout chapter five to encourage conversation with teachers about curriculum. As a student of curriculum theory, I find that I ask questions about curricula, and I think about how schools choose different curricula. At Stuart, teachers did not have time to think about Core Knowledge differently. Since they did not have an opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation about Core Knowledge, they continue to see it as “one more thing” with which to deal in their busy lives. That is why Marilyn describes Core Knowledge as something to get around, water down or avoid. I propose

that if Marilyn and fellow teachers could see themselves in the Core Knowledge curriculum, they would view it differently. Teachers at Stuart also had positive experiences with Core Knowledge, but these experiences were not as frequent as their struggles with the curriculum. Being a teacher, I can understand what the teachers at Stuart were experiencing. They were working as hard as they could in a system that was not encouraging them to view curriculum differently or giving them opportunities to learn how to view curriculum critically.

In chapter one, I write about my experiences with Core Knowledge professional development, and I believe that the sessions are an excellent way for teachers to begin working with Core Knowledge. The Core Knowledge Foundation provides a variety of workshops where teachers can think about Core Knowledge, craft a yearlong plan with their grade level colleagues, dream about ideas to promote the curriculum in their school and review their implementation from year to year. The teachers are encouraged to tailor the workshops to what they need. I believe in the workshops that are provided because they are teacher-centered, and they were created by teachers. Although there is guidance provided, the consultant acts as a facilitator while the teachers make sense of Core Knowledge in their classrooms. When possible, the Foundation assigns the same consultant to provide a variety of workshops and encourages a relationship between the consultant and the teachers.

While I talked with teachers at Stuart, I found us discussing what would make their experience with Core Knowledge an ideal one. These discussions were another indication that the teachers were more focused on the things rather than deeper discussions about the curriculum and its presence at Stuart, even after several

conversations that we had together. Most of them wanted more materials and to have those materials in one place (Core Knowledge in a box). Fullan (1991) writes, “Innovations may contain many good ideas and resources, but assume conditions different from those faced by teachers” (p. 130). I think that teachers often request more resources in an effort to alleviate their stress with Core Knowledge. However, as Fullan writes, the resources will not help if the conditions are not right for receiving Core Knowledge. I believe that teachers need some teaching resources from the Foundation, but the more resources provided, the more that teachers regard Core Knowledge as “thing.” I would encourage the Foundation to focus on the workshops as a way to provide person support instead of the many resource books. The publication department of the Core Knowledge Foundation has recently produced a *Core Knowledge Teacher Handbook*, and this is a helpful guide for teachers who struggle with a lack of background knowledge. In the future, I would propose that the publications department focus on the website for all Core Knowledge teachers to access and share websites and suggestions for places to gain more knowledge about Core Knowledge content.

The workshops from the Core Knowledge Foundation are costly, and I understand that funds are needed to conduct them. However, I believe that many schools that could benefit from the workshops can’t afford them and don’t know how to request grant money. I would like to see the Foundation concentrate on targeting grants that can provide workshops to schools that request them. I would like to see a system where any school that is interested could call and request a workshop from the Foundation. Although many schools seek governmental Comprehensive Reform grants, these grants have stringent guidelines for dispersing and accounting for money, and the schools seem

to end up jumping through hoops to provide documentation. These grants also seem to be applied for and assigned by district offices, which contributes to the bureaucracy.

Perhaps the Foundation could work together with schools to find grants that schools could apply for, tailor to their needs, and then be in charge of making sure they were spending the money wisely to facilitate workshops for teachers. When there is a large bureaucracy involved in grants, the schools and the teachers seem to get lost in the process of getting the money. This is the same situation that Dan describes earlier when he realizes that Stuart is interested in Core Knowledge primarily for the money it brings through the reform grants. Teachers should be most interested in the reform, not the money that it brings to the school. If teachers and administrators are only focused on money, then the meaningful thinking about curriculum disappears.

Additionally, the Core Knowledge Foundation could match schools to help each other find resources and facilitate training. At Stuart, there remain problems of facilitating collaboration and teachers accepting the idea of Core Knowledge. Schools that have innovative programs and principals that are willing to include their teachers in Core Knowledge find that Core Knowledge is more successful. The Foundation should match these flourishing Core Knowledge schools with schools that are struggling with the curriculum. The principals and teachers could meet to discuss strategies that work and become a team for workshops, presentations to other schools, or teams for unit presentations at the conference. Not only would this help both schools succeed with Core Knowledge, it would encourage networking and conversation between teachers throughout the districts and cities.

In an effort to have teachers think about Core Knowledge differently, they need to be involved in the journey of choosing and working with Core Knowledge. They should also be involved in the journey of pondering the politics of school and community, as these questions often involve them. The Core Knowledge Foundation, administrators and teachers should work together as a team to think about the curriculum and address these questions. Teachers may also be encouraged to research and think about sharing their expertise of the curriculum with other Core Knowledge teachers. I suggest that the Core Knowledge Foundation work with schools to find grants, and I continue to think about the vexing aspects of collecting money for educational materials and what that might continue to show about the state of education and the role of Core Knowledge in education reform.

The Politics of School and Community: Dwelling in the Tension

In *The Schools We Need, and Why We Don't Have Them*, Hirsch (1996) argues that there should be a difference between political ideology and education policy. He writes, "The first step in moving toward greater social justice through education is to avoid the premature polarizations that arise when educational policy is confused with political ideology" (p. 5). If this could be true, there might be more focus on educational policy that benefits students instead of furthering the political message of educational foundations. However, it is difficult to separate the politics of Core Knowledge from the educational theory. Education policy and curriculum reflect political ideas, and inspire the "complicated conversations" that arise from asking questions about it (Pinar, et al., 1995, p. 848). One promise of the Core Knowledge curriculum is that it can bring forward a more democratic society by increasing the cultural literacy of those who are

disadvantaged. Hirsch (1996) describes his idea: “The earlier book explained why economic effectiveness and social justice require all citizens to share an extensive body of school-based background knowledge as a necessary foundation for communication and participation in society” (p. 14). In order to provide the “promise” of Core Knowledge, the Core Knowledge Foundation seeks funding from a variety of sources, which is necessary since it is a non-profit organization. It is important to question the politics behind Core Knowledge and the association with other Foundations, even though Hirsch would argue that Core Knowledge is not a political idea. The questioning remains an important part of the democracy that Hirsch celebrates in his books. Foundations have provided money for educational projects from the Core Knowledge Foundation. Do the contributions of other Foundations influence thought about Core Knowledge? Does the promise of Core Knowledge bring people together, or do the politics of these foundations encourage keeping people apart? The questioning of the sources of funding for Core Knowledge educational projects encourages more conversation about Core Knowledge.

Asking questions about the politics of Core Knowledge brings forward another tension of the reform method. The promise of Core Knowledge is that using this reform in schools will help disadvantaged children. However, should there also be questioning about why society keeps these disadvantaged students in unequal schools? Disadvantaged students continue to remain in schools that are not equal to other schools in their districts. In what ways does Core Knowledge address this exporting of the crisis of poverty in schools? Once a reform such as Core Knowledge has been funded and implemented in schools, how does it address the larger problems of disadvantaged students, such as the inequality? Hirsch (1996) ponders these questions, “My political sympathies are with

those, who like Kozol, advocate greater funding and equity. . . I would label myself a political liberal and an educational conservative, or perhaps more accurately, an educational pragmatist” (p. 6). Hirsch writes that he is also troubled about the inequality in schools, but how might Core Knowledge teachers ponder these political issues as they struggle with the curriculum? In what ways do Core Knowledge schools then have to help solve the problems that society creates?

Those Core Knowledge schools who work with the curriculum also have to address how this curriculum affects teachers. When schools decide to implement Core Knowledge, they often have to seek funding to support the program in their facilities. What does it mean for teachers when schools have to look in other places for money and accountability? In what ways does it constrain teachers to have to think about accountability from outside? What is the context of community influence with Core Knowledge, and how does this influence affect teachers? How do we expect teachers to respond to these outside influences? When teachers have to concentrate on what is expected of them, they lose the insightfulness of their own practice and thoughts about curriculum.

Although Core Knowledge teachers at Stuart and around the country work diligently for the success of the students in their schools, there are other issues to explore behind the Core Knowledge curriculum. Although it might be preferable not to think about curriculum as political, conversations about Core Knowledge continue to expose other sides to the curriculum story. Thinking deeply about the politics of Core Knowledge and dwelling in the tensions that are inherent to that essential conversation provide an opportunity to think more deeply about Core Knowledge and ponder its place

in schools. Pondering this tension may open up the opportunity to gather around the hearth and discuss what lies at the heart of Core Knowledge.

Gathering Around the Hearth: Research about Core Knowledge

As I read over the sections I have written about teachers and helping them to see with an open heart, I think about how teachers can be involved in research about Core Knowledge. I also think about the change in my heart from participating in this research. In essence, everything that I have written about in chapter five must happen in an environment of caring. Heidegger (1953/1996) writes that caring is connected to the way we exist in the world. Caring about teachers means that schools have to listen to their outer voices and nurture their inner voices, their professional and personal side. Professional teaching organizations, colleges and universities, and the Core Knowledge Foundation also have to extend a caring hand to teachers if they want them to participate and engage in research about Core Knowledge.

I introduce this section with the heading “gathering around the hearth,” because I think that Core Knowledge teachers should be Core Knowledge researchers and encouraged to gather around the hearth. The word “hearth” comes from the Old English *heorth*, and it may describe part of a fireplace. It may also describe “family life or the home” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2001, p. 394). I propose that teachers and students cannot experience community and challenge themselves to learn when they are not feeling at home. Teachers cannot contribute to the work on Core Knowledge, if they are not accepted around the hearth of research. Bridging the gap between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived could begin to happen if colleges and universities accept

teachers as vital researchers in Core Knowledge and other curricula. Heidegger (1971/1975) describes dwelling as essential to realizing our Being:

Dwelling, however, *is the basic character* of Being in keeping with which mortals exist. Perhaps this attempt to think about dwelling and building will bring out somewhat more clearly that building belongs to dwelling and how it receives its nature from dwelling. Enough will have been gained if dwelling and building have become *worthy of questioning* and thus have remained *worthy of thought*. (p. 160)

I want to continue thinking about school buildings as places that students and teachers dwell with Core Knowledge and encouraging those people come forward to talk and write about their experiences. It is important to enter these dwelling places and hear what Core Knowledge teachers are saying about the curriculum.

When I first shared my heart metaphor for exploring the experience of teaching Core Knowledge, a classmate gave me some readings about the hearth in the home, as the center of a house. The hearth emanates the heat in a home. It seems fitting to end at the hearth because it brings back the image of the heart as the center of the body and brings forward images of gathering, which is one of the main ideas I have tried to bring forward when thinking about Core Knowledge: gathering as teachers, gathering as professionals, and now gathering as researchers.

As I read Aoki (2005), I realize that he is also talking about gathering to learn about curriculum and teaching. I have been writing about the difference between the Core Knowledge curriculum as plan and Core Knowledge curriculum as lived. Aoki (2005) ends one of his chapters with a quote that brought me back to the hearth and made me think about gathering together:

In Miss O's indwelling in the Zone of the Between we see the teacher's dwelling place as a sanctified clearing where the teacher and students gather—somewhat like the place before the hearth at home—an extraordinarily unique and precious

place, a hopeful place, a trustful place, a careful place—essentially a human place dedicated to ventures devoted to a leading out. . . from the “is” to new possibilities yet unknown. (p. 165)

So as I end this section and think back over what I have written and learned, I realize that I am at the hearth of my own soul, thinking about teachers and students and hoping that this work will lead Core Knowledge teachers to the “possibilities yet unknown.”

When I began this journey in graduate school to think about Core Knowledge, I had been teaching the curriculum in schools and studying it for another program. As I reflect on this experience, I would like to encourage teachers to participate in research projects and to do their own research—to journey to the “possibilities yet unknown.” To encourage teachers to work on their own research would mean that they would have to be encouraged by their schools to research topics, and they would have to be able to work with colleges and universities to learn about various types of research. I envision universities providing teachers with workshops on research and tailoring those workshops to the types of research that they could do over the course of a year or a summer. The research might not be the magnitude of a dissertation, but I think that teachers could work with research projects to enhance their professional knowledge and to present to their colleagues.

I would like for Core Knowledge teachers to read this research and think about how they might work with phenomenology. Phenomenology is the study of experiences, and teachers are in the heart of the education experience, answering questions about issues and participating in teaching and learning. Phenomenology also brings forward the study of philosophy in our present lives and thinking deeply about one’s existence can bring forward a more deeply considered view of teaching and learning. Encouraging

teachers to do research would bring forward more of the teachers' voices that I feel are absent in the conversation about Core Knowledge and encourage them to think philosophically about education. As teachers research and share their insights, they could mentor other teachers, form research teams and use their work in their teaching. I also believe that teachers would begin to think about curricula differently if they were involved in researching it and sharing their findings with their colleagues.

I was thinking about this issue of teacher research when I was attending a meeting of an education think tank in Washington DC where many great minds in education were talking about Core Knowledge, other curricula and what was happening in schools. I sat on the perimeter of a long table with others on the edge of the conversation, not really wanting to go inside the circle. My teacher-self was self-conscious about venturing into the middle of the conversation. I felt, as Marilyn said earlier, that these great minds were "handing me" information about Core Knowledge, and I should listen closely from the edges. As I sat there, I realized that there were not enough teachers' voices at the table. Why are there conversations about teaching without teachers? At one point, I was brought back to the conversation by a lone voice of a teacher that echoed through the large hall as she expressed her concern about the curriculum in her history textbook. She was worrying about what to teach her students in a history unit, and she wanted to hear how she might encourage discussion about these issues. I noticed the murmur of interest around the table as her voice stretched across the room. I could not help but wonder if this one teacher were causing such a stir, how the conversation might explode if the entire room was filled with teachers, and I wondered again where the teacher researchers were. I also wonder why the teacher researchers have to leave classrooms, as I did. Teachers

should be encouraged to research Core Knowledge as they teach it in their classrooms. The two roles should be connected and should inform each other, instead of being isolated from each other. Teachers should not have to leave their classrooms to write, and when they stay in classrooms, they should not feel overwhelmed by classes and labs required for research. There should be a middle ground, a comfortable place to achieve the good work needed to think about Core Knowledge from a teacher's point of view.

Working with phenomenology has been an insightful experience for me because I have learned to look at the curriculum through the eyes of the teachers at Stuart. That is a different lens for me because I was using my own experiences and relying on other research, before I talked with the teachers at Stuart. I was hopeful that this research would help me decide and put to rest my tensions surrounding the idea of Core Knowledge. I wanted it to be clearly delineated. I hoped that hearing the voices of Core Knowledge teachers would provide more direction or show me a clear answer. However, I learned that phenomenology left me asking more questions. In my mind, I return to my teaching experiences with the curriculum and think about the teaching experiences of the teachers at Stuart. I also return to thinking about these experiences in light of criticism about Core Knowledge.

As a teacher, I have written about how much I enjoyed teaching the Core Knowledge units I wrote, and how much I enjoyed working with my grade level colleagues to research and write about the Core Knowledge topics. As a student of curriculum, I find that there are critics of Core Knowledge, and they write eloquently about the perils of the curriculum. I write about scholars who consider Core Knowledge elitist. Theorists (Grumet, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1994) consider Core Knowledge

problematic because it focuses on traditional curriculum that preserves cultural heritage. I have struggled with their arguments because I have worked with Core Knowledge in a variety of schools and with diverse groups of students. Although I feel that my work with these children was meaningful, I understand how these theorists want the culture of all students included in the conversation about curriculum. Similarly, in her classroom at Stuart, Sheila agrees that Core Knowledge does not seem to address problems of the students in her second grade classroom, but instead seeks to teach them about other concepts. If she could, Sheila would focus more on the needs of the students in her room. However, other teachers at Stuart were pleased that the Core Knowledge curriculum provided a way for their students to open up new horizons and have conversations about topics in the curriculum. Those who work with Core Knowledge highlight the fact that the curriculum contains a variety of multicultural references, and that the curriculum is not meant to monopolize the entire school day. The Foundation encourages teachers to bring in other units of study. To think about this criticism more deeply means to talk with these Core Knowledge teachers and hear their experiences with the curriculum. I continue to see that there are many arguments for and against this position, and all voices should be heard and considered.

In addition to this criticism about Core Knowledge, there are those who disagree with Core Knowledge as a curriculum theory. Applebee (1996) argues that Core Knowledge is a list of ideas to be taught and there is not any connection between the units of study. When teachers are not able to have conversations about Core Knowledge, then it is definitely more difficult to see the connection between units of study. I agree with Applebee that the teachers at Stuart need to have time to discuss curriculum and see

it as “knowledge in action” (Applebee, 1996). As Core Knowledge appears now at Stuart, there is little chance for conversation, and teachers are struggling to make sense of the curriculum. I address possible options for increasing conversation between teachers in previous sections, but I agree with Applebee’s writing about understanding curriculum. I believe that teachers have the opportunity to work with Core Knowledge meaningfully, but they have to have the conversations that Applebee describes.

I could see these criticisms of Core Knowledge come forward occasionally when I talked with teachers at Stuart. What I found at Stuart is that teachers are struggling with Core Knowledge. Some of them feel that it is a meaningful curriculum that might work if they have the right conditions in which to teach it. The critics of Core Knowledge highlight important ideas to dwell on and talk about with Core Knowledge teachers. The teachers at Stuart would benefit from hearing these criticisms of the curriculum, studying them and addressing them as they work with Core Knowledge.

As I write, I hoped to learn more about Core Knowledge as a curriculum, but I feel that I also learned more about Core Knowledge teachers and Core Knowledge schools. I expected teachers to talk to me more deeply about what they felt about content in this curriculum. In my work with teachers at Stuart, I found a dedicated group of teachers and a principal that was proud of the work that the teachers were accomplishing. There are great teachers and students at Stuart, and I observed lessons that used a variety of teaching skills. I learned that there is much more to just labeling a school “Core Knowledge” without hearing the voices of the teachers and students inside the school. I write about teachers who I label as “Core Knowledge teachers,” but they have a different view of themselves and the curriculum because they don’t see themselves as Core

Knowledge teachers. I hope that teachers and administrators will read this work and discuss some of the themes that I identify as they study Core Knowledge at their schools. I want this work to inspire questions and probing thought before implementing Core Knowledge. I don't think that teachers should be labeled as Core Knowledge teachers if they don't see themselves in that role. Perhaps teachers will find some of the themes uncovered here will be a place to start conversation about Core Knowledge.

Future research could focus on a variety of Core Knowledge schools and listening to the voices of teachers within them to provide many conversations about the curriculum. I have learned that hearing teachers' voices adds an important aspect to the research about Core Knowledge. While research about schools may highlights the successes of Core Knowledge, it is also important to hear stories about the challenges for teachers. Future research could also be conducted with Core Knowledge schools from the beginning of the process to adopt Core Knowledge. Since I came to Stuart after the school had adopted Core Knowledge, the teachers were already in the middle of the curriculum. Although I heard their accounts of choosing the curriculum, it would be enlightening to follow teachers from the beginning, and then to see how they follow through with their work with Core Knowledge.

Van Manen (1990) writes, "Phenomenological text succeeds when it lets us see that which shines thought, that which tends to hide itself" (p. 130). I have been journeying with the teachers at Stuart to places that they had not thought about while teaching Core Knowledge or had not talked about before. In his writing, Van Manen discusses the "textuality of text" and how ". . . we need to see that the textuality of our text is also a demonstration of the way we stand pedagogically in life" (p. 138). I have

been called by the question: **What is the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher.** I was first honored to gather with Core Knowledge teachers at Stuart who talked with me about Core Knowledge in their classrooms—the center of their existence during the day. As I have sought to make meaning of this experience through writing, I realize that questioning never ends, and be-coming a teacher continues. Be-coming a researcher also continues.

I return to writing from Brown (2000) where she compares leadership to symphonies. Her comparison seems a thoughtful way to end this dissertation, as I still think about how Core Knowledge is viewed and contemplated. I write about the many voices that need to be included in the conversation about Core Knowledge, and I hope that the work with Core Knowledge continues to assemble these orchestras and lets them play. I hope that we continue to gather around the hearth as educators at all levels—elementary and university—to continue questioning. To gather together means to assemble, listen to the voices, and to let them resonate through the hearts and minds of all who are involved with Core Knowledge. Brown (2000) writes:

He said in leadership,
like symphonies,
the stunning
moments lie
in silence at the end,
in waiting,
not in rushing in.

I thought of how
that's true
in other things
as well,
nature,
and Shakespeare,
skiing,
and love.

Such stillness
is a healing
not an absence,
a meeting,
not a missing,
vitality that grows
within the power
of the pause. (p. 36)

As I continue to think about Core Knowledge, I think about the teachers and the future.

My job as a teacher was one that filled me with hope for students. I cannot express in words the feeling of watching classes I have taught leave on the last day of school. I was always filled with a sense of relief as the year ended, but I was filled with anticipation for the future of the children. Now, I also hope for the future of Core Knowledge teachers.

As I look back at what I have written, I hope that Core Knowledge teachers can be given more opportunities to speak and be heard. As I pause at the end of this work, I hope that Core Knowledge teachers have the opportunity to grow as professionals with much to contribute to the conversation about the Core Knowledge curriculum. I hope there is a pause here, at the end, in the silence of the completion of this work, to think about what has been learned from the shared experiences of Core Knowledge teachers.

APPENDIX A

AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY A Journey into the Heart's Core: A Phenomenological Exploration of Teaching the Core Knowledge Curriculum

You are invited to participate in a research study that will explore the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher. This study is being conducted by Maggie Grove, a doctoral student in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher. Using the qualitative methodology of phenomenology, the interest is in making recommendations for improved teaching practice from the insights gained from this study.

Your participation will entail sharing your teaching experiences with the Core Knowledge curriculum. Each conversation will be tape recorded to preserve the integrity and completeness of your experiences as you share them with me. The tape-recorded conversations will be transcribed into written form so I have an opportunity to study the text and formulate themes that describe the experience. All conversations, tape recordings and written transcripts will be held in strict confidence. Your identity and that of your school will be anonymous, unless you give permission to use your first name only.

As a participant in this study, you will be agreeing to meet with me on three different occasions during the next five to six months. Each meeting will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Meeting times and places will be agreed upon mutually by the researcher and participant to maximize the most convenient time and place. An additional meeting will be a group conversation for Core Knowledge teachers at your school participating in this study. At that time, we will address common themes beginning to emerge. During this research study, you will be asked to reflect thoughtfully on your experience of being a Core Knowledge teacher. You may also be asked to write a short description of your experience. In turn, the researcher will be sharing themes as they emerge from our shared dialogue.

Your shared experiences will add a greater dimension to this work on teaching and learning with the Core Knowledge curriculum. If you decide to participate in this study, please sign the attached consent form. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your consideration.

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APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Identification of Project/Title A Journey into the Heart’s Core: A Phenomenological Exploration of Teaching the Core Knowledge Curriculum

Statement of Age of Subject I state that I am over 18 years of age, in good physical health and wish to participate in a program of research being conducted by Maggie Grove in the Department of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Purpose I understand the purpose of this research is to study the experience of Core Knowledge teachers who are currently teaching the Core Knowledge curriculum in order to find a deeper meaning and description of what this kind of teaching entails.

Confidentiality I understand that I can remain anonymous, or that I may give specific written permission to use my first name. I understand that I have the right to request that specific written information or conversations not be used in this study. I understand that I will be told of any tape recorders present during recorded conversations and that I may ask that the recorder be turned off at any time.

Risks I understand that as a result of examining my experiences of being a Core Knowledge teacher and teaching the Core Knowledge curriculum, I may contemplate my curriculum choices as an educator differently. This may promote deep thought and reflection. I understand that there are normally no long-term effects to the contemplative experience involved in this research.

Benefits, Freedom to Withdraw, & Ability to Ask Questions I understand that this study is not designed to help me personally, but that the investigator hopes to learn more about the experience of Core Knowledge teachers. I understand that I am free to ask questions or withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

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Name of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Participant _____

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