Power and Collaboration-Consensus/Conflict in Curriculum Leadership: Status Quo or Change?
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What is This?
This exploratory article draws on multiple theoretical lenses and empirical research to focus on collaboration-consensus/conflict and power as experienced within literacy curriculum change efforts. Conflict and collaboration processes are discussed in the literature but remain dualistic and lack the nuance of deeper understanding. The article presents findings from two case studies of curriculum directors and others engaged in struggles to improve literacy curricula. Findings point toward the importance of more nuanced and theoretically robust conceptions of power and collaboration-consensus/conflict in curriculum change efforts. Implications for future research, practice, and curriculum leadership preparation conclude the piece.

**KEYWORDS:** educational leadership, literacy education, conflict, change, collaboration

Over several decades, curriculum leaders and others have debated the notion that curriculum changes should be built on shared power and consensus rather than contradictions, a strategy that some believe reinforces the status quo rather than educational change (e.g., Apple, 1995). Certainly, some neo-Marxist theorists (e.g., Apple, 1995) believe that the necessity of...
sharing power during collaboration-consensus may result in the maintenance of the status quo, while others maintain that shared power may be the best way to move beyond the status quo (e.g., Brunner & Schumaker, 1998; Pounder, 1997). Adding complication, a few theorists (i.e., Merton, 1968), even when using radical critiques, sought to link micro and macro levels of social analysis with collaboration-consensus/conflict and power. Such theorists occupy a centrist position when suggesting that radical problems be addressed through appropriate functional analyses. However, in large part, discussions about curriculum change-processes and related power interactions remain dualistic and lack the nuance necessary for deeper understandings of curriculum change conflicts.

Dualistic distinctions connecting collaboration-consensus with “status quo” and conflict with “change,” we assert, could be informed by deeper examinations of power dynamics. Consider that the act of collaboration-consensus is supported by shared power (valuing of individual voice) while the act of conflict is often a battle for power over others (Arendt, 1972; Brunner, 2000). Thus, through two illustrative case studies, the article’s purpose is to explore the subtle complexities in acts of collaboration-consensus/conflict and power within curriculum change efforts. Consonant with its purpose, the article includes five main sections: (a) theoretical framework, (b) education literature review, (c) method and design, (d) two illustrative cases, and (e) findings and conclusions.

Theoretical Framework

For clarity, we employ a meta-framework (Burrell & Morgan, 2003) that reflects the dualisms that connect collaboration-consensus with the “status quo” and conflict with “change.” Burrell and Morgan (2003) constructed a matrix to illustrate four modern paradigms defined by two binary dimensions across two continua: (a) objective to subjective (horizontal continuum) and (b) macro social change to micro social regulation perspectives (vertical continuum). The two macro paradigms above the horizontal line include explanations of social disorder and change: radical structuralism and radical humanism. The two micro paradigms include explanations of social regulation and order: functionalism and interpretivism (see Figure 1). Thus, our discussions fall into two categories: (a) “Social Change Theories: Macro Perspectives” and (b) “Social Regulation Theories: Micro Perspectives.” Because of space limits, discussions of the elements of this meta-framework are brief and somewhat simplistic. Furthermore, far fewer education examples at the macro level over the micro level exist, a fact that is not evident given the need for sections of similar lengths. Finally, dividing this literature into these two categories was a messy affair as educational theorists often conflate macro and micro perspectives in discussions.
**Social Change Theories: Macro Perspectives**

This first subsection contains two parts: (a) radical structuralism and (b) radical humanism.

**Radical structuralism.** Macro social change theories share a focus on problems of disorder, deep-seated conflict, domination, power, and coercive social structures. However, they vary in their social worldviews, primarily in whether the world, broadly speaking, is an objective reality or a subjective, constructed reality (Burrell & Morgan, 2003). **Radical structuralism** holds that modern social structures (and conflicts between them) exist in an external reality and can be investigated objectively (Burrell & Morgan, 2003, p. 357). Basically, radical structuralist theorists advance the idea that clear, observable superstructures legitimize power and domination such that radical social change can only be achieved through conflict (defined as crisis and revolution). Modern conflict theory is nested within radical structuralism.

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**Figure 1. Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory.**


**Social Change Theories: Macro Perspectives**

This first subsection contains two parts: (a) radical structuralism and (b) radical humanism.
and focuses on problems of social relations within a capitalist society (Dahrendorf, 1959; Rex, 1961). In conflict theory (Dahrendorf, 1959; Rex, 1961), enemies (e.g., power holders) are clearly delineated, and social change occurs when antagonistic relationships reach a point of crisis (change). Here power is finite, in the hands of a few, and with others powerless. Furthermore, because ruling class interests are clearly different than those of the relatively powerless, deep-seated antagonistic relationships and irreconcilable conflicts are inevitable (Dahrendorf, 1959).

Radical humanism. Radical humanist perspectives hold that reality is constructed within individual consciousness. Because of its subjective nature, radical humanism argues that oppression occurs when individuals lose hope in their ability to change social circumstances and, for example, continue to live in high-poverty communities with few jobs, dilapidated housing, and failing schools. In radical humanism, conflict is primarily an internal process, involving the alienation of human consciousness by ideological and visible superstructures (Burrell & Morgan, 2003).

Power in radical humanism is understood as ruling class domination over others; however, power is exercised through various forms of ideological manipulation, including more visible structures of authority relations (Gramsci, 1971). Briefly, power resides in numbers, and groups are seen alternatively as powerful or powerless, moving as social forces. Individuals lose agency when a larger social grouping subsumes them; oppression occurs when particular groups are privileged over individuals. Unexamined ideology renders power “natural” or “inevitable” and beyond challenge (Gramsci, 1971).

Social Regulation Theories: Micro Perspectives

This second subsection contains two parts: (a) structural functionalism and (b) interpretivism.

Structural functionalism. Micro social change theories feature explanations for social regulation and order. Structural functional theorists (e.g., Cohen, 1968; Parsons, 1963) focus on micro levels of institutional/organizational regulation using objective, concrete terms. Functionalist models hold that social institutions—political, economic, and religious—provide specific functions to serve some ultimate interest and maintain social order (status quo). In other words, behaviors within institutions (e.g., collaborative/consensual decision making) are linked to the controlled functioning of the social system (Parsons, 1963).

A few centrist theorists, referred to as conflict functionalists by Burrell and Morgan (2003), incorporated conflict in theories of social order (e.g., Cohen, 1968; Coser, 1956; Merton, 1968). According to Coser (1956), conflict is a form of socialization because no group can be entirely harmonious. As
he put it, “Far from being necessarily dysfunctional, a certain degree of conflict is an essential element in group formation and the persistence of group life” (p. 31). Across several disciplines, power within functionalism is understood to mean domination and social control (e.g., Blau, 1964; Dahl, 1957). Politics are the bureaucratic processes, actions, and behaviors through which potential power is utilized, legitimized, and realized.

**Interpretivism.** While objective functionalists are concerned with how organizations operate and leaders function, subjective interpretivists are concerned with how individuals experience them (Capper, 1993). In other words, interpretivists argue that the organization is an idea shared by others; individuals are the reality; shared, yet individual, sense-making guides behavior; and a large part of our organizational lives involve constructing and interpreting meanings (Greenfield, 1987). Problems of conflict play little or no part in interpretivist perspectives. Theoretically, interpretivists are primarily oriented toward obtaining an understanding of life without problematizing its contradictions (Burrell & Morgan, 2003). Instead of the radical humanist focus on the uneven power, interpretivists emphasize individual perspectives without questioning the role of leaders (assumed to be legitimate).

**Education Examples in Literature**

The following brief review provides illustrative education examples within the four paradigms of the theoretical framework. The section has a category of centrist theories along with the primary two: (a) macro education change theories, (b) centrist education theories, and (c) micro education regulation theories.

**Macro Education Change Theories**

Some education scholars (e.g., Apple, 1999; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993) use radical structuralist theories to highlight the conflicts that contribute to macro school reform. Apple (1995, 2004) and Anyon (2005) advanced that subordinated groups must organize and revolt in order to disrupt the status quo and create macro (social) change in schools. Other education scholars (Greene, 1988; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995) noted that conflict’s curriculum function is to awaken our consciousness to the possibilities of social change.

In one study, Smith (2001) examined U.K. teachers’ literacy practices for student empowerment during government-sponsored campaigns. In Smith’s view, literacy campaigns typically focus on functional literacy for coping in society. Yet, Smith advanced that relationships between reading and power are more complex: “Whilst it is clear that being unable to read or write renders the individual powerless in a society dependent on print, it is not nearly
so apparent that the ability to do either necessarily makes one powerful” (p. 413). Furthermore, some studies (e.g., Green, 2003; McIntyre, 1997) reveal the challenges involved in awakening literacy educators to social change. In McIntyre’s (1997) study, the White teacher candidates distanced themselves from the task of interrogating their own race privilege while maintaining a “culture of niceness” (p. 46).

Centrist Education Theories

When change theories are applied to education, theorists often conflate macro and micro perspectives in discussions. Presumably, such conflation occurs because educational theorists/researchers conceptualize schools as embedded within the macro context of society. Indeed, a small group of philosophers’ and theorists’ views are either centrist between micro and macro modernist views and/or outside of modernism completely. For example, the power’s ultimate aim can be understood as social production aimed at changing society through collective action (Arendt, 1972). As Arendt (1972) stated, “Power can serve the goals of a community and does not simply subordinate some people to the will of others” (p. 12). In other words, power is situated in participation, and groups hold the power. Though still considered a modern approach recognizing the totality of powerful groups, understandings of power as social production expand participatory possibilities during decision making (Brunner & Schumaker, 1998).

Drawing on findings from studies of educational leaders’ and others’ (e.g., community members and teachers) conceptions and uses of power in educational decision making, Brunner (2000, 2002) articulated a nascent theory of power. According to Brunner (2002), power exists in a space between and among ontological conceptions of power and the enactment of those conceptions. More specifically, she identified four ontologically held conceptions of power: (a) power-over, (b) power-with, (c) mixed (exhibiting elements of both), and (d) multiple, one in which participants “understood both power-over and power-with notions of power and were quite clear that they conceived of power as shared, that is until they needed to become advocates for disenfranchised groups” (Brunner, 2002, p. 13). Following Arendt and others, Brunner did not specifically characterize her power theory as postmodern but suggested that the category of “multiple conceptions of power” replaces the modern binary understanding of power with an expanded conception of power—one that, at once, includes social production and social control (advocacy for disenfranchised groups).

Micro Education Regulation Theories

In micro education research (the bulk of education research), micro is often defined as a focus on the individual in leadership/teaching/learning and the maintenance of a stable system. However, as noted in the centrist
section, the difference between macro- and micro-structural perspectives is blurred. By default (see following examples), the research ideas advanced fall primarily within *structural functionalism*.

First, for example, some educational administration scholars developed conflict management literature aimed at ways to control conflict and differences arising during educational change—a goal of functionalism (e.g., Hart, 1997; Senge, 2006; Snowden & Gorton, 2002). Senge (2000) and Snowden and Gorton (2002) similarly described *conflict management* as efforts designed to prevent, ameliorate, or resolve disagreements between and among individuals and diverse groups with opposing interests in school reform processes. Such school conflict management and resolution strategies (Hart, 1997; P. Short & Greer, 2001; Senge, 2006; Snowden & Gorton, 2002) allow a bit of tightly managed conflict because it may contribute to consensus and commitment (Parsons, 1963). While conflict management literature provides school leaders with pragmatic strategies to deal with the strife during change processes and makes use of the term *conflict*, it is not grounded in macro conflict theory (radical structuralism). On one hand, conflict *theory* (Dahrendorf, 1959; Rex, 1961) identifies uneven power relationships and holds that social change occurs when antagonistic relationships reach a point of crisis (change). On the other hand, conflict *management* literature ignores power differentials among people in conflict. Furthermore, because individuals at the top of the educational hierarchy want to retain their power and privilege, conflict is controlled by those at the top and never reaches the level of crisis needed for radical change. Absent conflict, restructured schools remain just new versions of old hierarchical models that include repression and oppression (e.g., Dahrendorf, 1959; Rex, 1961).

Second, the term *curriculum/instructional leadership* emerged from the radical-structural research on “outlier schools”—schools that successfully educate children from low socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g., Berman & McLaughlin, 1976; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). These studies found that strong, directive curriculum leadership was essential to create positive learning and safe, orderly schools regardless of out-of-school situations. Other important criteria identified were focused school mission, high student expectations, pedagogical expertise, extended time on task, and positive home-school relations.

In response, educational leadership training programs focused on preparing prospective administrators to individually enact curriculum leadership functions until decentralization trends toward site-based management created the need for collaborative or shared leadership models. This trend produced studies focused on how individual administrators build organizational learning capacity in schools (e.g., Jackson, 2000; Marks & Printy, 2003). Findings from this later research indicated that by *modeling* appropriate instructional leadership behaviors and inviting teachers to share leadership responsibilities, principals build instructional
leadership capacity for systemic school change and increase student engagement and learning, specifically that strong curriculum leaders fostered the use of constructivist pedagogy rather than drill-and-practice activities in their schools (Jackson, 2000). However even in this later research, macro (social) changes are not mentioned as important aspects of instructional leadership (e.g., Jackson, 2000; Marks & Printy, 2003). Curriculum/instructional leadership literature, then, fits within functionalist perspectives because it focuses on how organizations (and leadership) operate to improve teaching and learning.

Moving to the micro-subjective paradigm, interpretivist perspectives (e.g., Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2007) of education include suggestions that school group members ascribe different (even contradictory) meanings to educational change efforts and thus create resistance, isolation, conflict, and power struggles (Fullan, 2007; Ylimaki, 2011). Indeed, when multiple voices participate in school-based groups, the clear presence of a group leader (administrator or teacher) remains (Reitzug & Capper, 1996). Furthermore, as group members cooperate and share power in schools, collaborative-consensus decision-making processes temper and/or lose any macro (societal inequities) aims.

Method and Design

Grounded in the interpretive paradigm, this qualitative case study placed the perspectives of curriculum director/leaders and other study participants at the center of the research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1993; Merriam, 1998). As Lincoln and Guba (1993) pointed out, case studies encompass the multiple realities and mutual shapings found in particular contexts and are more likely to be responsive to contextual values (not merely investigator values). Patton (1990) further explained:

[Qualitative research] is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting [italics added]—what it means to the participants to be in that setting. (p. 1)

The school was the unit of analysis for this project; however, the district context had relevance in terms of organizational structures, curriculum policies, and demographics. First, several schools struggling with literacy education politics were selected based on newspaper articles and district administrators’ perceptions. Second, after pre-study interviews, curriculum directors/leaders with deep understandings of politicized curriculum decisions were selected. The study was finally narrowed to two cases:
one school in each (Countryview and Lakeside; pseudonyms) of two

districts.

Countryview School (Grades 5–8)—a one-story, brick, 1986 building—

had a student population of 780—76% Caucasian, 5 21% African American,

3% Latino (66% free/reduced lunch)—and a Latino male principal. 

Countryview’s achievement data revealed that students performed well in

comparison to the nearby urban and suburban schools, but discrepancies

between African American students and Caucasian peers were uncovered.4 

Countryview had a history of reliance on textbooks more than primary sour-

ces; however, 5 years before, teachers developed writing assessments and 

began using some nonfiction and content reading strategies.

Lakeside School’s (Grades 6–8) student enrollment was 870 (90% free/

reduced lunch)—36% Caucasian, 38% African American, 12% Hispanic,

14% Asian—and led by an African American female principal. Lakeside 

also had a history of reliance on textbooks, but 5 years prior, English and 

Social Studies departments developed integrated literacy-content units that 

teachers and parents credited with the school’s success. In 2002, the state 

department identified Lakeside School as a school “in need of improve-

ment,” but that designation was removed in 2005 due to improved literacy 

scores.

Study participants were purposively selected based on their professional 

positions and/or personal roles in the two case study sites. Participants (n = 

48 total; assigned pseudonyms) in each case included 1 curriculum director/ 

leader, 1 superintendent, 1 principal, 16 teachers, and 6 parents/community 

members (n = 24; at each site). Because of the study’s purpose, curriculum 

directors received focused attention.

Countryview’s Caucasian Curriculum Director Angela Jackson had a spe-

cialist degree (administration major and curriculum minor), 17 years of 

teaching, and 9 years as district curriculum director. Jackson frequently pre-

sented sessions on balanced literacy and content area reading strategies at 

state conferences. Ms. Jackson described her training: “My leadership classes 

really helped me understand the change process.” In interviews, teachers 

talked about Jackson’s “content reading expertise” and “abilities to help 

teachers improve student writing” as extremely helpful for teaching.

Lakeside School’s Latina Curriculum Director Louisa Romeriz (14 years 

of teaching experience and 8 years district curriculum leader experience) 

had a doctorate from a research institution (administration major with curric-

ulum minor) and deep experience as a community organizer devoted to 

social justice. Like Ms. Jackson, Dr. Romeriz had a reputation among local 

teachers and state reading leadership for expertise in reading and literacy 

curriculum. Dr. Romeriz described her training: “Some of my classes helped 

me think critically about the social inequities inherent in schooling. They 

made sense to me in light of my experiences with a local feminist group 

and a church social justice organization.”
Data collection over one academic year consisted of (a) curriculum leader shadowing (10 days per each), (b) participant observations, (c) site document analysis, and (d) interviews ($n = 62$; 1 hour; taped and transcribed) with all participants (curriculum directors and some teachers were interviewed more than once). Interviews focused on reading/literacy change, positive and negative challenges, critical incidents, and beliefs/practices related to conflict and power. Trustworthiness was established through member checks, prolonged site engagement, constant comparison of data, and evaluative dialogue with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1993). Throughout the study, the researcher remained reflexive through analytic memos and notes focused on potential bias, with an eye on negative evidence related to codes, categories, and themes.

Concurrent data collection and analysis followed the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the first stage, interview transcripts, participant observation notes, and document analysis notes were reviewed and a codebook developed for data incident categories. The 38 initial categories included, among others, antagonism, conflict management, respect for difference, engagement, power, and trust. Second, data analysis focused on substantiating, refining, and negating the initial categories from 38 to 21 and developing hypotheses to guide further data collection. One early hypothesis was that a conception of power as collaboration was foundational for a more productive and intellectually engaging use of conflict. In light of this hypothesis, additional data on power usage was collected. Next, discriminate sampling was used to test incidents identified in Stage 2, initial data incidents were identified, and particular categories and subcategories were crystallized (Richardson, 2001). Finally, discourse analysis related to power and conflict was conducted. Data analysis continued into the fourth stage of writing.

Findings: Two Illustrative Cases

The findings section includes two main subsections: (a) Case 1: Countryview School and (b) Case 2: Lakeside School.

Case 1: Countryview School

Two important contextual factors permeated the Countryview case. First, during the early 1990s, teachers and administrators suffered a lengthy philosophical conflict over dualistic (whole language vs. bottom-up) approaches to literacy. One conversation among three teachers illustrated this tension and how it was managed:

Becky: Teachers who are here now like each other personally now.
Dan: I think the collaboration stuff has helped. Since we implemented that, we really don’t see conflict now. It’s more about consensus.
Cindy: We go through these big conflict resolution meetings, but I have to say that we resolve conflict when people leave or just stop talking.

Second, on the face of it, Countryview’s stated literacy program philosophy advanced the importance of literacy as a social equity force. Curriculum Director Jackson described the district’s literacy reform agenda as “focused on bringing up students’ literacy scores and providing access to higher education opportunities that will make them literate, productive citizens.” However, when No Child Left Behind Act required state test data disaggregated by ethnicity, Jackson found racial/ethnic achievement gaps in literacy, particularly in Countryview School. Such gaps required the provision of intervention classes for nonproficient students (identified through local holistic writing and state assessments). Tensions arose when Countryview teachers avoided noncollegial and “impolite” conversations about the racial components of achievement gaps (i.e., more minority students—over White students—were performing below standard). Thus, at a time when the two contextual factors created the desire to avoid conflict, the participants faced an achievement problem that had to be addressed.

As with many problem-solving efforts, conversations about the problem’s cause became the focus of curriculum discussions. A few teachers privately acknowledged their concerns about (a) the school’s literacy program not serving all students well, (b) staff blaming students, and (c) staff advancing superficial changes rather than substantive ones related to teaching philosophies and school climate. As one special education teacher said,

Every time I hear teachers say, we have to get “these kids” out of our regular classrooms and having someone else teach them, it really comes down to the fact that many teachers just don’t know how to communicate with some of the poor Black and Hispanic kids.

This comment represents the few (a) references to race as an element of conflict and (b) comments that openly identified teacher disagreements over underachieving students. After this special education teacher raised concerns about racial overtones during meetings, other teachers talked over him. A veteran teacher commented, “More and more, we have those students swearing in class and disrupting everyone else’s learning. I send more students to the principal’s office now than I ever have in my career.” This comment demonstrates a teacher’s perception about changing demographics and student behavior.

During discussions, most teachers were unhappy with content reading reforms that inserted special education and bilingual students into regular classes for learning strategies aimed at comprehension of nonfiction/content textbooks. After opposing solutions that required content-teacher responsibility for students’ reading comprehension, several teachers advanced the (a) creation of “pull-out” remedial reading classes, (b) exclusion of
“challenging” students from advanced classes, (c) exemption (for regular teachers) from work with “challenging” students, and (d) reification of existing discipline policies and instructional techniques. Thus, when a few teachers highlighted responsibilities for “challenging students,” other teachers quickly identified the students as the cause of the problems and decided to “move” the students “out.” Note that most “challenging” students were African American or Hispanic/Latino(a), but none of the White teachers named race/ethnicity or the related institutional/economic inequities as the problem’s cause. At the school year’s end, the special education teacher and the new teacher (who often expressed opposition) asked for building transfers.

Jackson’s Views of Power and Collaboration-Consensus/Conflict

Jackson, who served as co-chair (with a teacher) of the district-level collaboration council, expressed mixed views about curriculum philosophy, leadership, and collaboration processes. Jackson simultaneously valued structural functional “consistency in curriculum philosophy, standards, classroom pedagogy and assessments” and “teacher decision making and innovation;” she pursued “collegial relationships among administrators, teachers, and parents” and identified herself as a “collaborative leader” and, at once, conceptualized power as “dominance, formal authority, and influence on decisions.” Jackson stated that she “much prefers consensus to conflict and has developed skills in conflict management” to maintain collegiality and consensus norms about curriculum direction. In fact, the school’s principal explained that he often called “Jackson to the school to help him resolve conflicts over literacy curriculum standards and pedagogy.” Furthermore, teachers described Jackson’s meetings as “a bit chaotic.” One teacher stated,

We were often living on the edge of a substantive decision that required difficult conversations about race and underlying literacy philosophy [from critical paradigms], and yet always knowing Jackson will shut down conflict in favor of consensus and collegiality [using conflict management].

In many ways, Jackson’s use of collaboration-consensus grew from her conceptualization of power as domination, and as such, collaboration-consensus became a tool to recreate the status quo in the district’s top-down curriculum decision-making model. At the same time, Jackson talked about conflict’s impact on innovation and creativity during change processes, referring to conflict as the “resistance and opposition to any new idea or innovation. . . . Conflict creates antagonism and hostility among staff members so it must be handled with care.” Similarly, the principal defined conflict as “resistance and opposition that must be resolved to bring
everyone on board with a change.” These discursive practices have roots in traditional leadership preparation. Most participants recognized Jackson’s perceptions of conflict. As the principal put it, “I think she agrees with me that conflict is about resistance, and sometimes even hostile relationships, that you have to resolve as a leader with [centrist] conflict management.”

Conflicts over how to make all students literate, productive citizens occurred over years at Countryview and were described by teachers as “painful.” One teacher asserted, “We have worked to become a close family in the school. When professional conflicts occur, I feel bad on a personal level.” Thus, collaboration-consensus was broadly understood as civility and a safe ground for friendships. Because Jackson, the principal, and the school leadership team were formally trained in conflict management, conflicts or hostile verbal exchanges were managed during public meetings—meaning they were arbitrated in private meetings or with Jackson. Several interviewees admitted that antagonisms were “just below the surface” and “come into the open every once in a while, only to be quickly squelched in the name of collegiality, consensus, and personal relationships.” Indeed, during collaboration-consensus meetings (schoolwide or grade level), staff moved past discussions regarding literacy philosophy and racial/ethnic achievement gaps to consensus (often through majority voting). Jackson noted that such strategies placed limits on deep-seated differences and helped her “maintain a sense of community in the school.” Thus, Countryview participants emphasized unifying goals, smoothed dissension, and limited the philosophical depth and intensity of differences to avoid conflict. In short, conflict was the enemy in the minds of most Countryview participants, and collaboration-consensus became a conflict management tool used strategically to squash the enemy.

Jackson in action. At one faculty meeting, Jackson and the principal asked teachers to sign up for action groups, including: (a) curriculum mapping, (b) research, and (c) assessment. Each group would study the achievement gap and take recommendations to faculty and the district curriculum committee. During meetings, the favored resolution for problems of student achievement expectations and “challenging students” was to “move children out” into remedial classes outside of regular classrooms or after-school detention. Such actions were supported even when in order to pay for the interventions, some of the AP (advanced placement) classes would be eliminated.

At a subsequent team meeting, two teachers were concerned about the reduction of AP classes and changes to the curriculum. One teacher (and Jackson) suggested putting reading specialists in classrooms to help model/teach reading strategies (e.g., anticipation guides for prior knowledge, organizers of text structure) in the content areas, working on adolescent literacy (changing texts, modes, identities), and purchasing...
supplemental program materials. Jackson opened the discussion for ideas. A special education teacher suggested a way to implement the proposal with differentiated instruction and inclusion, but two other teachers disagreed vehemently, talking over that teacher and labeling the differentiation program as tracking. Supporters yelled back, calling those two teachers “too easy on academics.” Of note, the Countryview teachers (most Whites) were grappling with closing racial achievement gaps in literacy. Yet topics of race and/or cultural backgrounds and identities never entered these conversations. As McIntyre’s (1997) study found, White teacher candidates often report that confronting curriculum issues related to race is difficult. Rather, as in McIntyre’s study, the predominantly White educators remained “polite” and maintained their “culture of niceness” (p. 46; e.g., the status quo).

Before the argument about race and other things could escalate, Jackson stated, “We might have different ideas about this, but the bottom line is that policies require us to provide intervention services and get all of our kids to proficiency. We really can’t argue with that.” She then put the proposal to a vote, and it passed with all but two teachers in support. As Jackson later commented, “It’s my job as a leader to make sure everyone gets on board with a vision to move the school forward.” In brief, Jackson’s leadership practices maintained order, possibly motivated by her background as a White suburban educator with (a) an understanding of power as domination and (b) leadership preparation in conflict management.

During a subsequent meeting that involved (more contentious) discussion of content reading changes, Jackson let disagreements progress only until all concerns were identified. One veteran AP math teacher, said, “Look, I want to help the kids that aren’t doing well, but we can’t forget the top kids.” Several other veteran teachers reminded others that the (remedial reading) class became more like a “dumping ground” or study hall instead of a reading strategies class. None of the (primarily White) teachers described the “dumping ground”/reading class in terms of race/ethnicity. After several back-and-forth comments, the director stopped the discussion. She used structured listening and “majority voting” as suggested by centrist conflict management training. She later explained,

You have to let some conflict out into the open so you know where to help people compromise and even come up with some good, creative ideas, but eventually, the leader has to say, “This is the direction we’re going and you need to get on board.” You have to resolve that conflict as a leader.

Several teachers privately confided that they “felt uneasy during meetings, knowing that they could raise difficult issues only to a point” and that “meetings were always somewhat chaotic, on the brink of radical conversation but always somewhat ordered and contrived.” During observed meetings,
Jackson helped teachers work through conflict by returning to a shared vision for literacy education.

When participants framed the conflict as between “challenging students” and some teachers or between the majority and a few resisters, they established a norm or pattern that minimized dissension in the name of cooperation and personal relationships. In so doing, they avoided antagonistic conflict and race-related discussions, shifting blame to students. Jackson sought radical social equity through literacy curriculum, but did not understand the internal philosophical, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers. Jackson was a leader who used her power to control conflict through collaboration (combined with staff efforts to preserve consensus and unity). Thus, the Countryview case illustrates how radical discourse is subverted, conflict is managed, and the status quo maintained.

Case 2: Lakeside School

The primary contextual force at Lakeside was the increase in minority and in-poverty students. Tensions and conflicts focused on how to close minority-Anglo literacy achievement gaps without resorting to segregation practices. These conflicts over the espoused (radical) curriculum ideology and the necessity for literacy change echoed the first case; however, the attitude toward conflict differed. Curriculum Director Romeriz characterized school’s educational ideology (that the purpose of schooling is social liberation) as grounded in radical change theories advanced by Apple (1995) and Aronowitz and Giroux (1993).

Romeriz’s Views of Power and Collaboration-Consensus/Conflict

At several levels, District 2 (including Lakeside School) was heavily involved in collaborative-consensus decision making, including bimonthly curriculum reform meetings and monthly school restructuring meetings that involved parents and community members in various decision-making processes. Individually, Lakeside School had weekly extended faculty meetings where teachers, the principal, and Curriculum Director Romeriz engaged in shared decision making around school reforms. Lakeside teachers were also engaged in multiple forms of collaboration-consensus, including weekly grade-level/“community” meetings to coordinate curriculum and monitor student progress across subject areas. On one hand, these collaborative processes were similar to those at Countryview. On the other hand, key differences were evident—differences that we came to associate with the curriculum leaders’ (a) multidimensional conceptualizations and uses of power and social justice orientation, (b) multiple understandings of collaboration-consensus/conflict, and (c) ability to foster shifting leadership roles in curriculum decision-making processes (see final subsection for discussion of shifting leadership).
To begin, in one interview, Romeriz explicitly described her conceptualizations of power when she stated,

Power means different things. At heart, I believe power is in and among people, in their relationships and interactions. . . . Then power is the synergy that occurs when people work together for the greater good. There is another way of thinking about power, though, which is more like authority and control. I have had to use power as authority at times, but that is when I feel the greater good has been compromised.

In contrast to District 1, where the curriculum director's expressed conception of power centered on domination and authority, Curriculum Director Romeriz conceptualized power as collaboration-consensus and the synergy of collective efforts working toward change for the greater good. Many others in her district recognized her views of power. Typical of others, one teacher commented, “Mostly, Dr. Romeriz sees power in people working together for the greater good. I have seen her use her formal authority to make decisions, but those occasions are rare and seem to involve issues of justice.”

Dr. Romeriz's perspectives on collaboration-consensus/conflict as they related to power were clearly reflected in the following statement:

You have to help people break through a web of conflict and power within group meetings. The way I do that is to think about how to level the playing field, to respond to people and use group interaction strategies where a parent’s comment is on an equal playing field with the superintendent’s comment.

For example, in one meeting, Romeriz asked all participants (superintendent, parents, teachers) to anonymously submit concerns to her secretary. When these concerns were typed out together, the parents’ concerns about the emphasis on fluency were presented as equal to the superintendent’s belief in back-to-basics literacy. In so doing, Romeriz encouraged people to re-read and challenge “mainstream” public ideas about literacy (e.g., an emphasis on teaching reading textbook fluency as decontextualized from comprehension).

Romeriz in action. Lakeside teachers talked at length about how Romeriz encouraged difference, individuality, and various fluid subgroup identities (our research term) at the school. The so-called fluid subgroups were reported to shift over time like temporary alliances based on particular issues or situations. Group membership changed frequently. In this organic culture, Romeriz enabled shifting leadership across the curriculum groups and subgroups—a fact that encouraged the emergence of multiple voices and knowledges. To be clear, leadership roles shifted among multiple
members of the group, depending on the situation, who had particular interest in and/or knowledge about a particular issue. Furthermore, Lakeside staff members actively engaged in public debates over ideological and professional differences, including race and class issues. As one teacher put it, “Conflict is emotionally hard to listen to, but it’s necessary for people to get real and talk about issues that go somewhere.”

The fifth (in a series) meeting witnessed many more teachers in attendance who added their perspectives (that were recorded) to perspectives gathered previously, and on display on wall charts, during the first meeting. Those in attendance were asked to highlight with different colors the points at which the perspectives intersected and where they digressed. Some perspectives of the literacy gap grounded the problem in the idea that African American boys couldn’t/wouldn’t read the textbooks. Other perspectives grounded the problem in professional development issues. Still other problems were identified (by Caucasian teachers as well as teachers of color) as racism and low expectations. As meeting participants noted these different perspectives, some began to argue for the validity of one problem over another. Curriculum Director Romeriz repeatedly stated,

> We’re not ranking these problems or solutions; one is not necessary better than another, though certainly some may be more serious. We want to know the underlying root of the problems or conflicts and the implications for those children who have previously been marginalized in the literacy program.

Here Romeriz assumed a social justice stance allowing for conflict, dissent, and collaboration and also encouraging participants to explore literacy change and inflammatory topics such as race/segregation. As Romeriz heard and respected participants with holistic philosophies and racially based concerns not previously included in literacy curriculum committees, she provided participants with a visible, public opportunity to contribute views. As teachers and parents contributed to the literacy direction on multiple occasions, new norms of open communication and socially just literacy instruction emerged.

Numbers of teachers shared that the openness toward differing opinions helped heal contentious histories among staff members. For example, one veteran foreign language teachers said,

> [The director] really has put strategies in place to help people get over their baggage about past fights over curriculum changes but still be able to disagree publicly. There’s an honor in difference now even if it’s a loud argument.

Teachers reported that Romeriz regularly invited people from the community to participate in dialogues about how to alleviate bias related to race
and class. In so doing, Romeriz created public spaces to hear multiple perspectives about literacy change, including improvement of the community. In fact, Romeriz often purposely invited people to meetings who were known to have diverse perspectives on a particular issue. As she put it,

I think it’s always helpful to have people with divergent sources of knowledge come together to talk. By talk I don’t mean agree, but there is power in the relations of people, a power that works best as a synergy of efforts from talented people.

At the same time, Dr. Romeriz acknowledged that when she included different knowledges, perspectives, and ideas, conflict often emerged.

Under Romeriz’s leadership, Lakeside aimed literacy efforts and resources toward targeted groups (i.e., African American males, Latinos and English language learners). Prior to data collection, the faculty began an examination of literacy gaps between African American males and their peers. In addition to achievement differences, disproportionate numbers of African American males were in detention and alternative high schools; disproportionate numbers of Caucasian males were in advanced placement classes. Thus, the faculty held discussions and instigated a pilot program grounded in African-centered pedagogy and content literacy curriculum (including expository writing, content reading strategies, and related holistic writing assessments and content reading inventories). Two African American male teachers were trained in how to infuse African-centered curriculum into language acquisition and instruction with the goal of literacy proficiency on local (holistic) and state (standardized) assessments.

After 3 years, external evaluation findings—related to the whole school and the pilot program—were mixed and improvement recommendations advised that the smaller pilot classes (10 to 12 students) be continued. To maintain the small classes in the pilot program, most teachers (with primarily middle-class students) outside the pilot were required to teach 30 students per class (before the pilot they had 22 to 24 students). Because of scarce resources (materials, assistants, number of faculty), the maintenance of small class size for pilot classrooms was a strain (heavier grading and workloads) on the teachers who had 30 students.

Heated debates over class size ensued. As one teacher put it, “I know the 15 students in that class are difficult, but 30 is really a burden when you have to grade a lot of writing.” Teachers were split over whether to continue the program or not. Some argued vehemently that the pilot program resulted in segregation. In meetings that followed, several teachers voiced avid support for the pilot program and the needs of African American males. During discussions, participants did not label or blame individuals or groups for the tracking and segregation issues. Rather, Romeriz and the teachers focused goals for critical literacy proficiency on social equity with comments
like “let’s look for strategies that close achievement gaps without tracking kids into vocational programs or advanced placement.” At the same time, Romeriz worked with the open conflict over segregation and racial tensions with an eye on social change. Romeriz was clearly recognized as a curriculum leader in the school and broader district; however, she purposely shifted leadership and supported the development of the temporary alliances necessary to narrow the racial achievement gaps and foster social change. At the year’s end, examining teacher-developed assessments and state tests, the staff, Romeriz, and the principal found a slight narrowing of the achievement gaps between Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics. In the next section, these cases are discussed from a theoretical perspective.

Discussion

Through two illustrative case studies, this article’s purpose was to explore the subtleties and complexities involved in acts of collaboration-consensus/conflict and power as they were lived and experienced within literacy curriculum change efforts. While not generalizable, six major findings emerged from the two cases. First, rhetoric from curriculum leaders aimed at radical literacy change did not necessarily lead to radical change. In both cases, the curriculum leaders stated a desire for social change and believed that literacy was a path for such change. When implementing their rhetoric, however, the two leaders diverged. Countryview Director Jackson espoused radical change views while at the same time upholding the views of the principal and teachers—views that supported more centrist views for a status quo society. Without realizing it, Jackson created inconsistent discourse. On one hand she stated that change must occur, while on the other hand she supported the status quo. Her lack of clarity related to the multiple perspectives/paradigms and their philosophical origins created an environment in which participants lived in constant tension and sometimes chaos. As is often the case in such situations, a return to the status quo is the only “safe” decision. Jackson’s rhetoric emerged from a macro radical perspective, but her status quo outcome remained within the micro perspectives. On the other hand, Lakeside’s Romeriz had a personal social justice orientation and an understanding of the philosophical roots of conflict rhetoric. Her understanding helped create a consistent and comprehensive (not perfect) discourse—one that could be implemented from the ground up. Participants from Lakeside held on to the consistency of a macro radical discourse as a form of stability for their purpose. Lakeside’s outcome, while not complete, moved in the direction of equity.

Second, we found that differing philosophies about and uses of power and collaboration-consensus/conflict created different outcomes. This complex finding required a close examination of the relationships among the words collaboration-consensus and conflict and the concept of power.
Without a doubt, some literature (Apple, 1995; Snowden & Gorton, 2002) connects collaboration (and sharing of power) with the preservation of the status quo and conflict (with power contested) with change. A few scholars (Brunner, 2000, 2002; Pounder, 1997) couple collaboration with change. In such debates, two things are often missing: (a) a clearly articulated definition of the “practice” of collaboration—for example, conflict could be included in the notion of collaboration but it usually is not—and (b) a clear articulation of the conceptions and uses of power. Both case studies are helpful for fleshing out the nuances of these complexities.

To begin, we recall that across modernism, most often power is understood to mean domination and thought to be held by a few while others remain, to varying degrees, powerless. There are, however, a few modern subjective micro and macro theorists who conceptualized power as social production or collective action (Arendt, 1972; Brunner & Schumaker, 1998) with the idea of a “clear” leader still intact (Capper, 1993). Within radical change literature, debates occur over whether conflict is an objective, surface manifestation of a deep-seated power imbalance (Dahrendorf, 1959; Rex, 1961) or a subjective, psychoanalytic process involving ideological manipulation and alienation of human consciousness (Gramsci, 1971). Thus, in the minds of many, contested or unequal power is the source of conflict, and as such, it violates the cultural norms of cordiality and equality. However, we suggest, from the findings of our two cases, that such distinct conclusions must be questioned.

From the Countryview director’s perspective, conflict meant antagonism and opposition to the dominant literacy philosophy and the hard won school norms of collegiality—antagonisms and oppositions much like those discussed in modern conflict theory (Dahrendorf, 1959; Rex, 1961). Indeed, resistances (particularly with racial overtones) to these dominant norms immediately were highlighted as conflict—something to be avoided. Quite unlike conflict theory, however, Jackson and others suppressed this conflict before it disrupted the norms of politeness and consensus (meaning “we all agree or remain quiet about disagreements”), stability, and collegiality. In so doing, Jackson stopped overt forms of conflict before it reached conflict theory’s “natural conclusion” of radical change (Dahrendorf, 1959). Thus, Countryview’s perspective of collaboration-consensus did not include conflict, and because Jackson’s conception of power was dominance, she used her dominant position of power to squelch conflict as it arose. And as Apple (1995) warned, Jackson’s premature attempts to control conflict resulted in maintenance of the status quo.

In the second case, Lakeside Director Romeriz recognized that as conflict theory suggests, conflict was essential for meaningful change, particularly in relation to social issues like racial/ethnic achievement gaps. Furthermore, at the same time, she argued that decisions were shifting and temporary and as such, required multiple, simultaneous decision-
making groups that fostered open conflict and critical, engaged dialogue in the midst of collaboration-consensus.

Importantly, although Dr. Romeriz helped the Lakeside school and district communities work with and through conflict over fundamental questions about racial segregation in literacy classrooms, the school members also retained a strong community belief in the democratic purposes of literacy education and schooling. What was distinct in Romeriz’s perspectives of conflict (and contrary to conflict theory) was her use of conflict within collaborative decision-making processes. She appeared to understand that if all participants were to express their views in a collaborative (shared power) process, opposing or conflicting views would quite naturally emerge. To disallow the expression of conflict, she knew, would shut down authentic participation (Anderson, 1998). Not surprisingly, Romeriz’s conception of power was shared or with others. Her conception of power not only supported collaboration, but also included authentic participation with embedded conflict, even in instances related to race and class.

Third, our findings quickly point to a distinct difference between two bodies of literature that are often confused with each other in centrist educational literature and practice: conflict theory (that falls in the radical macro paradigms; Burrell & Morgan, 2003) and conflict management theory (that falls in the micro paradigms; Burrell & Morgan, 2003). Countryview’s Jackson was informed by conflict management theory and Lakeside’s Romeriz was informed by conflict theory. Without a doubt, this difference in the two directors created the substance of their practices, broadly speaking. While a review of these two very distinct literatures is beyond the scope of this article, we note that educational conflict management and resolution literatures are aimed at ways to control conflict and differences that arise during collaboration (e.g., Hart, 1997; P. Short & Greer, 2001), while conflict theory advances the necessity of conflict (power struggles) for radical change. In other words, the two sets of literature are fundamentally different.

In particular, within conflict management/resolution literature, some scholars advance that shared power (with conflict controlled) is the best philosophical support for moving groups beyond the status quo (Pounder, 1997). These scholars suggest that controlled conflict contributes to consensus and commitment and does not disrupt the order and function of the system. Clearly, Jackson was not only aware of this literature (by her own admission), but it also guided her actions during her change efforts. Above all else, Curriculum Director Jackson, the principal, and teachers upheld their (primarily White, suburban) values of niceness, collegiality, and consensus, even if it meant transferring the source of conflict from the majority perspective to the “challenging” students.

In the Countryview case, then, suppression of conflict maintained stability and the status quo of literacy education. By retreating from conflict in the name of consensus and aligning with the broader politics of skills-based
literacy and schooling, the Countryview curriculum director, principal, and teachers maintained harmony at the expense of substantive literacy changes. Countryview’s Curriculum Director Jackson talked at length about how her thinking has been influenced by recent practitioner literature on change that aligned with the interpretivist paradigm (e.g., Fullan, 2007; Senge, 2000). In certain respects, the collaborative communities highlighted as successful in this literature may have reinforced this curriculum leader’s propensity to inhibit conflict and social change.

Like Jackson, Romeriz’s beliefs in the importance of conflict for radical change came from her training and education. Romeriz also agreed with Gramsci’s (1971) argument that individuals have agency to create their own sources of consciousness about race, class, and gender. Romeriz’s personal and professional philosophy aligned with the critical education theorists (whose works she read) like Apple (1995, 2004) and Aronowitz and Giroux (1993), who saw the purpose of schooling as social liberation. However, drawing on her personal social justice stance, she went further in her complex understanding of her work and used power as shared, a view that supported her collaborative and radical/critical curriculum leadership.

Our fourth finding falls from the third. Leadership preparation and training (and its content) can make a difference—to the positive and to the negative. Indeed, Jackson and Romeriz were affected by their preparation/education programs and, in particular, the reading materials (and subsequent discussions) chosen by their instructors. Differences in how Jackson and Romeriz were affected by their preparation programs existed. In particular, Romeriz may have embraced the more critically oriented readings and discussions in her preparation because they aligned with her social justice experiences and beliefs. Implications for educational leadership preparation programs are clear. As with all educational processes, if radical action is needed, preparation programs must include radical literature, materials, and explicit instruction challenging White suburban tendencies to mask conversations about social inequities.

Fifth, we found that the amount of diversity (racial/ethnic and poverty) may have had an impact on the outcomes in both schools. This somewhat straightforward finding draws attention to the differences between the two research sites in terms of the overt indicators of diversity in the study participants (race, ethnicity, poverty). Clearly the urban District 2, Lakeside, has greater racial/ethnic diversity and more poverty. Suburban Countryview School’s student population is 76% Caucasian with 66% free and reduced lunch, while Lakeside’s student population is 64% students of color with 90% free and reduced lunch. In addition, the teaching staff participants at Countryview are primarily Caucasian (10 out of 16), while the teacher participants at Lakeside are more diverse (6 African American, 8 Caucasian, 1 Latina/Hispanic, and 1 Asian). And finally, we suggest that discussions of
racial/ethnic achievement gaps were more heavily supported by participants in the more diverse Lakeside setting (McIntyre, 1997). We note this as a finding, for as Milton Bennett (1993) pointed out, “oppressed people may navigate the development of intercultural sensitivity differently from those in dominant groups” (p. 28).

Finally, sixth, we found that the use of an overarching theoretical framework such as Burrell and Morgan’s (2003) was extremely useful when thinking through the complexities of literacy change efforts aimed at racial/ethnic achievement gaps. Such efforts are fraught with multiple issues and problems, not the least of which is the search for the reasons these issues and problems arise in the first place. The ability to sort through the personal, philosophical, and theoretical roots of particular discourses draws attention to the subtle differences in word meanings and understandings. Seemingly easy discussions are laden with multiple understandings of single words, and they can leave participants confused and at cross-purposes without knowing why.

**Conclusion**

Findings from this study support the need for a more clearly articulated, theoretically robust conception of collaboration-consensus that includes conflict and power. Both cases illustrate more complex relationships among conflict, power, and collaboration than the dualistic distinctions that connect collaboration-consensus with the “status quo” and conflict with “change” in the extant literature (e.g., Snowden & Gorton, 2002). In Countryview, the curriculum director, principal, and teachers practiced collaboration, but their understandings did not include power and conflict theory. Thus, our findings add a macro level of understanding to collaboration about curriculum change efforts that include conflict and provide educational leadership scholars and practitioners with theoretical understandings that have the potential to disturb traditional propensities for order, stability, and the status quo (Burrell & Morgan, 2003). While the Burrell and Morgan (2003) metaframework is somewhat dualistic, we find the matrix useful for theoretical analyses of the complexities involved in cultivating macro social change through micro curriculum change efforts.

It is also important to note that the two illustrative cases of conflict and power are largely situated in different paradigms but are not polar opposites. Furthermore, based on field notes and interviews taken over an extended period of time, the understandings of conflict and power should not be seen as inert, with all conflict situations treated the same. In fact, the Countryview curriculum director allowed some non–student-related disagreements to be aired at length. Likewise, the Lakeside director in the second case stepped in on occasion to halt conflicts that were “likely to hurt students.”
In drawing conclusions, we must also recognize some limitations of this research. First, case study research can generalize to a theory, not populations (Merriam, 1990). The sample size is small; future research is needed to confirm these findings in other cases. Furthermore, the study is limited because of the primary focus on district curriculum leadership and the lesser focus on members of the school community, including particularly minority parents and students.

Nevertheless, one of the most interesting implications for these findings may lie in curriculum leadership training. The Countryview director's understandings of conflict were not only grounded in her own beliefs about power as domination but also in her educational administration training. Interestingly, the Lakeside curriculum director's formal university training in educational administration included more readings aligned with radical social theory and her personal social justice experiences and orientations. That is, she cultivated deeper understandings of conflict, power, and collaboration through her experiences with a community church and a local feminist group—experiences that she considered “invaluable to her leadership.”

In future curriculum leadership training, it is time to reconsider the idea that collaboration and curriculum processes are distinct from macro perspectives on power, conflict, and social change. Drawing on macro (social) theories and engaging in conversations about race, class, and personal identities/backgrounds, educational leadership faculty can give serious attention to conflict, helping educators recognize and challenge institutions of power and inequality within their schools and communities. Curriculum leaders must have a strong disciplinary background in social change (macro) theories as well as organizational (micro) theories often used in educational administration training programs. Today’s curriculum leaders must be able to get beyond modern binaries, dualisms, and centrist tendencies in order to work with the natural tensions and differences of education.

This work may also support researchers in attaining a deeper understanding of the complex relationships among collaboration, consensus, conflict, and power. Specifically, findings from this study have several important implications for research. First, additional ethnographic research is needed to explore the nuances and complexities of power and conflict within collaboration. Findings from this study also raise questions about whether leadership preparation programs that emphasize macro (radical) social change affect leaders’ identities, expressed philosophies, practices, and outcomes. Furthermore, research is needed to examine the role of diversity (racial/ethnic, gender, poverty, and intersections thereof) in collaboration-consensus/conflict processes.

In closing, we hope that the research and literature presented in this article provide researchers and practitioners with multiple theories to understand the subtleties and complexities of power and collaboration-consensus/conflict. More nuanced and theoretically robust conceptions of
power and collaboration-consensus/conflict may help curriculum leaders move beyond the modern propensity to seek consistency, collegiality, and order/standardization and foster difference and inclusiveness in our schools.

Notes

1. During data collection, curriculum changes were in reading and literacy, although similar conflicts occurred in all content areas.

2. At the time of data collection, an either-or binary debate over literacy education (the Reading Wars) was the predominantly held pedagogical philosophy. Since then, some (e.g., Guittierez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Turner, 1997; Pearson, Hiebert, & Camil, 2007) suggest that radical problems be resolved through a balanced instructional approach that recognizes student needs in classroom contexts. Recently, districts moved toward “comprehensive” literacy programs through, for example, Reading Recovery’s Literacy Collaboratives and Dorn’s model of comprehensive literacy. These pedagogical arguments fall short of radical change and social justice. Perhaps a deliberate term, comprehensive serves to minimize issues of race and class while focusing exclusively on performance/instruction as the way to address groups of struggling learners.

3. Recent literacy literature (e.g., Block & Pressley, 2001; Duke & Pearson, 2009) aims to improve children’s lives, but arguments are still largely pedagogical, focused on what good readers and writers do when engaged in reading/writing, changing texts, modes, and identities. These scholars link literacy to improvement in individual children’s lives, but the use of literacy, or the leader’s stance on how to challenge the status quo in society, is rarely mentioned. And while some scholars (e.g., K. Short, 2003) discuss critical literacy processes that could change consciousness, the results often fall short of social action.

4. Of White males, 39% were proficient in reading compared to 8% of African American males. State reading assessments, QRI reading assessments, and locally developed (school-level) writing assessments confirmed the literacy achievement discrepancy between the two groups.

5. Because study participants and documents used the terms Caucasian and White and Latina(o) and Hispanic interchangeably, all are used in the article.

6. While Burrell and Morgan (1979, 2003) provide a useful framework for the analysis of power and collaboration-consensus/conflict within modern theories about change, their framework has limitations. First, because it categorizes philosophies and theories using the broad brush of commonalities, Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) model is considered, by some, to be reductionistic. The placement of social change and regulation theories into four boxes with distinct epistemological and philosophical boundaries is thought rigid. Second and closely related, the 2 × 2 construction of Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) framework tends to reinforce binary perspectives. Third, some education scholars advance that the framework “crams social and organizational theory into four categories, one of which is labeled functionalism, [and] serves to de-emphasize important distinctions” (Willower, 1996, p. 355).

7. Power usage data were gathered through additional interviews, participants were asked to discuss power’s meaning, decision-making processes, and task-completion procedures.

8. In 2005, the school was recognized by the state as a “most improved school” and was removed from state review status.

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Power and Collaboration-Consensus/Conflict


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