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Abstract

This article chronicles a two-year ethnography focused on teachers' restorative places. Restorative places, in school contexts, are where teachers congregate with colleagues for solace during the workday. In this article, I outline teachers' perceptions at one urban school, from their own voice, of how restorative places are created, while also exploring their thoughts on the interactions and relationships developed within these places. This understanding can help guide teachers and administrators to establishing restorative places that are best suited to support teachers' professional needs.

Keywords

urban teachers, restorative places, teachers' lounge, ethnography, teacher relationships

The K-12 profession of teaching often isolates adults from one another (Court 1999; Little 1990; Rogers and Babinski 2002; Williams, Prestage, and Bedward 2001). There are few faculty meetings. Teachers rarely share office and classroom spaces at the same time. Teachers and classrooms are largely autonomous in the general workday (Little 1990; Tickle 2000). The only time

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that teachers get to spend with other adults and “switch off” (Betrabet Gulwadi 2006) is during their lunch hour.

During lunch some researchers suggest that teachers use the teachers’ lounge as a restorative place. Betrabet Gulwadi (2006, 504) argues that restorative places and experiences are environments where teachers can “regain mental attentional capacity, reduce physiological stress and increase positive affect, or regulate one’s emotions.” Scholars have researched the teachers’ lounge internationally to explore the interactions among educators that occur within these restorative places.

Ultimately, research on teachers’ lounges has arrived at three conclusions about their use. First, educators use teachers’ lounges as a place to gossip, share stories, and interact personally (Kainan 1997, 2002; McGregor 2003). Second, the people in these places use humor to cope with the stresses of the profession (Mawhinney 2008; Woods 1984). Lastly, educators use teachers’ lounges as a place to share professional ideas (Abrahams 1997; Mawhinney 2010; Paine, Fang, and Wilson 2003) and discuss with colleagues about supports for classroom instruction (Ben-Peretz, Schonmann, and Kupermintz 1999). Additionally, Betrabet Gulwadi (2006) looks at the restorative places that teachers chose outside of school grounds. This research has been beneficial to the literature by analyzing the professional and social interactions among teachers. Through observation, these researchers started to unpack how teachers’ interactions shape the professional lives of teachers within schools.

On the other hand, there are limitations to the research. First, the majority of the literature only looks at the teachers’ lounge as a sole place for restoration. Oftentimes, teachers can create other places, not in the teachers’ lounge, that are a reflection of the various interactions among teachers. Second, the literature does not explore how and why teachers make sense of place-making for restoration. Lastly, the current literature centers within observational methods, but the direct voice of teachers and their perspectives on restorative places has never entered the discussion.

The research presented in this article intends to push the literature forward and address these three limitations. The larger research study outlined here sought to answer three questions that were missing in the literature: Why and how do teachers choose to interact with certain teachers and within certain places? What interactions and subsequent subcultures are created in the restorative places? What are the teachers’ perceptions of the interactions and relationships created in the restorative places? The purpose of this article is to focus on the latter question.

In particular, in this article, I analyze one urban school and how teachers sought to establish their own restorative places and interact with certain

colleagues. These teachers rejected the notion that the teachers' lounge must be a school's only restorative place; instead, they ventured off to make their own restorative places throughout the school. I explain how the relationships between the meaning of a place just for teachers and the relationships among colleagues, rather than a location's designated use, shaped where teachers go for solace during their lunch hour. The study was a two-year ethnography in an urban school, and I interviewed various teachers to provide their perspectives on place-making, a voice that is often silent. In this article, my goal is to highlight a discussion with, not just about, teachers.

Restorative Places

To explore why and how teachers' choose certain restorative places, one must first contextualize place. Gieryn (2000) defines place with three characteristics: geographical location, material form, and investment with meaning and value. Geographical location refers to a "unique spot in the universe . . . [which] could be your favorite armchair, a room, building, neighborhood, district" and the like (Gieryn 2000, 464). The material form of place encompasses physical makeup, items, or objects that are within the place. For example, the material forms in a room that make a significant difference could be natural lighting, comfortable furniture, or a modern coffee maker. The meaning and value within a place are "interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined," yet the meaning or value of a place is "flexible in the hands of different people or cultures, malleable over time, and inevitably contested" (Gieryn, 2000, 465). Gieryn emphasizes the importance of understanding that place is not the same as space. "Space is what place becomes when the unique gathering of things, meanings, and values are sucked out" (Gieryn 2000, 465).

When applying the notion of place to the context of schools, it is important to understand not only where teachers find place, but where they also find restorative place. Betrabet Gulwadi (2006) outlines three aspects that constitute a restorative environment:

- (a) the types of environments that enable restoration along with their physical or spatial (e.g. nearby nature vs. hiking destinations) and psycho-social characteristics (e.g. favorite places, happy places), (b) the types of activities conducted in those places (e.g. just being there vs. active participation), and (c) the types of psychological, physiological, and psycho-physiological benefits obtained (e.g. positive affect of emotions, increased attention). (506)

Applied to the school context, teachers often pick restorative places that are connected to the people within it. The people and interactions create meaning and value, and the psychological support to cope with the profession (Abrahams 1997; Mawhinney 2008, 2010; Paine, Fang, and Wilson 2003; Woods 1984). Thus, it is important to understand how teachers use these places restoratively. This understanding can help guide teachers and administrators to establishing restorative places that are best suited to support their needs during the workday.

Methodology

In this ethnographic study, I used participant observation and one-on-one semistructured interviews. Farmer School,¹ a K-8 grade school situated within the School District of Philadelphia, was the site for data collection during the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years. The school employed approximately 106 teachers during those two years, the majority of which were White and female.

As I was trying to find a school to collect my research, I already had a prior relationship with Farmer School as a volunteer tutor. About two years prior to tutoring at Farmer School, I was teaching ninth grade English. As I returned to graduate school, I felt disconnected from the school district. Thus, I decided to volunteer my time as a tutor at my neighborhood school, which happened to be Farmer School. I tutored in reading and writing two days a week in two third-grade classrooms and in the sixth-grade Resource Room.² The following years, I worked exclusively in a fourth-grade classroom. After a year of tutoring, I knew that Farmer would be a great place to conduct my research the following year because I already had a relationship with the school and neighborhood. The school allowed me to conduct the research at Farmer because the data would help to support the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that the principal wanted to develop for the teachers. These community meetings would be scheduled adult time for teachers to collectively plan together, and the information from this ethnography would highlight the best working relationships for the teachers.

Since the relationship with participants is important within qualitative research, it is important to note that most of my interactions with teachers were limited during my first year of tutoring, and my interactions were mostly limited to students whom I tutored or who knew me from the neighborhood. I presented the research idea to the teachers toward the end of the year at a faculty meeting. Most of them were receptive, I found, because they often saw me in the hallways working with students. The fact that I was part of the

community gave me legitimacy. Moreover, the three teachers that I worked with over the year vouched for my authenticity to any teachers who did not know me. Ultimately, these close relationships provided me with access to these restorative places that would have been difficult, if not impossible, to access anywhere else. Since only a small number of teachers knew me as a tutor, my interactions and relationships with them grew during my time as a participant/observer in the lunch groups. I spent my days tutoring in the morning, participating in three lunch groups, and then tutoring in the afternoon.

Participant observations were the crux of this research project. Direct observations helped me interpret how teachers used restorative places as I recorded what occurred in the moment (LeCompte and Schensul 1999; Wilkinson and Birmingham 2003) and experienced how the school's climate impacted teachers' interpersonal relationships. I distributed consent forms to all teachers to gain their permission and ensure that they understood the study. I, then, conducted observations among three groups of teachers: the kindergarten to second-grade lunch group, the fourth-grade lunch group, and the seventh- and eighth-grade lunch group. There was a fourth group, known as the Library Group, but I was not able to obtain access to them. I completed approximately 300 hours of participant observations during these groups' lunchtimes over a two-year period. Most of these observations took place in the groups' alternative restorative places, available classrooms during their lunch break. In observing restorative places, I witnessed the interactions among teachers and how these relationships manifested themselves there.

There were benefits and limitations to researching a school where there was a prior relationship. The benefits and limitations were most prominent in my access to places. The teachers' perspectives and perceptions of me varied in the different lunch groups. One lunch group, the K-2 group, initially viewed me as an outside researcher. Two months into the project, after another teacher revealed my past teaching experiences, some of the teachers started to warm up to me. My relationship with a teacher prior to conducting research benefited in terms of her being an advocate on my behalf to the K-2 group. Conversely, my relationship with the fourth-grade lunch group was very different. As I tutored many of their students, they often saw me as a colleague. They would ask me for advice, as I would ask them. This was beneficial in gaining access to their place and information, but had limitations that I often had to remind them of my role as researcher.

My relationship with the seventh- and eighth-grade teachers was a hybrid of the first two groups. Some teachers trusted me due to interactions from my prior experience at Farmer, while others were skeptical of my research work. Ultimately, these three different positions affected my research.

The note-taking process on the observations became a complex issue. I could not take notes during the lunch hour because I ate lunch with the teachers, which made it physically difficult to eat and write simultaneously. As a result, I often missed valuable information. To resolve the issue, I began to leave lunch five to seven minutes early to go to an empty classroom and write down all that happened during the lunch. Leaving early to take notes, as opposed to waiting later in the day, increased the accuracy of notes based on my immediate recollection of lunchtime conversations and events. Additionally, leaving early also ensured that I did not take away from my after-lunch tutoring sessions with students.

In addition to participant observation, I gathered supplemental information with one-on-one semistructured interviews conducted during the last year of the study. I decided to conduct interviews in order to gain the direct perceptions and voice of the teachers. I used interviews to gather in-depth information (Wilkinson and Birmingham 2003) from individual teachers about place-making. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) discuss how interviews assist in interpreting, as well as gathering, cultural information, and how the interview data relates to the observations. I interviewed thirteen teachers, the principal, and two student teachers in order to understand the varying perspectives about restorative places. All interviews were audio recorded with participants' consent, transcribed, and then checked with members. All of the participants received their transcription in order to ensure the accuracy of the data.

Most of the data I present in this article stems from the interviews documenting how and why teachers chose certain restorative places and interacted with certain colleagues. At the completion of the project, I presented the teachers and principal with a completed version of the research. This provided an opportunity for teachers to offer any feedback on issues they disagreed with or thought was missing. No teachers suggested corrections. The school used the completed manuscript to help create structured Professional Learning Communities among the teachers the following year.

At the completion of the study, I coded data using constant comparative analysis and classical content analysis. Specifically, I used constant comparative analysis to compare themes among the coded categories (Hewitt-Taylor 2001), and classical content analysis to quantify the frequency of codes used in the project (Kohlbacher 2006; Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2006). Some of the themes that emerged were history of places, adult time, isolation, and benefits. The main focus of this article is around the theme of the history of places.

The Teachers' Lounge over Generations

Teachers at Farmer created various restorative places over the past twenty years. The reason for these creations stemmed from changes in the teachers' lounge over the last two decades. The following findings provide a context for understanding the current development of Farmer School's restorative places.

The Changing Space of the Teachers' Lounge: A Twenty-Year Development

Initially, the school district supported the designation of teachers' lounges in its schools. In the School District of Philadelphia, the importance of having a designated teachers' lounge had legal precedent. According to the contract between the School District of Philadelphia and the teachers' union, every school had to provide an employee lounge (Philadelphia Federation of Teachers 2004), an indication of the importance of restorative place for teachers. Farmer was certainly no exception to this rule. However, as the population of the school changed, so too did the placement of the teachers' lounge.

Farmer was a three-story school. Approximately twenty years ago, there was a teachers' lounge on every floor. Justine, a special education teacher who had spent the last twenty-five years teaching at Farmer, explained the setup of the past teachers' lounges:

Now, I guess back in the day there used to be a faculty lounge on every floor and there used to be a couch in every room. There used to be this theory that us women had to lay down when we had our period. So there was a couch provided on every floor, that's no longer. Kind of like [a couch] that you would find in a nurse's office of days gone by.

About fifteen years ago, the school became overcrowded, and there was a need for more space. The lounges on the second and third floor became a Resource Rooms and an Accommodation Room.³ Since they were only a little larger than a closet, the rooms could not accommodate space for full-size classrooms.

The teachers' lounge for the following years had been located on the first floor. Until 2005, the teachers' lounge on the first floor (referred to as the exclusive lounge) was about the size of a classroom and considerably larger than the old lounges on the second and third floors. The exclusive teachers' lounge was a large space with a family-style eating table, microwave,

photocopy machine, and reading lounge area. The back of the room had office space for the roaming science teacher, Gwen.

At the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year, because of overcrowding and severe lack of space, the principal decided to make the teachers' lounge into a counselor's office. Since the contract required the school to have a teachers' lounge, the school moved the lounge into the existing Home and School office, which volunteer parents operated. The lounge did not replace the Home and School office. Instead, the new space combined the Home and School office, the teachers' lounge, and Gwen's desk. The Home and School parents and the paraprofessionals mainly used the new space.

Ultimately, the school reduced the new, merged teachers' lounge to a small, square green table in the center of the room. Permanent fixtures on this table were the three-month-old tabloid magazines with Britney Spears on the cover. Large grains of salt lay scattered on the table, remnants from the daily pretzel sale that the Home and School Office ran. There was continuous movement in this space. The school's pretzel sales and Student Council's candy sales meant students frequently came into and out of the area. Support staff came to the lounge to take quick breaks and chat with their friends around the table. They often sat around the table while their walkie-talkies chirped commands in the background. Gwen sat at her desk quietly grading papers. Dora, the Home and School President, listened to the latest hip-hop station on the radio, completed paperwork, and talked with the teacher aides.

All of this ongoing activity in the teachers' lounge was not the original intention of the principal, Mary, when she decided to merge the teachers' lounge with the Home and School office. With the parents in the space, the teachers were unable to remove their professional façade of a day's work. As a former teacher, Mary knew the importance of this exclusive time for teachers, and she tried to designate lunch periods as a time when the parents and paraprofessionals could not be in the teachers' lounge. Her attempts proved unsuccessful. The parents and paraprofessionals continued to use the teachers' lounge during the times dedicated for teachers; they felt as though the room was originally their own restorative place, and it was not right for them to leave at certain times. The geographical location, materials set within the place, and the invested meaning were too important for the parents to compromise the place.

The result, therefore, was a severe lack of teachers in the teachers' lounge. The copier and the microwave were the only two elements that drew teachers into the lounge. Teachers would come in, microwave their Weight Watchers or Lean Cuisine meal, and then take their meal to an alternative restorative place. The problem arose from the fact that parents shared the conjoined

teachers' lounge. In this new space, the teachers encountered face-to-face interaction with their parents and, therefore, needed to maintain professionalism. The teachers' lounge was an unsafe place for relaxation and informal teacher interactions; it lacked two of the three elements of restorative places: it did not enable restoration and it did not allow the teachers to conduct certain activities.

An Unsafe Space: Teachers' Reactions to the Merged Teachers' Lounge

During the interviews, teachers took the time to explain why they chose not to use the teachers' lounge. The main concern was the fact that parents were in the new teachers' lounge. Since parents were in the space, the teachers felt that the teachers' lounge was neither safe for relaxing nor conducive to teacher discussion. Elementary-grade teacher, Cindy, explained why the teachers' lounge was an unsafe space to relax:

To speak for myself, it's not that I don't want to socialize with the extra staff members who are not professional teachers, it's not a snobby issue, but I don't want to chill out, I don't want parents looking at me like, "oh look, she's never working" or that kind of thing. I like those people and everything and I do schmooze with them when I see them in the hallway, but to, you know, to kick back and relax all the time in one specific space, I never really want it to look like I'm never working, that kind of thing.

Cindy did not feel safe relaxing and showing her emotional side in front of parents. For Cindy, a restorative place is where people can conduct certain activities; she would be able to get away from work for the forty-five-minute break. Being near parents in the space did not allow Cindy to fulfill her needs. Further, working in front of parents was not the type of activity she expected to do in a restorative place. Thus, for her the teachers' lounge lost its meaning and value, and it ultimately became just a space.

Linda, an upper-grade teacher, also talked about why it was an unsafe space to relax because of the constant ongoing in the lounge.

I don't find it appealing. I didn't find it appealing ever in this building. I'll be honest with you. First of all, it was shared, it was always something else going on. You know, maybe a tutor working with a kid. Maybe Home and School in some way, and that was even before it was

Home and School. It always seemed to be overcrowded and not a comfortable place for you to have lunch. So I never opted to. I don't find it appealing at all.

Because they needed to maintain their professional façade in the new lounge, Linda and Cindy both suggested it was not a relaxing and restorative place. For Linda, the space lacked physiological and material comforts, and it did not enable restoration because other work, like tutoring, was occurring. In short, the teachers' lounge provided no break from the teaching job.

Aside from the inability to relax, some of the teachers suggested that the teachers' lounge was not conducive to teacher discussion. Since the parents were in the room, it was an unsafe space to interact in the manner, which she so chose. The teachers discussed other students during their interactions with each other. Special education teacher, Laura, explained that the particular nature of teachers' interactions prevented Farmer's lounge from being a safe and restorative place for discussion.

Personally, I don't use the teachers' lounge, but my opinion is negative because I find that at lunch I just want to talk about children. If I had a really bad day with the child I'd feel better if I could just say, "you know so and so drove me crazy today or didn't do any work," and I don't feel comfortable to say that because there are parents in there 'cause it's the Home and School room. You don't know who's gonna carry that, that's confidential. If I say that in front of other teachers, that's not going back to that child, I would hope. But if you say that, you're never sure who's there and it may not be their parent but they could be friends with . . . it's an uncomfortable situation so I would not use it. I love the Home and School folks, nothing against them, but I don't feel comfortable 'cause we do talk about kids.

Laura was explicit about the fact that when teachers were together exclusively, they often expressed their true emotions concerning children. She did not feel safe articulating these thoughts in front of parents, where she usually had to maintain her expected teacher façade.

It is evident that the teachers were not satisfied with the teachers' lounge merger. The principal, Mary, had decided not to press the issue because teachers were not complaining to her.

I don't have the time, quite honestly, or the energy to worry about it because I think people are just comfortable with what they're doing.

They're not complaining about it. They all have microwaves and refrigerators, although they're not supposed to.

The reason the teachers were not complaining was that, as Mary indicated, they brought in their own microwaves and refrigerators to make their own "teachers' lounge." The teachers also brought other elements to the creation of the place aside from the appliances. For example, holiday tablecloths, storage filled with snacks for the year, and special silverware for the lunches are other small indications of how they turned these classrooms into comfortable, restorative places that mimicked the old teachers' lounge. These alternative restorative places, separate from the designated teachers' lounge, established themselves throughout the school.

The Creation of Alternative Restorative Places

After the teachers' lounge merger occurred, teachers turned to classrooms, offices, or the library during lunchtime where they would not have face-to-face interaction with the public in the form of parents, students, and administrators.

In these isolated places, teachers felt safe to remove themselves from the job, albeit temporarily, in order to relax or talk candidly about work-related issues. In this way, they gained one psycho-physiological benefit needed from a restorative place. The following section describes the emergence of new restorative places at Farmer School created by four groups: the K-2 group, the Library Group, the Fourth Grade "Defectors," and the Lunch Bunch. I highlight the materialization of the alternative restorative places through the teachers' voices and perspectives of the event.

Kindergarten to Second-Grade Group

The kindergarten to second grade (K-2) group was the last holdout from the teachers' lounge. For a couple of weeks after the teachers' lounge merger, the K-2 group attempted to eat lunch in the teachers' lounge, as they always had in the exclusive teachers' lounge. Unfortunately, their tradition of using the teachers' lounge in this new, merged space was unsustainable. Teacher Samantha explained that the lounge eating lasted only briefly, as illustrated in the following exchange:

Samantha: We did have a room to eat lunch. They kind of took that away from us. The old teachers' lounge. And now, although there is a lounge down there, so much is going on there. It's our Home and

School Room, it's a pretzel room, it's our little everything room. There's a lot going on there and it was harder to eat lunch down there.

Me: Did you try?

Samantha: We did try. We did try. We totally understand that that's their room too. They have things to do, but we all sat there and we all ate lunch down there, and that was just our place to go. And now, we were just uprooted last year. [Ms. Gray] said, "Well, my kids aren't here. Come to my room. We'll eat lunch there." And it was just easier because now we have a place to go.

This sense of "our" own place for teachers had been removed, and the place became a space. The merger made this group feel as if they lost their restorative place for interaction, so they decided to create a new place of their own. As teachers, the group had common interests that were different from those of the parents in the Home and School office. When they decided to split off, they moved into a classroom on the first floor belonging to one of the kindergarten teachers whose room was unoccupied during lunch. This room created distance from the parents, while it also satisfied the needs of a restorative place.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the K-2 group had approximately ten teachers and one student teacher in the lunch group, who were all White and female. The participants in the group changed during the following school year. Two of the special education teachers that joined the K-2 group the previous year decided to break off and eat lunch with the Autistic Support teacher. The three special education teachers ate in a room next door to the K-2 group. One of the special education teachers, Joan, explained that the break off occurred so they could focus their conversations on special education topics. Joan explained, "So our conversations tend to get a little more, you know, with the special ed. children. Some of the other teachers can be put off by some of our subjects." The special education teachers did not feel completely comfortable "talking shop" in front of other teachers who were unfamiliar with their specialization. Since their work was similar, yet different from that of the K-2 teachers, the special education teachers made a new restorative place for themselves. This provided a place where teachers could comfortably speak about their specialty area.

The special education teachers' group would have been important to explore concerning cultural exclusions from other teachers. In retrospect, I should have explored this space, but I made a decision at the time not to do observations with this new group. The group was small, and Joan explained

how important it was for the special education teachers to be together to “talk shop.” Since my background was as a general education teacher, I wanted to respect the group’s wishes and my relationship with Joan, so I did not further explore the inner workings of the special education group.

After the special education group was established, the K-2 group went down to about eight people that year. One kindergarten teacher retired, and the student teacher graduated, but additional teachers replaced some of the original members of the group. Two previously third- and sixth-grade teachers moved down to teach the lower grades, and switched their lunchtime to the K-2 group.

The Library Group, the Defectors, and the Fourth-Grade Group

One restorative place, called the Library Group, had already established itself nine years before the teachers’ lounge merger. This group consisted of third- and fifth-grade teachers and the school librarian, all White and female. The group was exclusive and elite, and other teachers in the school often referred to them as “The Library Clique” or “The Sorority.” The librarian, Martha, was the leader of the group. Personal invitation was the only way to be included as a member of the Library Group. As a tutor, the members did not invite me into the space, but I was granted an interview with Martha. She discussed how the Library Group got started nine years ago.

You know what, it was with a group of women I had become friendly with. I guess we had common interests and we were able to enjoy one another’s company and sit down. We found that we enjoyed going to the theatre and we enjoyed the ballet and we would meet outside of school and participate in those activities. So they became relationships that transcended school. We’re all about the same age. That was also a determining fact, and we all started here roughly within the same time, within a year from one another. So when we were the new kids on the block, you wanted to have somebody (*laugh*), a group to grab onto, so we formed that group.

In the case of the Library Group, the personal factors that brought the group together were their similar interests inside and outside the school. Contextually, the group members were initially all new teachers who worked together on the same floor. All of these elements formed the tight bonds of this group, giving an invested meaning and value to the restorative place.

The Library Group had a long history together. In the past, there were other participants in the group. For instance, some fourth-grade teachers also joined the Library Group, since they all took lunch during the same period; however, the fourth-grade teachers eventually decided to create their own restorative place because they did not like the conversations that were held in the Library Group. Elementary-grade teacher, Shanae, was the first to break away from the Library Group. Her fellow grade partner, Cindy, explained what occurred.

[Shanae] didn't like the cattiness too much, and I don't know if they [the Library Group] liked her. I used to eat by myself because I would get things done and I didn't want to drag all my food down to the library and that's why I just have my refrigerator. I used to eat with the other 5th grade teachers when I was in 5th grade, but we kind of split up. That was way back. So [Shanae] and I, I didn't want her to eat alone and so we just kind of hooked up, so then it [4th grade group] grew.

For Shanae and Cindy, personal factors were different from those of the Library Group, as they did not relate to the type of talk ("cattiness") that supposedly occurred in the place. They did not have the same investment in the activities that went on in the restorative place as did the Library Group members. Further, the geographical location of the restorative place made it difficult to get to the space, as Shanae and Cindy were located a floor above the library. The issues of geographical location, different values and meanings, and different views of what interactions should occur in a restorative place caused Shanae and Cindy to be isolated, until they left to make a group of their own.

Joining the Library Group involved a certain invitational ritual. The head of the group, Martha, would orally invite teachers into the place. During the 2005-2006 school year, Cindy explained that the Library Group gave her an invitation on certain terms. She explained, "They're nice people and I like them and I'm friends with them, but they are a clique. In fact, somebody once said to me that when [Shanae] retires you're more than welcome to join us." The Library Group had not been fond of Shanae when she previously defected from them. When Shanae retired at the end of the school year as planned, I asked Cindy if she would consider the Library Group's invitation, but her reply was, "I don't want to be a member."

Shanae was not the only fourth-grade teacher to defect from the Library Group. One day while I was helping out with the knitting club afterschool program, Candace talked to me about why she and her student teacher at the time, Jane, broke off with the Library Group. Jane was Candace's

student teacher and also the parent of a sixth-grade child in the school. Jane's oldest daughter also graduated from Farmer School three years prior to her student teaching experience. Jane and Candace together would go to the Library Group:

So most of them [the Library Group] are in their 50s, maybe 5 or 6 years away from retirement. So they like talk stuff [negative comments] and are a little burned out. The woman I took over for retired in September, so I was with her that first month and she would eat in the library. So [Jane] and I would go down there. Now they didn't like [Jane] because of how she is as a parent. Now [Jane] the parent and [Jane] the teacher are two different people. So we started to back off.

There are two important points in Candace's comment. First, Candace did not feel comfortable with how the Library Group chose to express themselves. She felt the conversation was negative and pushed up against her values, and it did not enable her to feel restored. Candace was expected to conduct her emotions and conversations in ways similar to the established norms of group. Moreover, the Library Group was very uncomfortable having Jane, a parent, in their restorative place. The place was created exclusively for teachers to remove themselves from face-to-face interactions with parents. Although Jane had a new role as a teacher, the Library Group still viewed her as a parent and, therefore, as an outsider. This perception of Jane shifted the place back into a space in which the teachers were coming face-to-face with their work. Thus, the teachers felt Jane made their space unsafe for their type of interactions.

The final reason for Candace defecting from the Library Group was an incident that occurred between Martha and herself. Candace explained:

Well, one day my kids were in the library. [Martha] starts into me in front of the kids. She was like, "You are the worst teacher in the school and everyone talks about you and you can't control your kids. I don't know why you always have kids in your room." And I'm thinking, well duh, this is a school. I was so shocked, my jaw was like to the ground, that I didn't even say anything. Then [Shanae] sees me and is like, "What is wrong?" Well, I lost it. I just broke down crying. I kept thinking I thought I can control my kids. I didn't know them [the fourth-grade group], but they were like, "You can come here and eat with us, we're not like that."

The negative consequences of this interaction continued, but Candace never went back to eat with the Library Group.

At the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year, Martha followed up again with invitations to the Library Group. Martha stated,

We have invited everyone to join us, but some of the girls, I believe the 4th grade teachers, eat in a room on the second floor. There's a new 5th grade teacher, we certainly invited her to join us, but she says she eats in her room and she's got young children at home and she likes to leave right after school.

After the interview, I asked the fourth-grade group about Martha's invitation during lunch. Candace explained that, "[Martha] came up alright. But she invited [Cindy], she didn't invite everyone." Consequently, this solidified the fourth-grade group.

After Shanae's defection from the Library Group, veteran teachers Cindy and Shanae had started the lunch group among themselves five years prior to this ethnography. Two years later, a special education teacher named Ann joined, followed by Candace. The two student teachers joined during the 2005-2006 school year. In total, their group consisted of about six people: all the fourth-grade teachers, one special education teacher, and two student teachers.

Shanae retired in 2006, and the faces in the lunch group changed during the 2006-2007 school year. Cindy, Ann, and Candace were still in the group, joined by Shanae's replacement. The student teachers left, but a new special education teacher had joined the group. In addition, a fifth-grade teacher, who used to work with Ann at a previous school, ate with the group. The number of teachers in the group stayed the same, but the location moved to Cindy's room.

On the whole, although some members in the fourth-grade group rejected the Library Group as a clique, the fourth-grade group ultimately became its own clique. The group had personal and contextual factors that brought them together. The personal factors included their similar ideas about discussions during lunch. These similarities in values initially drew the fourth-grade group together, and it provided restorative support for each of them. The fourth-grade teachers ultimately wanted a place where they could remove themselves from the "negative conversations" of the Library Group. This group had similar values about how lunchtime discussions should proceed. Their discussions were based on positive and productive conversations about school and life in general. Having created a place where they were more

comfortable, they could now temporarily feel restored within the group. In a space in which they were not comfortable, like the previous one, they had not been able to do that, since they were repressing their true selves. It is clear that social interactions, for this group, are deeply connected to place-making and restoration. Further, the group's cohesion was supported by the contextual factor of physical proximity. All their classrooms were located on the same floor, making it easier for the group to get together.

The Lunch Bunch

The third floor was where the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades were located. The seventh- and eighth-grade teachers ate lunch in Linda's eighth-grade English classroom. This group was known throughout the school as the Lunch Bunch. The Lunch Bunch started eight years prior to my research when Linda transferred to Farmer with her friend and coworker Felicia. In an interview, Linda recaptured her experience from her previous school, Garcia School, and how that translated into Farmer School. The following was Linda's story about Garcia:

One of the nice things about [Garcia] was a staff that started together at the same time because we opened that building, it's the old [Bell] High School, and we opened it as a middle school together so all the staff was brand new, and at the same time, we all had that camaraderie. We generally ate together. There was a nucleus of us, maybe half a dozen of us that would always eat lunch together. It was a nice break in the day because you needed it. We really needed it. 'Cause it was a stressful situation there, and it was tense from time to time. Not so much from the administration, but the kids were really difficult. So we always had lunch and we always had a chance to kick back a few minutes and relax.

Although Linda was talking about another school, she emphasized the importance of the restorative places and the social support that these professional relationships could bring. Linda talked about Garcia's culture of eating and relaxing together, and stated that it was not part of Farmer's culture when she came to the school:

When we came here, [Felicia] was teaching 7th grade at the time, I was teaching 8th, but still had the same lunch. We noticed as we walked the hall at lunchtime, everybody was kind of just staying in their own

room. Some people were doing work during lunch, some people were just sitting eating lunch at their desk by themselves, and this was bizarre to us. You know, especially, I have to break away. I just, I NEED that time. Maybe others can function better just moving straight through. Not to say, but I found it a little peculiar.

Linda so greatly valued the importance of eating with other adults that she and Felicia decided to eat together in Linda's room. Linda emphasized that the restorative place and its relationships fulfilled an urgent need to step away from the pressures of the job. Part of the restorative process for Linda was not being isolated. She needed to be among other teachers with similar interests. With Felicia fulfilling that need, this pairing formed the origin of the Lunch Bunch. Linda recaptured the early events:

So when we came, [Felicia] and I started eating lunch in my room, and little by little people would see us in there, and it kind of migrated to my room one by one. And I just thought it was interesting because people, like [Laura] used to teach right here, up here and she would never move out of her room at lunch time. She was always just busy working, or working with kids, whatever the case may be. And little by little, not only did she come and have lunch with us, she now comes from the first floor to have lunch with us. It really began to multiply as you can see, we accept all.

Linda's and Felicia's lunchtime partnership established a new norm on the third floor. The Lunch Bunch had multiplied with an average of eleven people in the group. The regulars were four seventh-grade teachers, four eighth-grade teachers, a special education teacher, the computer teacher, and one sixth-grade teacher. This is the only grouping of teachers where there was a mix of race and gender. Two female African American teachers and two White males were part of the Lunch Bunch. Other people might stop into Room 310 during their prep time as a break, so there were new faces moving in and out of the restorative place daily. As with the fourth-grade group, the place provided a refrigerator and microwave that most people used on the third floor.

The Lunch Bunch differed from other groups because it mainly operated primarily on contextual factors rather than personal factors. The fact that the group was located on the third floor, which was two floors away from the teachers' lounge, created an issue of geographical location. The Lunch Bunch provided a place in proximity to everyone, which allowed the group to form

over contextual factors. This provides insight into why the group had more teachers from a variety of interests than the other three groups.

The sixth-grade teachers also had lunch at the same time as the Lunch Bunch. In the first year of data collection, one of the new sixth-grade teachers, Sandy, was a regular in the Lunch Bunch. The other sixth-grade teachers chose to eat lunch by themselves in their classrooms. During the 2004-2005 school year and the years prior, the sixth-grade teachers used to eat together in veteran teacher Rhonda's classroom. Contrary to the racial demographic of the school, the sixth-grade group consisted of African American teachers. As an African American tutor myself, I was interested in gaining access to this unique restorative place within the school. Unfortunately, Rhonda died of cancer the summer before the 2005-2006 school year. After her death, the rest chose to stay in their respective classrooms during lunch.

Jewish teacher Sandy was Rhonda's replacement, and Sandy was unaware that the sixth-grade teachers used to get together for lunch. While eating lunch one day with the Lunch Bunch, Sandy admitted her feelings about not having the other sixth-grade teachers to share lunchtime. Sandy turned to some of the seventh-grade teachers and stated, "You guys really have a community here. I wish I had that. As you can see, I am the only sixth-grade teacher here. You guys can really work together." Maria, the seventh-grade science teacher, heard Sandy's statement and sympathized, "It has to be hard." Sandy explained, "I figured it was because I was the newbie of the group. I had [John] (a sixth-grade teacher) help me when I first came here." "But it's not the same as having community," replied Maria.

The teachers brought up various points in this discussion. First, Maria expressed the point that restorative places can allow teachers to assist each other professionally. In the restorative places, teachers can ask for advice or assistance in an unthreatening way, separate from the interactions with students, parents, and administrators. Second, Sandy may have also felt ostracized, since she did not teach in the same grade as the others. Her different interests could have provided a feeling of isolation within the group. In an already isolating profession, the restorative place was not a complete escape for Sandy. For her, as with the others, a restorative place was an environment to share with people of like grade levels, as she indicated in the quote above. Sandy did not have that opportunity.

Although the teachers talked about how the Lunch Bunch built community, there were still cliques within the group. Generally, the seventh-grade teachers ate on one side of the classroom and the eighth-grade teachers ate on the other side. Laura, one of the regulars, explained the open community, but the cliquish environment:

The climate, I would say, is open and inviting. I think anybody can just walk in. I've taken other people in, I brought the nurse, I told her to come up because she was looking for another place to go. In some ways it's clique-y, although that probably contradicts what I said about opening. But whatever group you sit with they're still opening and inviting to you, but I think the 8th grade teachers tend to sit to one side and the 7th grade people sit to one side.

Laura indicated that the cliques were divided into grade groups. This was consistent with the special education group wanting to talk professionally during lunchtime. It also explained Sandy's yearning for the sixth-grade group to meet. Although she had a space to escape the job for a period, Sandy did not have a community to discuss specific details of the sixth-grade job. In other words, the Lunch Bunch came together through proximity, but the group itself was broken up by personal factors revolving around grade groups. It was as if there were subrestorative places within one place.

Interestingly, while the Lunch Bunch had inner cliques, the group certainly became a permanent fixture within the school culture. This became evident in an interview with the new seventh-grade English teacher, Elaine. Elaine was a veteran teacher in the district and transferred to Farmer in 2005-2006. After twenty-seven years at her former school, the district decided to eliminate the middle school grades in an effort to continue with their school reform mission. Elaine said that when she first came to the school, Farmer's principal, Mary, specifically escorted Elaine to the Lunch Bunch. Elaine reflected:

[Mary] brought me to the room, she said, "At lunch time, you eat with the 7th and 8th grade teachers" and I thought if she said that, then I should obey and do it. And I am very happy that she told me that because they are wonderful people to eat lunch with. First of all, we share ideas, what the 8th graders are doing, I talk to the 7th grade teachers at lunch time, and that's very rewarding 'cause I see that I'm not behind, or I'm right on target, or I may get a little upset, and they're upset because we had to rush the lesson because we are doing tests all week. It's really good. So when she [Mary] said that, that was fine with me.

Elaine explained that her time in the restorative places was also used to gauge how she was doing professionally among her fellow seventh-grade teachers. Again, this established the idea of restorative places providing a safe outlet where teachers can be students and learn from each other.

I continued to question, “So let me ask you, if [Mary] didn’t say that, what would you have done? Would you have found them [seventh- and eighth-grade teachers] or would you have stayed in your classroom?” Elaine, the only African American teacher among the seventh- and eighth-grade teachers, explained that race would then have played a role. She stated,

Probably. You know, the 7th grade teachers are so together, [Zoe] would of probably said, “Oh come on with us and eat lunch together.” So somebody else would of just taken me to that room anyway, I believe. But if [Zoe] would not have done that, I would have looked on the floor and seen, which is wrong, what African American teacher was on the floor, and ate with that person. That’s what I would have done. That’s exactly what’s on my mind.

Elaine explained that her comfort level would have been with other African American teachers. This may be due to personal factors as they could relate their professional and personal experiences through race. The commonality of race would provide a psychological benefit and support for Elaine, yet the year she came, the exclusive group of African Americans disbanded to their own classrooms.

Although not discussed in an interview, Elaine was not completely psychologically comfortable in the restorative place. For example, as a fellow African American educator, Elaine felt more comfortable talking professionally to me than to her White colleagues. One day after the Lunch Bunch, teachers went back to their classrooms. Elaine pulled me into her classroom privately. She stated, “I didn’t want to say this story in front of them, but I have to tell you what happened in class. I didn’t want to say it in front of them, but you’ll understand.” Then she described an incident that happened in her class that day. In this case, the underlying reference of “them” referred to the whiteness of the group. Elaine did not want to share the story as it might have made her look weak in front of the White teachers. Elaine was repressing and manufacturing emotions during the lunch hour, so this clearly was not a completely restorative place for her. She wanted to keep her mask of “knowledgeable teacher” on in front of them. She adapted by pulling me privately into her classroom, which essentially became a temporary restorative place where she could speak frankly. Obviously, for Elaine, the Lunch Bunch did not provide a comfort where she could temporarily escape from the profession.

Discussion

The teachers at Farmer articulated through their words and actions that having a restorative place for their forty-five-minute lunch with each other were imperative. Various features made up that restorative place and the people included within it. Ultimately, there were two criteria that the teachers placed on making a restorative place. First, the place was private from outsiders (nonteachers), and, second, the teachers connected with other teachers who were similar to them and had similar values.

The restorative place makes certain that the teachers can relax or discuss the classroom without having to be a “teacher” in front of students, parents, and administrators. This became evident when the K-2 group moved out of the merged lounge. The parents were encroaching on their place, and they did not feel comfortable or safe. They adapted to make a new place in an available classroom where they could feel more sound. When the restorative places met with outsiders, however, it became problematic. For example, when Jane, the student-teacher and parent, joined the Library Group, this was an issue of contention for some of the teachers, as they believed it compromised the emotional safety of their place. It violated the feature of safety that resulted from being separate from the parents.

The second criterion for the teachers at Farmer School was that commonalities equal comfort. Teachers felt more comfortable and restored if they were connected professionally, morally, or physically with each other, all of which are categorized under personal factors (Sias 2009). They felt connected professionally when they could have discussions with others who understood their work. The special education group, for instance, made their own lunch group in order to talk among themselves about the job, away from other teachers who would not understand the conversation. For others, being morally similar was important for their restorative place, as with the fourth-grade group that wanted to be away from the negative conversation of the Library Group. Because they valued a positive conversation about school and life, they made an alternate restorative place for themselves. Lastly, teachers found comfort among others who were physically similar to them. Elaine made it subtly clear that she felt more comfortable around other African American teachers. Since Farmer School no longer had a group that fit that description because of the dissolution of the sixth-grade group, she found a commonality professionally with colleagues teaching the same grade.

Credentials and commonalities combine to make a place where teachers can feel comfortable, but this ethnography points out interesting differences within the perceptions of such places. First, although teachers are removed

from the students, parents, and administrators, they do not always feel that they have had a break from the job. Second, when there was a breakdown in the commonalities, some teachers still masked their emotions, indicating they were not completely benefiting from the restorative place. Third, this study finds that personal factors are more valued than contextual factors, as was shown most prominently by the Lunch Bunch. Contextual factors brought the group together because of physical proximity, but personal factors outweighed contextual factors with cliques inside the group. Members like Sandy felt isolated because of lack of similarities in grade groups, while Elaine felt isolated because of her race.

The teachers' establishment and perceptions of place provide a framework for other teachers and administrators to take note. It is clear that the teachers' union in the School District of Philadelphia understood the importance of restorative places, as it was outlined in their contract. In Farmer's case, the space was provided, but the administrator was unwilling to make it exclusive to teachers because of the overcrowded circumstances. It is quite probable that in other schools, administrators are unaware of the true importance of restorative places. It is important that they are aware, as it will assist in job satisfaction for teachers. This becomes even more important considering the current issues within the teaching profession.

Currently, 40 percent of teachers leave within their first three years of teaching (Darling-Hammond 2003). The number of retention issues escalates to 50 percent with urban schools like Farmer (Darling-Hammond 2003; Frankenberg, Taylor, and Merseth 2010; Ingersoll 2001). Lack of teacher retention costs schools and administrators money by trying to hire replacements. The teachers at Farmer explained the importance of restorative places, and administrators can start to ensure teacher retention occurs by understanding the importance of restorative places in connection with job satisfaction. Restorative places possibly could be the difference between teachers burning out on the job or being retained the following school year.

Administrators can start to be more aware by analyzing their own schools in order to maximize teachers' restorative opportunities. This self-analysis can ensure that teachers have some place, and not just space, to take a break from the workday. Further, administrators can do a self-analysis to discover which teachers work best with each other, and this could assist with ensuring the productivity of work. A large component of this self-analysis, as demonstrated by this article, is to talk directly with teachers to hear their voice, and not exclude them from the discussion. Administrators should analyze the restorative places with teachers in order to create a cohesive understanding of its importance.

Conclusion

Teachers have a very powerful and dynamic voice that is often missing in the literature. The voices outlined in this article challenge the current literature by providing perspectives from teachers, not just a description about teachers. This article's purpose was to outline teachers' perceptions, from their own voice, of how restorative places are created, while also exploring their thoughts on the interactions and relationships created within these places. This exploration pushes the literature forward. First, this article highlights an underdeveloped area in the literature by looking at alternative restorative places, not just the exclusive teachers' lounge. Second, by using teachers' voices and understanding their professional worldview, we now grasp why and how teachers make sense of place-making for restoration.

The teachers at Farmer have taught us that because of the growing isolation in the profession (Court 1999; Rogers and Babinski 2002; Williams, Prestage, and Bedward 2001), teachers use restorative places to remove their professional façade, where they do not have to express, repress, or manufacture their current state of emotions (Zembylas 2005). Because such an exclusive restorative place was so valuable to the teachers at Farmer, the main theme that emerged in the ethnography was their willingness to adapt in order to attain it.

This concept of adaptability among teachers is important in understanding the value placed on teachers' lounges and restorative places by teachers. Researchers have discussed the importance of the relationships that occur in the teachers' lounge (Abrahams 1997; Ben-Peretz and Schonmann 2000; Ben-Peretz, Schonmann, and Kupermintz 1999; Kainan 1997, 2002; McGregor 2003; Paine, Fang, and Wilson 2003; Woods 1984), but little research exists on how these places came to be and why they are seen as valuable to teachers. This ethnography addresses this gap by taking a step back to examine the history and the teachers' continual adaptability, as they established and maintained these restorative places.

When the exclusive teachers' lounge at Farmer was altered with the additions of parents, teachers had two options for adaptation. One was to eat by themselves in their respective classrooms; few chose that option. Instead, they chose to adapt and come together to create an alternative restorative place. When there were clashes involving personal factors (Sias 2009), the teachers individually adapted to make a place for themselves. The special education group adapted a new place in order to take a break from the job. The fourth grade group adapted a restorative group that would share the same values. Elaine temporarily used her classroom in order to gain the comfort of

shared culture. The need to have a restorative place was so great that the teachers continued to create new ones until it met their standards. The place provided a way to connect with others like themselves, share information, and communicate about the profession with those that understood.

The ongoing adaptability I observed underscores the value of restorative places for teachers. It is important for administrators to acknowledge and encourage restorative places for teachers. Part of this important recognition starts with ensuring that administrators understand how and why these places are needed in schools through self-analysis. It is my hope that this work will provide an impetus for researchers and school administrators to recognize and value the importance of restorative places.

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1. The names of the school and teachers are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.
2. Teachers use a Resource Room to pull out students from their regular classroom for extra assistance in a particular subject area. For example, if a student needed more focused assistance with reading, they might go to the Resource Room for one period in the day for extra help.
3. An Accommodation Room is a place where students can go for detention, "time out," in-school suspension, or for another reason that temporarily removes the student from his or her regularly assigned classroom setting.

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Bio

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