

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to reveal the degree of critical consciousness of school administrators in regard to school-corporate technology partnerships. The significance of the study was based on what Molnar (1998) described as “the seeming failure of the education community to describe and attempt to understand and assess the impact of commercial activities on the character and quality of schools and their programs” (p. ii). The researcher of this study ultimately wanted to reveal the extent to which school administrators are aware of the influence they have regarding business involvement in education.

According to Freire (1973), the ultimate goal on the continuum of critical consciousness is to become a critically transitive thinker, the most desirable level of awareness. In this study, critical transitivity means continually thinking critically about decisions related to school-corporate partnerships. School administrators have a choice as to whether or not to enter into a particular partnership with a corporation. If they decide to partner with a company or corporation, they have a voice as to the conditions of the partnership. Administrators' choices are influenced by the political, economic, social, educational, and ethical pressures exerted both internally and externally to the school. The issue of voice relates to how administrators think about and weigh the internal pressures of school finances and education against the external social, educational, economic, political and ethical pressures. The choices and the voices of the school administrators are what ultimately revealed their degree of critical consciousness.

The previous chapter presented results of the study through an analysis of the in-depth interviews with nine school administrators from across the country. Tables were created to organize and present the data using the constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This chapter provides a brief summary of the findings pertaining to each of the four research questions and the central themes that emerged as a result of analyzing the data. The chapter also presents stage four of the constant comparative method, writing the theory. The theory was generated through discussion of the results of the study and through the emergence of the themes of the study, especially as they relate to the concerns of commercialism and funding. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the study as well as implications for further research.

#### Research Questions

The four research questions that guided this study asked participants to discuss the criteria they considered when entering into the partnership, what policies and/or guidelines they consulted when entering into the partnership, and the benefits they received and the costs they incurred as a result of the partnership. The following sections briefly summarize the responses to each question.

#### *Question One: Criteria Considered*

Each of the nine administrators interviewed for this study reported at least one criterion or reason for entering into the partnership. The researcher was

looking for criteria that satisfied the categories of educational, financial, social, political, and ethical aspects of school-corporate partnerships. All of the reasons cited by the administrators were either educational in nature, i.e., pertaining to student achievement, or financial in nature, i.e., pertaining to the acquisition of hardware, software, and/or training they would receive by entering into the partnership. Three of the nine administrators cited both an educational and financial reason for entering the partnership. No other aspects of partnerships were cited as reasons for entering into the partnership.

*Question Two: Policies and/or Guidelines Consulted*

In only one case did a school administrator consult any policies or guidelines prior to entering into the partnership. This high school principal consulted her school district's business-school partnership manual. Two principals consulted central office personnel, as one said, to ensure that the hardware was supportable within the district's technology plan.

*Question Three: Benefits Received*

Of the five categories of benefits, four administrators reported educational benefits pertaining to student achievement, such as technology for students with special needs and software to boost test scores. Seven administrators reported financial benefits related to the acquisition of goods and/or services. Financial benefits were the most commonly cited benefit by administrators. Four administrators cited examples of social benefits, explaining how the benefits extended beyond the school, none of the administrators reported any political benefits, and three administrators discussed ethical benefits.

#### *Question Four: Costs Incurred*

While all of the administrators could cite at least one benefit received as a result of their partnership, only three administrators mentioned any type of drawback related to their partnership. Two of the drawbacks were educational in nature, relating to the curriculum and learning to use the equipment, and one was related to the ethical aspect of commercialism.

The above findings set the stage for the initial discussion of critical consciousness. Several other questions, including the questions on funding and a separate question on cautions and concerns related to entering into partnerships also had a significant effect on generating the grounded theory. Stage four of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method, writing the theory is presented in the following section.

#### *Stage 4: Writing the Theory*

Three central themes emerged from the data collected that allowed the researcher to begin generating theory on critical consciousness. One theme that emerged from the participants' responses is that school-corporate partnerships are perceived as a beneficial necessity due to financial constraints and inadequate educational funding. Administrators cited their needs for additional hardware, software, and training as criteria for entering into the partnerships. In some cases it was a need for assistive technology for students who needed support and accommodations due to disabilities. For another school, it was the need to boost test scores. In all cases, there was a company willing to provide

some aspect of technology to each school, to the satisfaction of all but one administrator.

While the administrators lamented that public funding for education was inadequate, and that more of the goods and services that are currently privately funded should be publicly funded, all but one of the administrators responded that they were satisfied with their partnerships. Thus, the researcher concluded from the data that the administrators felt that their partnerships were justified due to inadequate public funding. In other words, they were able to acquire resources that they would not have been able to afford without the partnership, and if the government picked up the tab for technology, corporate partnerships would not be as critical to their organization. As one administrator put it, “That’s not the company’s responsibility [to fund the goods and services received from my partnership]. You’d think it would be a federal government responsibility, but it’s not there.”

A second theme that emerged was that many administrators **seem to be** completely unaware that by presenting the partner company’s products at conferences, workshops, and to the public in general, they are actually engaging in promotional activities on the company’s behalf. One of the concepts the researcher wanted to examine regarding school-corporate partnerships is what, besides money, matters to school administrators. One **plausible** reason for the high rate of commercialism in the schools is that money matters, and it matters a lot. The Council on Corporate and School Partnerships, an industry group favoring corporate involvement in schools, reported that in 2002, schools

received \$2.4 billion a year from what the organization calls “business relationships” with corporations (Molnar, 2005). Molnar (2005) commented that, “A council news release containing those figures asserted that, from the vantage point of business leaders, school partnerships benefit business and educators in four key areas: human capital development, community development, student achievement, and financial impact in terms of earning revenue for business and providing needed funding for schools” (p. 19).

In this study, school administrators cited the financial benefits of their partnerships more frequently than any other type of benefit. When principals were asked what benefits they are receiving as a result of the partnership, seven out of the nine principals cited financial benefits of some kind, while only four administrators cited any type of educational benefit. No other categories of benefits were cited by the administrators. When the administrators were asked to describe their partnership and discuss what led to entering into the partnership, financial reasons were again most often cited. Seven of the nine principals cited financial reasons, compared with five who cited educational reasons. A possible reason for the relatively large number of administrators who cited financial reasons can be summed up by Dan Fuller of the National School Boards Association. He reported to CNN that, “First and foremost, our schools are struggling. Many schools are engaged in this [commercialism] because of the dire straits they’re in. This presents a real opportunity and a trend that will continue, and possibly grow” (<http://www.cnn.com/2004/EDUCATION/01/15/schools.commercialism.ap/index.html>).

When the researcher asked the participants if they had experienced any drawbacks that didn't seem to exist at the beginning of the partnership but showed up later, six out of the nine administrators could not articulate any drawbacks at all. Later in the interview, the researcher approached the concept of costs from another angle. This time, she directly asked the administrators if they have any obligations to the company, including advertising and/or display of logos. While none of the administrators perceived that they had obligations to the company, one administrator explained:

We do not have to display a logo or anything like that, but we have volunteered to be a demo school for them. And at the beginning, when the equipment was very new, we went and did some presentations and also, we're going to the [reading conference], and not specifically to promote the equipment, but we will use the equipment to show how technology helps to show some measurable differences. But there was never anything in writing that we had to sign.

According to Molnar (2005), "The advertising industry is very effective at promoting the consumption of goods and services" (p. 73). In this study, the researcher found five other examples in which administrators discussed how they were actually promoting the partner company's product. In each discussion, the administrator did not say he was "promoting" the product. Instead participants gave examples of presenting the company's product, which they perceived to be positive aspects of the partnership. In each case, the administrator looked favorably on the exchange of goods and services. In the following response the

administrator is proud of how the company featured the students' work. In this example, the researcher believes the principal is unaware that the company is actually using the students' work to promote the company's product. She explained:

The company has several international competitions a year and our kids have been highlighted for several years now. They have a big international map competition every July and it brings thousands of people together and our kids have a really good reputation internationally for the research that they do and the company featured them as their keynote speakers at their big conference two years ago. The kids' research had been featured in European conferences and you know, at the company it's important for them to acknowledge the kids' successes and have their names published.

Many of the administrators felt that they were giving back to the company by presenting the company's product at workshops and conferences. The following three examples illustrate how schools were actually promoting their partner company's products at conferences or workshops as a means of making the partnership mutually beneficial. None of the administrators purported to be engaged in commercial activity; they perceived this presentation on their part as a favorable contribution to the company. According to a private school principal:

At the state technology conference [equipment] is one of the items we showcase as being a tool that is IT as well as AT and they usually will provide us with a complimentary [piece of equipment] at the convention so

that we can do the show and tell so to speak. They support us, they set it up and they take it down so my people are very high on their list. They are very excited about the things we do between the two.

This elementary principal told the company they would share their results with others, but she did not perceive that she had any obligation to the company, either.

We share our results and successes with others. We told the company we would participate, whether it be in workshops, and let other people come and visit us and people have done that. We have done that with other schools. We are a sharing learning community and we tell our story if it's successful, which we have.

The fourth case of a school promoting the company's product was also in the form of marketing the product and the company to others:

I also think it benefits the district in that other folks have visited us, heard from us, we've shared our information, and they're using it now – other communities much more at high schools, but at other schools in the [city] area.

When asked if there were any obligations he had to the company, one principal reported, "none at all." In the next sentence, however, although it did not pertain to his partner company, he went on to discuss an example of how he allocates school space for corporate logos and advertising. He did not discuss it as an explicit example of how he allocates school space for corporate logos and advertising, it was considered such an example by the researcher. He added:

Not at all. In fact one time – we have a folder we send home to the parents each week – a communication folder with behavior and what not and there’s a company who basically said we’re willing to set up a folder for your school. What we do is we go out and collect advertising from some companies that way it doesn’t cost you a dime and it’s a nice looking folder and the companies can advertise on the folder. And so I asked the gentleman we work with from the [partner] company and he said, to be honest, that’s not something that we are in to. We support you, we believe in what you are doing, but we don’t do that and we won’t. It’s kind of funny. I thought it was something he would see beneficial but the company is a good partner. They really look for nothing but supporting education.

While the schools were giving back, which is the nature of a partnership, the manner in which they “gave back” to the company was in the form of product promotion. These examples of product promotion fall into the category of indirect advertising, which Wohl (2001) described as product sales and incentive programs. By presenting at conferences and workshops, administrators were in fact, selling the product, and in some cases, acquiring additional technology for doing so was an added incentive.

A third theme that emerged from the data is that there is a need for policies and guidelines that specifically address technology partnerships. Only one administrator interviewed in this study consulted her district’s manual of school-business policies, and none of the administrators consulted any other published policies or guidelines prior to entering into their partnership. There

have been several sets of guidelines published by organizations like ASCD and the Council for Corporate and School Partnerships, but the researcher did not find any that specifically addressed the concerns of technology partnerships. The fact that policies and guidelines for technology partnerships do not exist demonstrates a global need for the formulation of such guidelines.

### *Cautions and Concerns*

One interview question that has not yet been discussed in detail related to cautions and concerns school administrators would convey to other administrators who are considering entering into a technology partnership. The responses to this question provided the data the researcher used to generate a set of guidelines specifically for technology partnerships. These guidelines can be found in Table 1 on page 175. Every administrator provided a response to this question. In fact, in almost every case, their response to this question generated more discussion than any other question asked during the interview.

There were a variety of cautions and concerns expressed by the principals; however, one administrator summed up the cautions and concerns in one sentence: "Do your homework." In fact, all of the responses regarding cautions and concerns associated with technology partnerships could fall under the umbrella of "do your homework." With that advice, the researcher outlined the ten areas of concern in the following section, along with the cautionary advice that school administrators would convey to other administrators considering a school-corporate technology.

### *Vision*

One caution that emerged from these responses was the need for a clear vision of what is expected to be accomplished through the partnership. One elementary principal explained:

I would just say initially that there needs to be a vision. I don't think you should just jump into something because there are free resources. You have to have a vision for what you want to accomplish for your children. I think if you know what you want to do with the resources and have a plan, I think that's the most important thing. Because if you have all these resources and you don't have a plan or a vision, the organization's going to look at you and say wait a minute, we're giving to you, but you're not utilizing the resources in the best manner possible. You have to have a clear vision of what you hope to accomplish with the partnership and you shouldn't go to business or corporation requesting a partnership without a vision or purpose. To do so would be errant, I think. You need to be able to articulate what your purpose is and what you feel the school can give back to that partnership. For us, I think the give-back is we continue to exemplify technology applications. They support a vision such as the company, which is a technology-based company.

The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, a public-private organization of leaders in business and education cited embracing a powerful vision of vision as an essential step in building partnership momentum (Department of Education. (2002).

*Technology Support*

An area of concern that was expressed by a middle school principal was the ability of the school to support the hardware and software acquired through a partnership. She explained how her school ended up with technology equipment acquired through a partnership that could not be utilized because they could neither support the equipment technologically nor financially. She cautioned:

We run PCs but we can't support that, so virtually, \$10,000 is worthless to us because we have a district-wide network and we can't just put [the software] on our building because it won't be supported by our technology department. It can't be, we don't have enough people or money, so it's difficult when you do those kind of things and they all have to be supported. Yeah, I think the biggest caution is we have to be very, very sure that we our technology department is on the same page. If we would've known what was going to be on the package, we didn't know that at the time, if we had known what was going to be in the bundles that they were offering, we would have never bothered. It took a long time to put the partnership together and then to find out what we got was not going to work.

They [school administrators] should know that software is very expensive. and they [the company] are also in the business of making money so they can't give away the world for free.

This principal expressed dissatisfaction with the partnership due to the fact that the school would have to purchase additional equipment and supplies to run the software and the hardware, and they were not in a financial position to do so.

## *Curriculum*

A third area of concern related to school curriculum. One elementary principal discussed how her staff had to modify the company's incentive program in order for the program to fit the values of her school. Another elementary principal explained how modifying the company's program was not in the best interest of the school, because as she said:

You have to realize that if you use it the way it's intended to be used it will make a difference without a doubt, but if you try to change it and modify it to use it the way you want to use it you are wasting all your money. After we had it in my school for 5 or 6 years, the corporation said this seems to be working let's put it in all the schools. Without a real understanding, some people think it's just kids sitting at a computer doing math problems, it's not just a computer program, it's a math program and most people don't realize that. Teachers have to learn a different strategy towards teaching. It's not that everybody's doing the same thing at the same time. You teach a skill to everybody as your daily lesson, and we go by what our grade level standards are, that we know that everybody has had instruction on those standards and then after the teacher has taught that lesson, even though she is teaching that lesson, she knows there are students who are beyond that, but it's good review for them. There are some kids – that's where they are instructionally and then there are some kids who are not there yet. But it's good preview to where they're going to be.

Molnar and other authors of the Milwaukee Principles for Corporate Involvement in Schools stated that corporate involvement must support the curricular goals and objectives of the schools. (*Milwaukee principles for corporate involvement in the schools*, 1990). It was also stated by ASCD that the partnership respond to a clearly understood educational need, and that the partnership supports an existing curriculum and instructional message (ASCD Task Force on Business Involvement in the Schools, 1989-1990).

#### *Collaboration and Communication*

One principal cautioned that the partnership needs to be a collaborative effort on the part of both the school and the company. They also believed that communication between key people within the school and business was critical to the success of the partnership. A high school principal explained:

You always have to look at what is the collaboration and what's the communication. Collaboration and what are they wanting and what are you able to do if they were into a money issue it would really be more cumbersome. And as I said, with us, there never is any money exchanged, which makes it a much cleaner. I would be much more hesitant if you were partnering with someone who wanted to buy services so I would be very cautious as to the type of deal. And the other thing is the communication with a key person within the company. And that person has to be consistent. And I think that's another strength that we've seen. They have changed people but the continuity of what they say, the integrity of the agreement has been maintained throughout. That would be

my concern – that this person wants to be around for three months, you know, those types of things that make me very nervous, because then you are always renegotiating and that would be my caution. And then on the school end of things, you need someone to be consistent as well as the contact person on our end so that's a two-way street too.

The British Columbia Teacher's Federation, concerned with maintaining the integrity of the public school system advised in their school-corporate guidelines that partnership agreements be reached only after full discussion among participating school staff, parent representatives, and the prospective partner company, and agreements are open as public information (<http://www.bctf.ca/parents/IssuesInEducation/Support/guidelines.html>).

### *Internal Capacity*

Once schools acquire hardware and software through partnerships, it becomes essential to be able to support the technology in-house as well as through the company. Because of the time and expense of technology training, upgrades, and maintenance, one principal strongly advised building internal capacity as a means of sustaining and improving the use of technology. He believed:

It's key to train people in your staff who then become the leaders in your building so I wrote a mini-grant to have a few people study the company more in depth who could then become the leaders in the building. So that's what I'd say is key. If you want to carry this out independently then you have to build capacity and in order to build capacity within your

building you're going to have to have some internal leaders so we've developed internal leaders. To have this partnership and not have internal leaders would lead to frustration because it's going to be limited results. If you develop the internal leadership and capacity who can then answer most of these questions you know, then you don't have a dependency on these folks. You know I don't need these folks to be out here every week. That would be very frustrating for them and very frustrating for us. Because we did that internal capacity, that was a key factor. That was something we identified, you know, they encouraged us, but I recognized that we needed to do this. So I would caution others. It's not a partnership where you can do a hit and a run. You have to build capacity. You have to learn it and use it in order to carry it out yourself.

While many companies do provide technology support as a condition of the partnership, waiting for or scheduling the company to provide the support may mean that the technology is not utilized to its full potential. By providing in-house support there is less waste of time and resources.

### *Commitment*

Being connected and having a strong commitment on both the school and the company was advised by one high school principal. She affirmed:

The level of commitment is important. This company is an education company so I think they were interested just to see kids because a lot of their products are for kids but they put themselves into it. They show up here twice a month and sit down and teach lessons to the kids on things

like motivation and writing resumes and interviews, so I mean it's got substance to it that I think everybody likes. And if you don't have that (level of commitment) and they just want you for your money or we'll send you free tickets now and then I mean the partners don't feel connected.

These partners are very connected and that's why it works.

This high school principal experienced partnerships which lacked commitment on the parts of both the company and the school. She iterated,

We have a couple of other business partners, for instance, who just don't really do anything for us. I mean, on the flip side, we don't do anything for them, either but they came on board and said they want to be partners and we went through the whole induction process and we've never seen or heard from them again, so it's kind of, why are we doing this?

Having experienced both successful and unsuccessful partnerships, this principal could attest to the importance of the role commitment plays in the success of a partnership.

### *Obligations*

When the researcher initially asked the administrators if they incurred any obligations to the company, eight of the nine administrators reported they did not incur any obligations to the company. The one principal who felt she did incur an obligation said, "The obligations are to support the stuff [the technology she received as a result of the partnership] with our own money." While the other administrators did not cite specific obligations, when the researcher asked one participant who initiated the partnership, he replied:

Initially they gave us the licenses and also the training. We in turn were responsible for using it and also keeping data on some of our students as a pre and post in terms of what kind of impact it had on those students, which we did and then we've also continued the relationship with them by purchasing additional materials from them and they are very responsive to our needs for technical assistance.

When the researcher asked him later in the interview if he had any obligations to the company, he replied that he did not. Although there was only one participant who actually reported an obligation, when asked whether there were any cautions or concerns he would convey to other administrators when entering into a partnership, she replied:

Probably the expectations that are put on the school. I know of a few administrators at schools that have tons of paperwork and what they [the company] want is for them [the schools] to promote their product, and even though I don't think that's wrong, because after all they're in it for business also, I would caution that there would be some type of personal relationship between at least one administrator and the company rep so that everything is not so helter skelter, but more organized.

While the subject of obligations is open to interpretation, it can potentially relate to the issue of commercialism, and critically-transitive principals need to be cognizant of any and all obligations the company expects on behalf of the school.

*Product Promotion*

Another aspect of schoolhouse commercialism is product promotion. In this study, none of the administrators reported that he, the school, or the staff was engaged in any type of product promotion. However, the researcher found principals and schools engaged in various activities of product promotion. For example, one principal reported:

At the state technology conference [equipment] is one of the items we showcase as being a tool that is IT [instructional technology] as well as AT [assistive technology] and they usually will provide us with a complimentary [piece of equipment] at the convention so that we can do the show and tell so to speak.

Another principal discussed how her students were keynote speakers at the company's conferences, and other principals discussed how they also promoted their partner company's products at workshops and to the general public. While principals discussed this type of product promotion in their responses to questions regarding criteria, benefits and costs, none of the administrators discussed product promotion in their responses to obligations, cautions or concerns.

### *Assessment*

The Council for Corporate & School Partnerships (2004) advised that the principles of effective partnerships should outline evaluation of partnerships, including determining strengths, weaknesses, and future directions. When asked if he would recommend his partnership to another administrator, one high school

principal felt that he should have known more about how well his partnership was working. He replied: "Probably before I did that [recommend the partnership] I'd do a little more research, you know, just to make sure what I think is true is true." When asked if there were any cautions or concerns he would convey to other administrators regarding partnerships, he continued:

I would research it [the partnership] before I made any recommendations to find out how it's worked out for us. Like if someone called me to find out how that partnership was working out for us, like a colleague, not a researcher from the University of Minnesota, I'd go to everyone and find out from them how this partnership is working for us before I go and tell my colleague down the street that it's been great. Perhaps you wished I had done that before I talked to you.

Even if the partnership fits the criteria specified by the school, and the benefits seem to outweigh the costs, it is important, as the British Federation of Teachers recommended, to systematically evaluate all partnership agreements.

### *Longevity*

One area of concern that a middle school principal raised related to the longevity of the partnership. She felt that it was very important to weigh the benefits and costs of the partnership to determine whether or not the partnership is working and worth the resources being put forth. This principal cautioned that if

the partnership is not working, it should not be continued. She explained her situation:

The benefits do not outweigh the amount of work and the costs to support what we got. It just doesn't work. We won't do it again. We haven't even gotten this year's stuff, but it will sit in the boxes for a long time. That's disappointing. We try to give as much away as we can. Let somebody else pay for the cartridges.

The Council for Corporate and School Partnerships maintained that partnerships should be sustained over time (The Council for Corporate & School Partnerships, 2004), but as this principal explained, knowing when to dissolve the partnership is just as important.

#### *Guidelines for Technology*

Based on the areas of concern expressed by the school administrators, the researcher formulated a set of guidelines for technology partnerships. These proposed guidelines are outlined in Table 1. Each partnership guideline is stated succinctly and then framed in the form of a question. The purpose of framing the guidelines in questions is to require administrators to think critically about how they would answer the questions. According to Freire (1973), as people amplify their power to perceive and respond to suggestions and questions arising in their context, they become transitive thinkers. Molnar (2005) argued that "because school commercialism has been the result of policy decisions, concrete steps can be taken and new policies enacted to rid schools of the hucksters who hold students as a captive audience, robbing them of precious time and worthwhile

lessons” (p. ix). None of the administrators interviewed consulted any published guidelines prior to entering into their partnership. However, the researcher found through conducting research into the subject and through interviewing the participants that no guidelines specifically related to technology partnerships currently exist. These guidelines were formulated to fill that void.

Table 1

*Guidelines for Technology Partnerships*

<p>1. Vision</p> <p><i>In what ways does the technology partnership align with the school’s vision?</i></p>
<p>2. Support for Technology</p> <p><i>Can the school support the hardware and software, financially, technologically, and professionally, not just in the short run, but in the long run as well? Are the platforms and infrastructure of the school compatible with the hardware and software? What is the budget for additional hardware and/or software that might be needed? What professional development will be offered to building staff to enhance the use of the technology?</i></p>
<p>3. Curriculum</p> <p><i>How does the technology fit with the curricular best practices of the school? Give examples as to how you can adapt the technology program or curriculum to meet the students’ educational needs.</i></p>
<p>4. Collaboration and Communication</p> <p><i>What makes the technology partnership a collaborative effort between the school and the corporation? Who are there key people within the school and the</i></p>

*corporation who will be the sources of communication for both organizations?*

5. Building Internal Capacity

*Technology requires constant training, upgrades and maintenance. How will you build the internal capacity that will enable the school to sustain and improve the use of the technology?*

6. Commitment

*In what ways are both the school and the corporation committed to making the partnership work?*

7. Obligations

*What does the corporation expect in return for the goods and/or services they provide to the school?*

8. Promoting the Product

*Are you asked or expected to promote the company's product in any way? What constitutes product promotion?*

9. Assessment

*What indicators or assessments will you use to determine whether or not the partnership is working? How will you continually assess the benefits and costs of the partnership?*

10. Longevity

*How long should you continue with the partnership? How will you determine the length of the partnership and whether or not the partnership worth the resources you are putting into it?*

This section highlighted the central themes that emerged from the data, and how the researcher utilized the themes to formulate the guidelines outlined in Table 1. These guidelines were proposed to help administrators think in a more critically transitive manner when making decisions related to school-corporate partnerships. The following section discusses how all of the data and the themes contributed to generating the new grounded theory.

### NEW GROUNDED THEORY

This study revealed that the financial constraints facing schools and school districts are having an impact on the amount of money school administrators that can allocate to technology. Schools are benefiting from technology partnerships by receiving the latest hardware, software, and training, as illustrated by the administrators' descriptions of the benefits they receive as a result of their school-corporate partnerships. While the benefits of school-corporate partnerships have been documented, some of the benefits that school administrators reported to the researcher prompted concerns regarding business involvement in education.

This study addressed two concerns of school-corporate partnerships: 1) commercialism in the schools; and 2) the role that business plays in funding educational programs and materials. The four research questions that guided the study and the data collected from the interviews revealed the degree of critical consciousness of school administrators, which the researcher found to have an impact on the rise in commercialism in schools and the role that business plays

in funding educational programs and materials. The following section presents the new grounded theory, which is based on the researcher's findings of the study.

One of the concerns raised in this study was the fact that the exchange for materials and resources resulting from a school-corporate partnership is often financial gain for the corporation. One middle school administrator interviewed in the study actually said she felt she was writing an advertisement for the company. She maintained that she could not support most of the hardware and software she received from the company and felt that the company was into tricking her to buy more stuff from them. According to this middle school principal, "This [partnership] is a tremendous amount of work to give them some wonderful commercial that you know, that will reap more rewards for them than for us." While only one administrator recognized and admitted that her school was contributing to the rise in commercialism in schools, other administrators engaged in some type of commercial activity, even if it was perceived as being a mutually beneficial piece of the partnership.

A second concern raised in this study related to the role that business plays in funding educational programs and materials, a concern which reflects the tension between private and public aspects of educational funding. Many of the administrators interviewed in this study are genuinely concerned about private funding but, in almost every case, the administrators resigned themselves to the fact that, while they don't like it, it is reality. The researcher concluded, based on the data, that the question of where to draw the line between market

ideology and democratic values lies with what schools can provide for kids that they would not be able to provide otherwise. As one administrator iterated, “It’s all about getting technology into the hands of kids.”

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher generated the theory that there is a relationship between the degree of critical consciousness of school administrators and commercialism in schools. This theory supports the researcher’s conclusion that a low level of critical consciousness of school administrators **could be contributing** to the rise of commercialism in schools. Data pointed to two possible reasons for the impact on commercialism in schools. The first possible reason is that administrators are not aware of their role as advertisers for their partner company’s products. A second possible reason for the high rate of commercialism is that there currently are no policies or guidelines widely accessible to school administrators, either within school districts or nationally, that specifically address technology partnerships. Policies and guidelines would help administrators navigate through all aspects of school-corporate partnerships – not just the financial aspect of a partnership. It was apparent through this study that administrators are not **always** critically transitive thinkers when it comes to making partnership decisions. While there were administrators who considered more than one criterion for entering into a partnership, most administrators considered only the financial aspect, and only a few considered educational criteria. Boyles (1998) maintained that those who critique school-business partnerships, rather than seek them out and/or

participate in them without question, are demonstrating in at least a minor form what critical transitivity entails.

### Critical Consciousness and Commercialism

The researcher found that the relationship between critical consciousness and commercialism lies in the degree of critical transitivity of school administrators in regard to school-corporate partnerships. In other words, where the administrator falls on the continuum of critical consciousness, between intransitivity and critical transitivity, **can** impact their decision-making with respect to commercialism in schools. The continuum represents the degree to which the administrators considered criteria, consulted guidelines and understood the benefits and costs associated with their partnership.

The researcher wanted to study the critical consciousness of school administrators to examine what they think about when entering into partnerships, and how they perceive benefits and costs of the partnership once it is implemented. After analyzing the data, the researcher determined that the level of critical consciousness of school administrators in this study fell somewhere in the range of semi-intransitivity. Some examples of responses to interview questions, besides those that discussed some aspect of advertising, that led the researcher to determine the level of critical consciousness include:

*Describe your technology partnership.*

I really think it just involves us being able to access hardware for a discount. Someone said, Hey we get these for cheap or for nothing, is that

okay? So I said, Any strings? No? Okay. So that's the extent of our partnership.

*How was the decision made to go forward with the partnership?*

Actually it was a decision that was kind of a no-brainer. We have someone who wants to bring the latest technology to any urban school that other schools don't have.

*Does the school/district have any published guidelines for partnerships?*

I don't know about guidelines or policies.

*Did you consult any other corporate partnership guidelines or policies?*

No, I have not. They're probably there, but no, I have not.

*What are the benefits you receive from your partnership?*

I think it's the ability to get some equipment that we would otherwise not be able to afford. If I have it right. I mean, I could be wrong. I'm not sure.

*Would you recommend the partnership to another administrator?*

Um, probably before I did that I'd do a little more research, you, know, just to make sure what I think is true, is true. I'd go to everyone and find out from them how this partnership is working for us before I go and tell my colleague down the street that it's been great.

*In a dollar figure, what are the financial gains as a result of your partnership?*

Whatever it would cost in tech support and training.

According to Freire's (1973) model of critical consciousness, in a state of semi-intransitivity a person's sphere of perception is limited. In this state, people

confuse their perceptions and fall prey to magical explanations because they cannot apprehend true causality. In this study, the researcher found that while the participants could articulate their perceptions of benefits and, in a few cases, costs, some administrators fell prey to the role of advertiser for the company. In the cases where this occurred, they did so without consciously realizing that they were contributing to the financial gain of the company. The school administrators who went to conferences and did a “show and tell” were ultimately promoting the product for the company. While they may have received a piece of equipment as a token of appreciation, the company was reaping financial benefits on behalf of the school. Companies that use students as their keynote speakers at their conferences are, in a sense, using “cheap labor” to push their products. Boyles (1998) maintained, “A cycle is established, then, where business expectations for school beget schools that push products, provide free advertising and “produce” future consumers, who in turn, favor and support business interests an corporate involvement in public schooling” (p. 6). **These school principals were, in some form or another, pushing the company’s products without *thinking* about it or acknowledging it as a promotional activity on behalf of the company.**

Boyles (1998) asserted that the point of connecting consumer materialism and critical transitivity in relation to school-corporate partnerships is to engage administrators in debates and arguments over such issues as the motives for business involvement in schools, the benefits from partnerships for schools versus the benefits for businesses in what is gained and what is lost in specific partnerships. The kinds of questioning that critical transitivity requires challenges

the consumer materialist assumptions regarding easy answers and simple conclusions, such as one administrator who replied, “We get free stuff.” This is an example of Boyles’ concern that school-corporate partnerships inherently inhibit questioning and instead develop critically intransitive consumers rather than critically transitive thinkers.

According to Molnar (2005),

While the commercializing of schools reflects larger cultural trends, it is also a function of the particular vulnerability of schools. Schools experience strong demands for academic improvement from parents, the business community, and government agencies. At the same time, their budgets are restricted even as they are under considerable pressure to, among other things, offer a wide variety of sophisticated and expensive technology to students. These intense external pressures make commercialized offers of assistance, if not necessarily attractive, at least politically convenient (p. 28).

Political and economic pressures, especially as they relate to expensive technology, force administrators to do things that they may not otherwise find acceptable practice. As was evidenced by the Stillwater, Minnesota school district’s partnership with Apple Computer, economics and politics are tightly intertwined. The following section discusses the connections between political economy and commercialism.

#### Political Economy and Commercialism

The Stillwater, Minnesota partnership discussed in Chapter One is one example of how political and economic pressures can force administrators into difficult situations. According to Mitchell and Ross (2003), "Political economists have been particularly forceful in directing our attention to the ways in which the political and economic values embraced by various education policies are both complex and highly contested" (p. 122). The Stillwater partnership became a political campaign issue in response to the hasty decisions made by the school board and the principal to spend \$1.7 million over the course of five years in order to purchase \$2.2 million worth of iBook computers. One school board member who voted against the Apple agreement commented that there were poor communications and no common sense in reaching the deal with Apple, calling it "a bad deal." The board of education explained that it would have liked more time to discuss the matter with the public, but Apple was unwilling to wait. If Apple did not receive its answer quickly, it threatened to seek out another school (Pioneer Press, 2004). As Molnar (2005) states, "Virtually every corporate marketing program tied to the public school system is linked by a common thread: the school's need for resources beyond those available through conventional funding mechanisms" (p. 122).

The implications of NCLB and student achievement, school choice, and vouchers, all coupled with the need for technology, require schools and school boards to dictate the flow of alternative means of funding. An article in the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* discussed other examples of the politics and economics of commercialism (Boyd, 2004). In Saint Paul schools, it was reported that school

families bring in about \$4 million a year in fundraisers, and other school districts have ventured into “the potentially profitable realm of naming rights, selling to a business the right to tack a corporate name on a school building” (p. 6A). The article stated that the Hopkins, Minnesota School District actually revised its naming policy to allow a corporate name on one of its school buildings.

With voters saying they can’t afford higher taxes, schools are looking for help from parents and neighborhood businesses. While there are some school districts that prefer to work with the Legislature and policy makers to fulfill their state-required mandate to adequately fund education, some financially-strapped districts are levying referenda, which is a very controversial political and economic topic as they increase the tax burden for families (Boyd, 2004).

According to Engel (2000), “Current discussions about the future of education are conducted almost entirely in the language of the free market: individual achievement, competition, choice, economic growth, and national security – with only occasional lip service given to egalitarian and democratic goals” (p. 3). Political economists would recognize that political and economic decisions play a major role in determining whether or not to adopt policies regarding business involvement in education. This topic always will be controversial. While some schools do not have written obligations to promote company products, and do so more as a service, some schools do gain more financially from marketing and promotional agreements with corporations. Policies restricting marketing and promotional activities by schools could have severe financial impacts upon some schools. The political economy perspective

helps to reveal the extent to which contradictions or paradoxes in the formulation and implementation of educational policy are grounded in understandings of what schools are expected to produce and how they are expected to produce it. The political economy perspective also directs attention toward the divergent interests and values inherent in competing policy proposals (Mitchell & Ross, 2003). In the case of commercialism and schools, regardless of whether policies and guidelines are formulated at the local level within the school district, or through state or federal legislation, the competition between democratic values and market ideology will continue until public schools receive adequate public funding.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions can be made for further research. The theory the researcher generated based on the data collected in this study is that the degree of critical consciousness **may be contributing to and impacting** commercialism in the schools. Alex Molnar, the foremost critic of school commercialism in the United States, has researched commercialism in schools for two decades. This study has lent some insight into the questions of why commercialism in schools is so prevalent and what influences the rise in commercialism in schools. These two questions warrant further research because in order to understand why commercialism in schools exists, one must understand the sources of decision-making regarding school-corporate partnerships. The themes that emerged from the study, along with the two aforementioned questions, could be used as hypotheses or discussion for

further studies in the area of commercialism in schools. The following topics for further research are suggested based on the information from this study:

1. ***A study examining the legal issues regarding conflict of interest: where the line is drawn between demonstrating student achievement and promoting the product.*** This study discussed the concern of commercialism in schools and began to search for answers as to why commercialism in schools continues to rise. One conclusion the researcher drew was that school administrators are promoting their partner company's products without actually realizing that they are engaged in a form of advertising for the company. In some cases this could lead to a legal issue involving a conflict of interest on behalf of the school. An inquiry into the legal aspects of commercialism in schools could help deter school administrators from engaging in product marketing and promotion that ultimately leads to greater profits for companies at the expense of ideals of public education.
2. ***A study researching critical consciousness of corporate executives regarding technology school-corporate partnerships.*** This study focused solely on the school administrators' perceptions of criteria, benefits, and costs. To balance these perspectives, it would be useful to study corporate executives' perceptions of the criteria, benefits, and costs associated with the school-corporate partnership.
3. ***A study addressing the need for technology guidelines, as well as other published guidelines, and to investigate how to encourage, if***

***not enforce, school administrators to use guidelines when considering school-corporate partnerships.*** The researcher found that only one in nine administrators consulted any published guidelines or policies related to school-corporate partnerships. She concluded that one possible reason for the rise in commercialism in schools is that school administrators do not widely consult published guidelines or policies prior to entering into partnerships. One question that was not asked of administrators in this study was whether or not they felt technology partnership guidelines would be useful. A second purpose of this study would be to investigate why administrators do not consult policies and guidelines, and determine what types of policies should be enacted to help increase the use of guidelines for entering into and maintaining school-corporate partnerships.

4. ***A study on developing policy and legislation regarding restrictions of product promotion and advertising by school personnel and students.*** Commercialism in schools will continue to rise unless restrictions are placed on marketing and promotion in schools and by schools. Without policy and legislation there is no accountability for, nor limit to, the degree of marketing and advertising that schools can engage in on behalf of the company.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This final chapter has discussed the findings of the study, and has offered implications for further research. While conducting the study, the researcher

encountered several limitations which may hinder the generalization of the findings to all school administrators involved in school-corporate partnerships. One limitation was that the sample was drawn through researching the Internet and recent issues of practitioner-oriented educational technology journals. Some school administrators who are currently engaged in technology partnerships were not included in the study due to the fact that their partnership was not found on the Internet or not reported in the technology journals researched. The second limitation was that the interviews were limited to nine school administrators. While the nine administrators constituted 75% of the original sample, as a result of the size, many attitudes and opinions of administrators involved in school-corporate partnerships were not analyzed due to the purposive nature of the selection criteria.

The data in this study were collected solely through telephone interviews. While telephone interviews offer significant advantages such as adaptability and immediate feedback and allow for follow-up questions which can lead to more data and greater clarity (Borg & Gall, 1989), there also are several limitations to conducting a study involving interviews. Borg and Gall (1989) maintain that an important limitation of the interview stems from the nature of the interview process: “the flexibility, adaptability, and human interaction that are unique strengths of the interview also allow subjectivity and possible bias that in some research situations are its greatest weakness” (p. 448). In this study, the interactions between the researcher and the school administrators could have been subject to bias from several sources. Borg and Gall (1989) refer to these

interactions as response effects. A response effect is the difference between the answer given by the respondent and the true answer. Reasons for response effects include the possibilities that the respondent wants to impress the interviewer and give exaggerated responses, or that the respondent may give an incorrect answer because he is ashamed of the true answer.

Weiss (1975) cited four potential sources of error in the interview situation: 1) predispositions of the respondent; 2) predispositions of the interviewer; 3) procedures used in conducting the study; and 4) the interaction between respondent and interviewer. The first potential source of error, predispositions of the respondent, means that the source of error stems from the respondent in several different ways. The respondent may be suspicious of or hostile to the research or may be indifferent or not motivated to cooperate. The respondent may also lack the information the interviewer is seeking, want to please or be accepted by the interviewer, and/or want to present himself in favorable terms.

The second potential source of error, predispositions of the interviewer, stems from the interviewer. The interviewer may have been more comfortable with some administrators she was interviewing than with others. The interviewer could also have allowed her own opinions to influence what she heard and/or recorded. It is also possible that the interviewer had expectations of what people were like and what they would say.

The third potential source of error relates to the procedures used in conducting the study. Some of those procedure errors could have been the result of the way in which the study was explained to the respondent, the methods used

for gaining the respondent's cooperation or the length of the interview (Weiss, 1975).

The fourth potential source of error involves the interaction between the respondent and the interviewer. According to Weiss (1975), "part of the interviewing lore is that it is essential for the interviewer to establish good rapport with the respondent" (p. 367). Weiss maintained that the closer the interview comes to a warm, intimate relationship, the better the caliber of data. Therefore, it is essential that there is enough rapport so that the respondent agrees to answer the questions, but she also warned that too close a relationship reinforces the respondent's desire to seem more socially desirable than he really is, and thus imperils the validity of the data (Weiss, 1975). A limitation pertaining to this potential source of error is that this was the first time the researcher conducted a research study collecting data through in-depth telephone interviews. Thus, she was less familiar with this methodology, especially for the first few interviews.

#### SUMMARY

This study has revealed that commercial activities are continuing to flourish in schools. According to authors associated with the ASCD Task Force on Business Involvement in the School, "In the United States businesses are powerful institutions that are well organized to promote their own interests. Sometimes the interests of business coincide with those of public education, and sometimes they do not" (ASCD Task Force on Business Involvement in the Schools, 1989-1990). Schools are walking a fine line. Where to draw the line

between democratic ideals and market ideology is becoming less and less clear because of inadequate funding. Gary Ruskin, executive director of Commercial Alert, a nonprofit group that aims to limit commercialism lamented, “It’s a sign in the decline of our values that we name things not after our history, but after corporations with the deepest pockets” (Boyd, 2004, p. 6A).

Financial constraints, coupled with the need to continually upgrade and support technology, will continue to fuel the desire for school-corporate technology partnerships. To help ensure that the interests of business coincide with those of public education, those in charge of educational decisions must aim to become critically transitive decision-makers. This means balancing public school objectives with business objectives, questioning hidden agendas, and maintaining the integrity of the public school system.