

Intergroup Contact: Arizona School District
and Charter School Leaders

by

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ABSTRACT

Arizona's district and charter communities have a history of conflict, including working against each other when advocating policy positions at the state legislature. The purpose of this research was to improve the relationship between the district and charter communities through an intervention based on intergroup contact theory. Through her personal network, the researcher formed and facilitated the Arizona Initiative for Public Education Dialogue (AZ iPED), comprised of eight district superintendents and charter leaders. This mixed-methods, action research study explored what happened when Arizona school district superintendents and charter school leaders were brought through intergroup contact to discuss potential policies they could jointly support. This study addressed the following three research questions: To what extent does intergroup contact increase allophilia (positive attitudes) between Arizona school district and charter school leaders? In what ways do participants voice allophilia during in-group dialogue? How do school district superintendents and charter school leaders socially construct and negotiate narratives that support the conflict between their two communities? The members of AZ iPED met four times from October through December, 2016. Allophilia (positive feelings toward the outgroup) data included an Allophilia Scale administered at the beginning and end of the study and transcripts of first and second in-group district and charter focus groups. Results are reported through descriptive statistics, Wilcoxon signed ranks of matched samples, and content analysis. Findings indicated a non-statistically significant increase in allophilia. Content analysis also indicated increases in the quantity and quality of allophilia talk. Narrative analysis of conflict talk generated the four following themes: competition sets the stage for conflict, actions construct conflict, perceptions sustain

conflict, and conflict causes feelings. Those themes provided structure for compiling a collective District Narrative and collective Charter Narrative, which were further analyzed through the lens of conflict-sustaining collective narratives. Narrative analysis of select portions of the transcript suggested processes through which conflict-sustaining narratives were constructed and negotiated during intergroup contact.

This is dedicated to my family, whose support and prayers have been unfailing during
this chapter of my life and during many of the chapters that led up to it.

To my father, who was the first Dr. in my life and to my mother, his gifted companion:

Thank you!

To my son and daughter, who are ever-so-brilliantly busy writing your own life stories,

you may now call me “Dr. Mom”:

I love you!

And finally, to my steadfast husband, who has gallantly sacrificed our time together so

I could grow up to be a doctor:

It’s finally time to have some fun!

“We’re all stories, in the end. Just make it a good one, eh?”
The Doctor, Season 5, Episode 13

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION OF THE TOPIC

What has to change . . . is the us versus them mentality of charter schools and district schools.
—Arizona Governor Doug Ducey¹

The United States 2016 presidential election and surrounding historical events brought intergroup conflict to the fore of public awareness. At the national level, intergroup conflict tensions escalated between traditional school district advocates and charter school advocates regarding Education Secretary Betsy DeVos’s senate confirmation. Conflict is a universal issue that takes place between two individuals (e.g. husband and wife), between nations (e.g., United States and Russia), and between identity groups (e.g. between political parties or racial groups).

I am a member of two communities with a history of conflict: public school districts² and public charter schools. I am a charter school founder and operator, actively supporting the charter community as a member and vice-chair of the Arizona Charter Schools Association’s³ (ACSA) Charter Leader Advisory Council. However, as an active member of the Arizona School Administrators Association⁴ (ASA), I also support my

¹ Governor’s Remarks to the State Board for Charter Schools on August 17, 2015.

²Throughout this document, I chose to use the terms *districts* and *charters* in that order in deference to school districts’ status as being the first entities to provide Arizona’s students with a public education and the relatively recent arrival of their younger sibling charter schools.

³ ACSA supports student achievement through high quality charter schools, advocates for student equity and charter school autonomy, and leads Arizona charter schools as a sustainable, strong, credible organization (ACSA, n.d.).

⁴ Arizona School Administrators Association works to advance the roles of administrative leaders by providing training and support services for its membership. Its membership serves as a voice in the legislature, in their communities, and in other organizations promoting educational improvements that benefit students and schools (ASA website).

school district counterparts, superintendents. Despite their common interests of supporting student achievement and promoting educational improvements, the lobbying efforts of ACSA and ASA primarily focus on pursuing each individual group's interests, which have frequently been at odds with each other. Fusarelli (2003) described the crux of much of this conflict as follows: "the extent to which charter schools should be regulated is a major source of political conflict, as proponents believe charter schools are already over-regulated, while opponents view the schools as dangerously under-regulated" (p. 144). My problem of practice is that Arizona's school district and charter school communities do not mutually respect each other and work together to ensure all students have access to and the opportunity to benefit from high-quality public schools (Rofes, 2005).

The purpose of this project was to increase positive feelings (allophilia) between participating school district and charter school leaders through an intervention based on intergroup contact theory with hope the intervention could also serve as the impetus for improved district/charter relations across the state. I also wanted to contribute to the larger intergroup contact conversation by qualitatively exploring the perspectives of intergroup conflict as expressed by members of two communities involved in a specific intergroup conflict—Arizona school district superintendents and charter school leaders who are politically active within their respective associations.

The specific research questions guiding this study included the following:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): To what extent does intergroup contact increase allophilia (positive attitudes) between school district and charter school leaders?
(Quantitative)

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive, correlational relationship between intergroup contact and allophilia.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): In what ways do participants voice allophilia during ingroup dialogue? (Quantitative) (Qualitative)

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do school district superintendents and charter school leaders socially construct and negotiate narratives that sustain the conflict between their two communities? (Qualitative)

National Context

Charter schools by definition are statutorily-created, publically funded schools run by a private party/company (LoTempio, 2012). Because of this dual nature, charter schools are considered public schools in terms of funding formulas, open meeting laws, non-discriminatory enrollment practices, and special education mandates, but private actors in regards to employment (*Caviness v. Horizon Learning Center, 2009*). To date, federal courts have not reached consensus on the issue of charter schools being state actors or private entities (LoTempio, 2012). Charters are generally organized around an educational philosophy (e.g., Montessori, back-to-basics, classical, or blended learning), a focus (e.g., at-risk students or the performing arts), or a setting (e.g., small school or online learning). Students are not assigned to a charter school; instead, families must choose to enroll their children. Charters are public schools of choice.

Minnesota passed the first charter school law in 1991 (Finnigan et al., 2004). Other states quickly followed suit, and by 2011 42 states had charter schools, with 1.789 million children across the nation enrolled in them. Charter schools have been hailed by both Democrats and Republicans as an important public education reform tactic (Bulkley,

2004; Wells, Grutzik, Carnochan, Slayton, & Vasudeva, 1999). On the other hand, Diane Ravitch, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education, and others warn this “privatization of education” will lead to the destruction of America’s public education system (Ravitch, 2013; Smith, Wohlstetter, Farrell, & Nayfack, 2011).

Ray Budde (1989) originated the concept of charter schools in the 1970s and Albert Shanker, the late president of the American Federation of Teachers, expounded on the concept in the 1980s. Budde envisioned a school-within-a-school—a group of teachers “chartering” with local school boards to implement an innovation that would then be evaluated for effectiveness and allowed to continue if it produced positive results within a specified period of time. In Budde’s vision, the system would allow innovations to be tested and widely adopted for the common good. Budde’s model for change infers a connection and dialogue between charter and public education systems where innovations could be diffused (Rogers, 2003). Shanker (1988) described charter schools as a way to expose fixed assumptions and practices within the public school system, gain new insights into persistent problems, and test potential solutions.

However, the benevolent give-and-take Shanker and Budde envisioned has not characterized district-charter relationships. Although districts and charters⁵ have been known to collaborate (Finkel, 2011; Yatsko, Cooley Nelson, & Lake, 2013), it is still the exception rather than the norm. This is understandable because policy-makers designed charters to be an “avenue for deregulation or market-based reform” (Lake, 2008, p. 116), expected to cause improvement in the public school system by providing competition to

⁵ Throughout this work, I use the terms *districts* and *charters* metonymically to include the people who work in them (e.g. *charters* do not have to follow those regulations or *districts* can pass overrides).

the public school, bureaucratic establishment. Despite the obvious paradox, charters are also expected to be laboratories of innovation, diffusing those innovations to the rest of the system so all students can benefit (WestEd, 2006).

Recent court cases across the country are evidence of conflict between school district advocates and charter school advocates. A Washington coalition of public school advocates, including the Administrator's Association and the Washington Education Association, filed a lawsuit challenging the state's charter school law that had been narrowly approved by the voters. In the fall of 2015, just weeks after the schools opened, the Washington Supreme court decided the charter school law was unlawful under the state's constitution (Higgins, 2015). In another case, a California charter school sued the Los Angeles Unified School District for not providing rent-free classroom space. In April, 2016, the arbitrator ruled the district owed the charter school \$7.1 million (Torres, 2016). The nomination and confirmation of the Department of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, who has been known as a strong supporter of school choice (including charter schools and school vouchers), in the spring of 2017 also highlighted tensions between district and charter supporters (Grinberg & Kessler, 2017; LoBianco, Barrett, & Scott, 2017).

There have been efforts in other states to improve relations between the two groups. With grants from the Gates Foundation, 16 districts and charters across the country entered into compacts with each other in 2011 (Castellano, 2011; Finkel, 2011; Yatsko et al., 2013). District and charter leaders collaborated to create and agree to compacts articulating overlapping goals and shared interests, with various levels of success (Yatsko et al., 2013). Another attempt to reduce tensions consisted of a California

task force of district, charter, and private school advocates that came together to answer the question, “What would it take to initiate an era when public school stakeholders in either district schools or charter schools respected and supported one another's commitment to providing a quality, equitable public education to all of California's school children?” (Rofes, 2005, p. 1). The task force met for six months and produced a report with specific recommendations for state policymakers. The task force and their report provided inspiration for this research proposal.

The Relationship between Districts and Charters in Arizona

Arizona passed its charter school law in 1994 during a special session in the same bill that provided for open enrollment between school districts (Powers, Topper, & Silver, 2012) and the first charter schools opened in 1995 (Gifford, Phillips, & Ogle, 2000). The Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction’s report for fiscal year 2016 indicated 17.28% of the Arizona’s public school students attend a charter school (Arizona Department of Education, 2017). According to the Arizona Charter Schools Association, Arizona has the highest percentage of public school students attending charter school than any state, and second only to Washington, DC” (Arizona Charter Schools Association, 2013). Charter schools in Arizona were established to “give parents academic choices for their children and to provide a learning environment to improve student achievement" (A.R.S. § 15-181).

Charter schools by definition are statutorily created publically funded schools run by a private party (LoTempio, 2012). They do not have publically elected boards and, unlike traditional school districts, are not considered a local government (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). Because of this dual nature, charter schools are considered public schools in terms

of funding formulas, open meeting laws, required non-discriminatory enrollment practices, and special education mandates, but private actors in regards to employment⁶ (*Caviness v. Horizon Learning Center*, 2009).

Arizona's charters are generally organized around an educational philosophy (e.g., Montessori, back-to-basics, classical, or blended learning), a focus (e.g., at-risk students or the performing arts), or a setting (e.g., small school or online learning). Students are not assigned to a charter school; instead, families must choose to enroll their children. Charters are public schools of choice.

Charters in Arizona not only have different governance structures and regulations than their district counterparts, they also have had different funding formulas and spending limitations. Historically, Arizona's charter schools have been based on current year student counts and district schools were based on prior year student counts (Olson, 2009). During the 2016-2017 school year, when I conducted this study, school districts were in transition to also be funded on current year student counts (Arizona Department of Education, 2015) and are expected to be fully on current year funding by the 2017-2018 school year unless the legislature takes action. School districts have expressed concerns about the change to current year for several reasons, including the following: If enrollment declines mid-year, the district still has an obligation to teachers who are under contract; federal maintenance of effort requirements; and the complicating factor of the minimum qualifying property tax rate (Arizona Department of Education, 2015). The district funding formula is comprised of at least nine categories that dictate how the funds may be spent (Arizona Joint Legislative Budget Committee, 2013). If the voters in the

⁶ To date, federal courts have not reached consensus on the issue of charter schools being state actors or private entities (LoTempio, 2012).

district approve them, districts also have access to local property taxes, bonds, overrides, and facilities funding. The state’s funding formula for charters is based on current year student enrollment and is comprised of two categories (Base Level and Charter Additional Assistance). Charters have no restrictions on how these funds may be allocated. “Charter Additional Assistance” funding, which comes directly from the state operating funds, is intended to offset charters’ inability to access local property taxes or state facilities funding (A.R.S. §15-185).

Through open enrollment and charter schools, Arizona has created a competitive educational marketplace that is the basis for much of the tension between the two communities. From the district’s perspective, charter schools have an unfair advantage because charters are statutorily free from many of the regulations to which districts are subject (A.R.S. 15-183(E)(5); Fusarelli, 2003). District advocates lobby for increased charter regulation so there is a “level playing field.”⁷ At the same time charter advocates lobby for “charter school autonomy by eliminating unnecessary statutes” (ACSA, 2016).

The two communities have also been in competition against each other for funding. From the charter perspective, districts are advantaged because they have access to more financial resources like local property taxes and teacher experience index (TEI) (Arizona Senate Research Staff, 2016). The perceived inequity is why ASCA funded the school finance equity lawsuit, *Foley v. Horne*⁸. From the perspective of Arizona district

⁷ For example: Arizona School Boards Association (ASBA) 2016 Short Term Policy Position #7 “require comparative and consistent Auditor General Reports for public (district and charter) schools” (ASBA website).

⁸ In 2009, ACSA sponsored *Foley v. Horne* alleging the state school funding formula disadvantages charter students.

advocates, it is unfair that charter schools receive approximately \$1,000 in Charter Additional Assistance⁹ school districts do not receive (Arizona Senate Research Staff, 2016). In 2013, as a result of this inequity, school districts began converting district schools to charter schools in order to access Charter Additional Assistance funding as a method of compensating for the state's lack of facilities funding (Wang, 2013). Some charter advocates were alarmed the conversions would negatively impact traditional charter schools. In 2014, the state legislature responded by passing HB2711, stripping school districts of their right to sponsor charter schools and rolling back district-charter conversions (Faller & Rau, 2014; Roberts, 2014). From the district perspective, the legislature's actions were further evidence of the system favoring charter schools.

A more recent example of the adversarial relationship between school district and charter school advocates was the competing school finance reform recommendations each group submitted to Governor Ducey's Classrooms First Council. Governor Ducey brought together Arizona business and education leaders to form the Classrooms First Council and charged them with the task of modernizing Arizona's school finance code "to ensure more funding for teachers and classroom instruction" (Arizona Governor Doug Ducey Education Office, n.d.). The charter association's proposal included a recommendation to phase-out school district desegregation money (Arizona Charter Schools Association, 2015). School district advocates viewed this suggestion as another example of charter school proponents attempting to weaken the local school districts by draining already scarce resources (Berliner & Glass, 2013; Fusarelli, 2003; Ravitch,

⁹ Charter Additional Assistance is intended to cover facilities, transportation, and other funding categories available to districts through property taxes and other sources unavailable to charter schools (Arizona Senate Reserch Staff, 2016).

2013). The Arizona Association of School Business Officials (AASBO) presented a counter-proposal that offered to fund charter school facilities, but only if the title-holder is the School Facilities Board (Arizona Governor Doug Ducey, Office of Education, 2016). However, many charter advocates have expressed to me that they believe private ownership is important to maintain autonomy and keep the movement strong. After two years of work and a lot of debate, the Classrooms First Council identified problems with the current funding system, but left the “how” to the legislature and governor (Rau, 2016).

From my perspective, debating these issues distracts educational leaders from pooling their resources to advocate for statewide educational improvements and innovations that might be possible if the district and charter communities respect each other and work together to ensure all students have access to and the opportunity to benefit from high-quality public schools (Rofes, 2005).

Researcher Positioning

People do not approach research *tabula rasa*. Instead, we bring distinct personal histories that affect our research. Thus, our philosophies affect what we consider worthy of study, our theoretical perspectives and research strategies, as well as the collection methods and analysis we choose to use (Cresswell, 2013). Our histories as members of different groups also provide us with “distinctive ways of speaking/listening . . . reading/writing” (Gee, 2014b, p. 183), including the language we use to structure our thinking and the ways in which we interact with others.

Therefore, before I move on to the literature review, I explain my personal history and clarify the philosophical assumptions with which I framed this study.

I joined the charter school system after experiencing Arizona's public school system as a student, a teacher, and a parent. As I considered educational opportunities for my own children, I wanted a small environment, academic rigor, and high discipline standards. I did not believe the local district schools offered what I was looking for, homeschooling did not appeal to me, and private school tuition was not affordable. As a result, I investigated local charter offerings and subsequently experienced the charter school system as a parent, a teacher, and eventually as a charter founder and operator.

Today, I am the founder and superintendent of Pointe Educational Services dba Pointe Schools, a charter with over 1,300 students and over 100 employees. Pointe is a non-profit (501c3) company and holds one K-12 charter operating three sites. Our organizational structure resembles a small district but also has elements of a corporate structure. The central office handles finance, accounting, human resources, and operational support. The executive director, who would be called an assistant superintendent within most district structures, reports directly to me and works with me to support the three principals. As the superintendent, I am responsible to provide leadership; ensure educational, financial, and operational stability; establish and maintain positive public relations; and ensure compliance with regulatory and legal requirements. I am the only remaining founder and I am in the unique position of having personal experience in almost every aspect of the company.

Pointe's capacity has increased enough over the past eight years to allow me to participate as a charter leader in the context of Arizona's larger educational community. I am currently the vice president of the Arizona Charter Association's Charter Leader Advisory Council. I am also a governor-appointed commissioner on the Commission for

Post Secondary Education, serving as the charter representative. For the past six years, I have been the only charter leader to be actively involved in the superintendent's division of the Arizona School Administrator's Association. Since 2015, I have also served as the charter representative on the ADE Title 15 Working Group. I regularly attend board meetings and local charter, district, and ADE conferences, and the annual national charter school conferences.

My identity as a former public school teacher and current charter school leader, combined with my participation in the larger education community, and my interest in policy allow me to bring a unique perspective to public education. Although I hear similar discussions about education policy within the school district and charter communities, I have also been taken aback by statements made within the district community about charter schools and statements made within the charter community about school districts. Within my personal network in the district and charter communities, I see distrust, incorrect assumptions about the other educational community, and missed opportunities for coordinated action. Therefore, I designed the proposed intervention for this action research study for the purpose of improving the relationship between members of the two communities. Specifically, I sought to increase positive feelings the participating school district and charter school leaders had towards each other. It was my hope that this intervention would serve as the impetus for improved relations across the state.

From a philosophical perspective, I was raised in a conservative Christian home with the belief there is only one truth—God's truth as revealed in the Bible. I have, therefore, instinctively seen many things in terms of right/wrong and true/untrue, which is

generally described as a postpositivist worldview. However, I was also taught there are many areas that are not black and white, where peoples' perspectives vary and there is no "one truth." Age and experience have caused me to see fewer things as having single "truths," which could cause some people to label me as a pragmatist or "relativist" (a negative term for many Christians). In Chapter 3, I discuss how the grand theory of social constructionism helped me reconcile these two worldviews.

It may also be helpful to know that I bring to this study my training and experience as a high school theatre, speech, and English teacher because the ways I think and speak are influenced by the languages used within each of those fields (Gee, 2014a, b). I describe later how my background also influenced the choices I made when determining what and how to communicate my analysis and findings.

Before I move my review of the literature, I present a brief vignette that stories some of my early experiences in ASA because I believe it will provide context for my claim that there is a history of conflict between Arizona's district and charter communities.

First Vignette

I remember my first ASA conference up in Prescott. When I registered, I didn't realize I would be the only charter person in attendance. I checked in on Sunday night and felt very out of place when I saw everyone was dressed professionally (I'd come straight from a women's retreat and felt very scruffy). Everyone seemed to know each other and their way of being together felt foreign to me. The superintendents were friendly—until I said I my schools were charter school. At that point, most would suddenly seem distant and the conversation would politely end. However, I enjoyed the content of the conference and made a few connections with the attendees. I was genuinely interested in building collegial relationships and understanding the perspectives of my district counterparts. So, I went to the ASA summer conference. Although I still felt like an outsider, I was a bit more at ease this time. Yes, the walls usually still went up when I introduced myself as a charter leader. However, I felt people eventually re-engaged as I asked questions and demonstrated I was willing to engage in honest dialogue.

At lunch, I had just introduced myself to my table as a charter school leader when the speaker, Christopher¹⁰, started his speech. Although I can't remember everything he said, I remember the key assertion very clearly, "You shouldn't hate charters, any more than you would hate a wild animal that sneaks into your camp and steals your food." The dehumanizing statement caught me off guard. I stopped eating and didn't lift my eyes from the table as Christopher talked about charters in a way that made it clear he considered them a threat to the public school system. Sitting in the room surrounded by potential colleagues, I felt like an outsider—judged and unwelcomed.

Afterwards, several people with whom I'd connected came over to assure me they didn't see me as an enemy and to make sure I was okay. One of them assured me that Christopher was really a good guy. Someone else said I should talk with him and offered to introduce us. That evening, as the group socialized and sang karaoke, someone introduced me to Christopher. For the next few hours, people razzed him for being mean to the "charter girl." Christopher and I ended up being the finale for the karaoke night by singing a duet of "Ebony and Ivory" (because he wasn't familiar with the song "Why Can't We Be Friends"). Afterwards, we began an ongoing dialogue that has challenged my assumptions and stereotypes about school districts and his stereotypes and assumptions about charter schools.

That experience was palpable evidence to me that there was a conflict between the school district and charter school communities. It also convinced me of the potential to improve the relationship and work together for the common good.

¹⁰ Pseudonym.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

One may detect the voices of numerous scholarly conversations throughout this proposal. Too many fields of research have contributed to my thinking for me to include in a coherent literature review. Therefore, I have limited the topics to those that provide the essential structure undergirding my research design. The rest of this chapter discusses the relevant elements of those topics in the following order: charter schools, theories behind charter schools, and competition and strategic alliances. I end the review of the literature by discussing the grand theory of social constructionism and three mid-level theories from the intergroup conflict literature: intergroup contact theory, allophilia, and conflict-sustaining narratives.

Charter Schools

Ironically, charter school research itself has fueled the competitive relationship between districts and charters. A 2011 meta analysis of charter school research over the previous decade revealed the primary focus of this line of research has been whether charter schools perform better than or worse than school districts (Smith et al., 2011). The results have been mixed. Some studies indicate charter students perform better than their district peers (Hoxby & Muraka, 2008; Hoxby & Rockoff, 1990) while other studies indicate charter students perform the same as or worse than students in school districts (Finnigan et al., 2004). A quote from Chester Finn (2006) sums up this area of charter research: “Reality shows that some [charters] are fantastic, some are abysmal, and many are hard to distinguish from the district schools to which they're meant to be alternatives” (p. 1). The focus on charter performance on state tests has framed the conversation as

whether charter schools are “better” than district schools, rather than identifying strengths of each system or areas for cooperation.

As mentioned earlier, the Gates Foundation has been the source of some emerging research on district/charter collaboration projects (Castellano, 2011; Finkel, 2011; Hess, 2010; Whitmire, 2014; Yatsko et al., 2013). But, this research primarily focuses on the success or failure of exchanging goods or improving processes (e.g. universal registration). According to an early report, there have been various levels of success to date. However, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the process of improving school district and charter school relationships.

Theories Behind Charter Schools

In addition to educating students within their own walls, charter schools are expected to be the catalyst to improve education for all students under two very different theories. Under the economic free market theory, charter schools provide parents with choices and improve the education system by providing competition. Milton Friedman, the father of the Chicago school of monetary economics (*The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice*, n.d.) espoused this purpose for charter schools. *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (Chubb & Moe, 1990) also advocated for using the market principals of choice and competition to restructure public education. Most charter-school research mentions this purpose for charter schools.

Less frequently discussed is the purpose for charter schools envisioned by Shanker (1988) and Budde (1989). Under their theory, charter schools should be lighthouses of innovation, experimenting with new ideas and sharing successful innovations with the educational community. This purpose is grounded in the concepts of

the “public good” and action research theory. Charter schools were originally conceptualized as centers for action research, a place where solutions could be tried on a small scale, free from the regulations that frequently hinder such work in the traditional districts. Charter schools were seen as a place where educators could use action research to “make the familiar strange by problematizing taken for granted (sic) assumptions” (McNiff, 2013). Sharing results is an important feature of action research (Grogan et al., 2007; McNiff, 2013; Riel, 2010). In keeping with other charter school research, studies attempting to establish if charter schools have no effect, a positive, or a negative effect on surrounding districts also have mixed results (Holley, Egalite, & Lueken, 2013; Lake, 2008; Preston, Goldring, Berends, & Cannata, 2012; Yongmei, 2009).

Charter schools have been torn between theories of action and theories of practice. In practice, it is difficult to reconcile the purposes of competition and cooperation. The result has been a focus on the free market benefits of charter schools in both the research literature and in practice. However, in order for charter schools to be of maximum benefit to the educational system, there must be avenues for charter schools to bring value to the larger educational community.

Cooperation and Strategic Alliances

One theoretical lens that may help charters and districts reconcile these opposing purposes is the concept of *coopetition*. Coopetition is a neologism used to describe relationships combining cooperation and competition. Using game theoretic concepts, Brandenburger and Nalebuff (1996) discovered companies could develop significant competitive advantage and foster innovation through strategies combining competition and collaboration. Wenger (1998), an educational theorist and practitioner best known for

developing the theory of situated cognition (with Jean Lave) and his work on

Communities of Practice, explains:

Your most threatening competitor may be your best partner when it comes to learning together. If you hoard your knowledge in a social learning system, you quickly appear as taking more than you give, and you will progressively be excluded from the most significant exchanges. (p. 18).

The concept of cooperating with competitors has been widely applied in business (Kanter, 2012; Kock, Bengtsson, & Slotte-kock, n.d.; Zen & Chen, 2003), frequently under the more widely used term *strategic alliance*. Examples of business strategic alliances include Starbucks and Barnes and Noble, Disney and Hewlett-Packard, Northwest Airlines and Dutch airline KLM, and Hewlett-Packard and Microsoft. The concept of cooptation is now being applied to education (Finkel, 2011; Muijs, 2008) and the research points to a growing interest in cooptation and strategic alliances (Kock et al., n.d.; Muijs & Rumyantseva, 2013; Zen & Chen, 2003). The terms *collaboration*, *cooperation*, *coordination*, *coalition*, *network*, *alliance* and *partnership* are often used interchangeably in the literature according to Huxham (1996).

Kittel (2013), a pre-founding member of the Board of the Association of Strategic Alliance Professionals (ASAP) who helped establish Hewlett-Packard's corporate level strategic alliance with Microsoft, defined a strategic alliance as a "long-term business relationship, focused on value-creation, in contrast to value-exchange or value-extraction relationships" (p. 3). He believed that personal relationships were key to successful strategic alliances. When establishing relationships, Kittel advised starting by clearing the air and identifying the obstacles in the relationship. He believed whenever we attribute others' actions to deviousness, incompetence, or lunacy we do not understand their perspectives. The process of understanding different perspective builds trust (J. Kittel,

personal communication, 2013). It is only possible to move on to mutual value-building after both parties can clearly see themselves through the other person's filter. The Arizona Initiative for Public Education Dialogue (iPED) group I designed as my intervention for this mixed method action research study used one of Kittel's strategic alliance building tools during the second iPED meeting (see Appendix A).

Social Constructionism

The tenants of social constructionism also provide hope for transforming the conflict between the school district and charter school communities. At its core, social constructionism holds that all meaning is derived through people acting in relationship with other people (Gergen, 2009). And, because meaning is socially negotiated, it can therefore, be socially re-negotiated. This was appropriate for my study because my problem of practice was the relationship between two communities. My research design, including its methodology of using focus groups and intergroup contact (iPED meeting), and my analysis for my third research question were guided by the grand theory of social constructionism. Social constructionism also provided me with the framework to explore the ways district and charter socially construct their perceptions of the conflict between their two communities.

Gergen (2009) explained the major tenants of social construction as follows:

1. The way in which we understand the world is not required by "what there is." The world does not demand a specific way of talking about it. Instead, we have socially constructed our way of talking about and understanding the world. Therefore, "other ways of talking are possible" (p. 6).

2. The ways in which we describe and explain the world are the outcomes of relationship. Nations, cultures, communities, and professions develop specific ways of talking about and thinking about the world. Therefore, vocabularies are situated in particular historical and cultural contexts.
3. Constructions gain their significance from their social utility. We must agree to a common meaning for a word in order for it to become useful. Words can only describe the world and become truth-telling when they successfully function to allow participants to “coordinate their actions in ways that are valuable to them” (p. 11).
4. As we describe and explain, so do we fashion our future. Together, we construct new ways of making sense, new ways of talking, and, therefore, new ways of thinking about and being together in the world. Together, we construct our realities.
5. Reflection on our taken-for-granted worlds is vital to our future well-being. We have the potential to create alternative futures together when we recognize the ways we talk about and think about “what is” are historically and culturally situated and are willing to question those assumptions and consider alternative ways of framing “what is,” because then we can “invite the kind of dialogue that might lead to common ground” (p. 13).

According to social constructionism, all meaning is rooted in relationship. And, because meaning is socially constructed, it can also be socially re-constructed. As Gergen (2009) stated, “The moment we begin to speak together, we have the potential to create new ways of being” (p. 29). Social constructionism does not believe in a single way of

seeing the world. Rather, it seeks to capture the processes individuals use to construct and negotiate a shared understanding because constructionists believe that socially negotiated process is of the most value (Cojocaru, Bragaru, & Ciuchi, 2012). However, social constructionism itself has a mixed intellectual heritage and has been constructed differently within different disciplines. Therefore, social constructionist researchers may decide to investigate the socially constructed content or the social construction process (Hosking, 2011). In this dissertation, I explored both in order to investigate both the content that was socially constructed and the process participants used to socially construct and negotiate. The theoretical framework of social constructionism guided both my methods and analysis, which I discuss in further detail in Chapter 3.

Intergroup Conflict

Intergroup conflict, defined as conflict between two different identity groups, has been extensively studied by various disciplines, including social psychologists and peace scholars (Tropp, 2012). I limit my review of the literature to three specific concepts within the intergroup contact literature that were relevant to this study: Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis (intergroup contact theory); Pittinsky's construct of allophilia (positive feelings towards an outgroup; Pittinsky, Rosenthal, & Montoya, 2011), and Bar-Tal's (2007) conflict-sustaining collective narratives. I discuss the literature for each of them below.

Mid-Level Theory: Intergroup Contact Theory

According to the contact hypothesis, groups experiencing conflict with each other (intergroup conflict) can reduce tensions through face-to-face interaction under certain conditions. Gordon Allport introduced this contact hypothesis in his seminal book, *The*

Nature of Prejudice (1954). Allport's contact hypothesis, which is generally referred to as intergroup contact theory, has been the subject of many studies over the past half century and the research overwhelmingly supports his hypothesis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

According to Allport, the four conditions required for intergroup contact to have positive effects are equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by social and institutional authorities. However, over the years, Allport's conditions have not necessarily withstood scrutiny (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005). Researchers in this area now generally agree all four of the conditions do not need presence for intergroup contact to have positive effects (Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Historically, intergroup contact research has focused on outcome rather than process (Hammack, Pilecki, & Merrilees, 2014; Pettigrew, 1998) as illustrated in Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory that identified 515 quantitative intergroup contact studies without reporting any qualitative studies. Due to this quantitative focus, intergroup contact literature tells us surprisingly little about communication processes and interactions within specifically situated contact experiences (Hammack et al., 2014; Nagda, 2006). I have been able to locate few intergroup contact studies that claim to be qualitative and of those that do, it is not uncommon for the "qualitative" study to be reported quantitatively, rather than providing the rich, multifaceted data characteristic of qualitative research (Cresswell, 2014).

One truly qualitative study was a field study by Hammack et al. (2010) that utilized ethnographic and interview methods to examine the life stories of participants in relation to their participation in intergroup contact. In a subsequent study, Hammack et al. (2014) utilized a mixed methods design but presented qualitative data quantitatively,

reporting frequencies and percentages. Finally, Nagda (2006) sought to investigate how the participants engaged in intergroup dialogue understand intergroup communication processes. However, Nagda utilized a quantitative pre-and post-intervention questionnaire, thereby limiting understanding to the author's pre-conceived conceptions rather than giving voice to participants' words in use.

Intergroup contact theory originally focused on reducing prejudice between racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. However, in their 2006 meta-analysis of intergroup contact, Pettigrew and Tropp found intergroup contact can have positive effects for stigmatized groups in other contexts (e.g. homosexuals, homeless, the mentally and the physically disabled; Pettigrew, 2008). The theory appears to apply whenever two groups experience identity-based conflict (Pettigrew & Troop, 2006). I have found no scholarly literature addressing the conflict between school districts and charter schools from an intergroup framework. However, from my perspective, district superintendents and charter school operators stigmatize each other and display biases, misattributions, distrust, and conflict in the same manner as the in-groups and out-groups discussed in the intergroup literature. Therefore, I believed intergroup contact theory was a useful lens through which to view their conflict and could be applied as an innovation to improve the relationship between the two communities.

Mid-Level Theory: Allophilia

As discussed above, the intergroup contact literature has primarily focused on prejudice reduction (Allport, 1954). However, researchers have more recently argued that liking is not the opposite of disliking (Alfieri & Marta, 2011; Pittinsky & Montoya, 2009; Pittinsky et al., 2011) and have moved the conversation beyond addressing the presence

or absence of prejudice by focusing on improving positive intergroup attitudes (Pittinsky et al., 2011). One of the problems this new area of research faced was the absence of a social construction for understanding the opposite of “prejudice” (Pittinsky, 2005). The absence of prejudice, or “not prejudiced” does not indicate positive feelings. After Pittinsky failed to find an antonym for prejudice, he coined the term allophilia, derived from the Greek words meaning “liking or love of the other” (Pittinsky, 2005, p. 5). Therefore, allophilia is a recent social construct intergroup contact researchers are beginning to use to think about and talk about improving relationships between communities with a history of intergroup conflict.

Pittinsky and colleagues (2011) developed and validated the Allophilia Scale as an indicator of positive feelings towards an outgroup. The Allophilia Scale has also been adapted and validated for different contexts (Alfieri & Marta, 2011; Pittinsky & Montoya, 2009; Pittinsky et al., 2011). When developing the scale, Pittinsky et al. determined that allophilia is comprised of five factors: *affection* (having positive feelings toward outgroup members), *comfort* (feeling comfortable and at ease with outgroup members), *kinship* (believing there is a close connection with outgroup members), *engagement* (seeking interactions with outgroup members), and *enthusiasm* (feeling impressed and inspired by outgroup members). The Allophilia Scale is comprised of 17 Likert scale items (1-6 with 1 being strongly disagree and 6 strongly agree) that measure allophilia’s five constructs. The Allophilia Scale questions to specifically measure allophilia towards district and charter school leaders are listed in Appendices B and C, respectively.

Mid-Level Theory: Conflict–Sustaining Collective Narratives

One way to interpret conflict between groups is that, during intractable intergroup conflicts, groups socially construct collective narratives that serve to justify and sustain the conflict (Bar Tal, 2007; Bar-Tal, Oren, & Nets-Zehngut, 2014; Nasie, Bar-Tal, Pliskin, Nahhas, & Halperin, 2014; Srour, Sagy, Mana, & Mjally Knani, 2013).

According to Bar-Tal (2007), these narratives include both a narrative about the past (collective memory) and a narrative about the present (ethos). Collective memories and conflict-supporting narratives about the present share some common themes. The collective memory narrative themes include justification for the conflict's beginning and continuation, presenting the ingroup in a positive light, delegitimizing the outgroup, and presenting the ingroup as a victim of outgroup (Bar-Tal, 2007, pp. 1436-1438). And, the ethos narrative themes are (a) justness of ingroup goals; (b) security; (c) positive collective self-image (attributing positive traits, values, and behavior to the ingroup); (d) victimization of the ingroup (that the ingroup is the sole victim of the conflict); (e) delegitimizing the rival group (outgroup); (f) patriotism (loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice); (g) unity (ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements to unite against the external threat; and (h) peace as the ultimate desire of the society (Bar-Tal, 2007, p. 1438).

For the purposes of this study, I focused on the four conflict-sustaining narrative themes found in both the collective narratives and ethos narratives (Bar-Tal, 2007; justification for the conflict/justness of ingroup goals, positive ingroup collective self image, victimizing the ingroup, and delegitimizing the outgroup). I did this because these four themes are usually present in both the collective narrative and the ethos narrative.

Three other themes identified in Bar-Tal's framework, security, patriotism, peace, were not evident in the data. This may be because these themes are more evident at a national level or for conflicts involving violence. There may be suggestions of the final theme of ingroup unity within the transcripts from this study. However, it was not present in the analysis I conducted prior to learning about conflict-sustaining narratives and I did go back to re-code for that theme.

The collective narrative framework has parallels to the concept Gee (2014a, 2014b) called figured worlds, a term he says has been called many other names, including cultural model, "discourse model, schema, frame, and script (Gee, 2014, p. 95). According to Bar-Tal et al. (2014), "These narratives play an important role in satisfying the basic sociopsychological needs of the involved individuals and collectives" and therefore, "the narratives tend to be biased in favor of the in- group, selective, distorting and simplistic" (p. 662).

Bar-Tal et al also described six methods ingroups use to socially construct their conflict-supporting narratives:

1. Reliance on supportive sources;
2. Marginalization of contradictory information;
3. Magnification of supporting themes (especially themes about the justness of goals, collective self-preservation; delegitimization of the rival; and patriotism);
4. Fabrication of supportive contents (details and events unsupported by evidence);
5. Omission of contradictory contents; and

6. Use of framing language that triggers emotions, memory, cognition, and motivation related to past events (2014, pp. 666-667).

Understandably, two communities engaged in intergroup conflict frequently have conflicting collective narratives (et al., 2014; Srour et al., 2013). During intractable intergroup conflicts, adhering to the conflict-sustaining collective narrative becomes one of the requirements for qualifying as a member of the ingroup (Bar-Tal et al., 2014). These specific ways of believing and talking become part of each group's (big D) Discourse (Gee, 2011), ways of "being" a member of the ingroup.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This chapter discusses the methods and procedures I used to address the three research questions that guided my study:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): To what extent does intergroup contact increase allophilia (positive attitudes) between school district and charter school leaders? (Quantitative)

Research Question 2 (RQ2): In what ways do participants voice allophilia during ingroup dialogue? (Quantitative) (Qualitative)

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do school district superintendents and charter school leaders socially construct and negotiate narratives that sustain the conflict between their two communities? (Qualitative)

First, I discuss the rationale for using an action research design and mixed methods, followed by an overview of the research design and the theoretical perspectives and mid-level theories I used to structure my investigation of each research question. Then I describe the setting, the participants, my positionality as a researcher, and my intervention (iPED meetings). Finally, I describe my data collection and data analysis. For the sake of the reader, I present these methods chronologically and linearly. For readers who are interested in how messy the process actually was, I present a backstage perspective in Appendix M.

Overview of Mixed Methods Action Research Design

As a mid-level theory, action research (AR) “is a way of investigating your practice in order to improve it. It is a rigorous methodology that begins with a question of

the form, “How do I improve my practice?” (Whitehead, 1989, in McNiff, 2013, p. 3). In its simplest form, AR involves diagnosing a problem, planning, acting, and then evaluating results. It is distinct from other forms of research in that the researcher (a) is studying a personal problem of practice; (b) conducts the research in the field with others; (c) does not attempt to remain impartial and “erase” herself from the research; and (d) engages in an iterative, cyclical process (Friedman & Rogers, 2009; Grogan et al., 2007; McNiff, 2013; Riel, 2010). According to Bradburry Huang (2010) a key feature of action research is disseminating the new knowledge it creates to the field.

There is an opportunity to use action research whenever reality does not match values, or whenever there is a disconnect between theories of action and theories of practice. Action research is a way of learning that changes the very thing being studied (Fullan, 2006). I chose to use action research because I have personally felt and witnessed conflict between Arizona’s school district superintendents and charter school leaders—a reality that does not match my values. This conflict was my problem of practice and I wanted to take action to improve the relationship between the two communities. As an active member in both communities, I acknowledge that I am not an impartial researcher and I make no attempts to erase myself from this study. The process of improving the relationship between Arizona’s school district and charter school leaders is an ongoing, iterative process. Finally, I intend to communicate what I have learned from this study to the field so they may learn from it and contribute to future cycles. Charter schools themselves were originally designed to be laboratories for action research (Budde, 1989; Shanker, 1988). It is my desire that action research helps them to contribute more fully to Arizona’s public education community.

As an action research project, the purpose of bringing these two groups together around a collective project was to increase positive intergroup relations between the participants that could serve as a catalyst for improved relations between the two groups across the state. I also wanted to enter into and enrich the larger intergroup contact conversation. Therefore, I used a mixed-methods design to anchor the study within the established, quantitative intergroup contact research and to provide a bridge for a qualitative exploration of ways intergroup contact affected participants' expressions of allophilia towards the outgroup. I also wanted to contribute to both the larger intergroup contact and charter school discussions by providing insights into the ways participating superintendents and charter leaders socially construct their perceptions of conflict between their communities.

Through a mixed-methods design, I sought to provide a way for qualitative research to contribute to the quantitative intergroup contact literature. Without the quantitative section connecting this research to prior research in the field, this study would have been at risk of being dismissed by intergroup contact scholars because of its ontological, epistemological, and methodological differences (Koro-Ljungberg, 2012). Therefore, I situated the study within the quantitative intergroup contact research by measuring the relationship between intergroup contact and allophilia (Pittinsky, 2015), positive feelings toward the outgroup (district or charter), through surveys completed at the beginning and end of the study. However, in a departure from other intergroup contact studies, I also attempted to provide a new perspective of the intergroup contact by qualitatively exploring participants' socially constructed expressions of allophilia before and after intergroup contact. Finally, I also sought to contribute to both the intergroup

contact literature and the charter school literature by qualitatively exploring how, during in-group discussions (first and second focus groups) and intergroup discussions (iPED meetings), participants socially constructed and negotiated narratives that sustain the conflict between their communities.

Quantitative intergroup contact research has explored the mechanisms by which intergroup contact improves relationships between communities (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Dys-Steenbergen, Wright, & Aron, 2015; Pettigrew, 1998, 2008), but it cannot interrogate how people involved in intergroup contact socially construct perceptions of their intergroup conflict. Thus, I relied on qualitative research to expand my understanding of how these particular representatives of the district and charter communities socially constructed and negotiated conflict within the context of this particular action research study. Table 1 outlines the mixed methods research design for this study.

Table 1

Mixed Methods Research Design

	Allophilia	Intergroup Conflict
Research Question(s)	RQ1 (quantitative) RQ2 (quantitative and qualitative)	RQ3 (qualitative)
Theoretical perspective	Post-positivism	Social constructionism
Mid-level theory(ies)	Intergroup Contact Theory Allophilia	Intergroup Contact Theory Collective narratives
Methods		
Data Collection	Allophilia Scale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening • Closing Audio transcripts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First focus groups • Second focus groups 	Recordings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups • iPED meetings Audio transcripts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups • iPED meetings
Data Analysis	Allophilia Scale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive statistics • Wilcoxon signed ranks Audio transcripts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content analysis 	Narrative analysis

In the next three sections, I describe my theoretical perspective, mid-level theories, data collection, and data analysis for each of my three research questions.

Research Question 1: Investigating Allophilia

Between District and Charter Through Surveys

I investigated RQ1 from a quantitative methodology, adopting a post-positivism theoretical perspective based on determination, reductionism, empirical observation and measurement, and theory verification (Cresswell, 2014). The mid-level theories for this phase were from the intergroup conflict literature; specifically, intergroup contact

(Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and allophilia (Pittinsky, 2015; Pittinsky & Montoya, 2009; Pittinsky et al., 2011), which are both theories within field of intergroup conflict. Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis (intergroup contact theory) posited that groups experiencing conflict with each other (intergroup conflict) can reduce tensions and improve positive feelings through face-to-face interaction under certain conditions (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Thus, intergroup contact served as the mid-level theory I used to frame the context of the problem (intergroup conflict) and the intervention (ingroup contact) (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Quantitatively measuring changes in allophilia allowed me to document whether my intervention was associated with an increase in positive feelings between school district and charter school leaders, which allowed me to situate this study within the larger field of intergroup contact studies.

Methodologically, I used a survey (see Appendices B and C for paper examples of the District Superintendent and Charter Leader Surveys) to collect data and used SPSS to analyze the data through descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests on the data as three separate datasets (all participants, superintendents, and charter leaders) for allophilia and each of its five constructs (*affection, comfort, kinship, engagement, and enthusiasm*). I enriched this understanding by qualitatively exploring allophilia related speech as they occurred within specific contexts, before and after the contact event (RQ2).

Research Question 2: Investigating Allophilia

Between District and Charter (Voiced)

Next, although I kept a post-positivism stance, I qualitatively investigated allophilia related talk as it naturally occurred during the first and second district superintendent and charter leader focus groups. I used the same two mid-level theories for this phase from the intergroup conflict literature; intergroup contact (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and allophilia (Pittinsky, 2015; Pittinsky & Montoya, 2009; Pittinsky et al., 2011).

Identifying voiced allophilia from the first and second focus groups and counting the occurrences allowed me to compare across time (first and second focus group) and between the two groups (district and charter). This step allowed me to determine if there was a relationship between my intervention and spoken allophilia, which augmented the survey results. It also allowed me to situate this study within the larger field of intergroup contact studies. I enriched this understanding by exploring the types of expressed allophilia and comparing the types of expressions across time (first and second focus groups) and between the two groups (district and charter).

Methodologically, the data sources for the qualitative analysis related to RQ2 included transcripts of the recordings from the first and second district superintendents and charter leader focus groups. I analyzed the data using content analysis to identify allophilia-related talk. I reported my analysis quantitatively (frequency) and qualitatively (what was said).

Research Question 3: Investigating Conflict -Supporting Narratives

I investigated RQ3 from a purely qualitative perspective, adopting a social constructionist stance (Gergen, 1999, 2009) and using two mid-level theories from the intergroup conflict literature; intergroup contact (Allport, 1954) and conflict-sustaining collective narratives (Bar-Tal, 2007; Bar-Tal et al, 2014) to provide context and a lens for analysis. Within various disciplines, social constructionism has itself been constructed and understood in different ways. The constructionist researcher may focus on socially constructed content and/or processes used to socially construct (Hosking, 2011). Therefore, as it relates to RQ3, social constructionism was an appropriate theoretical framework because I was interested in both the socially constructed content and the social construction process (Gergen, 2009) of conflict-supporting narratives.

Intergroup contact theory compliments social constructionism because intergroup contact brings people from rival groups together to engage in dialogue with the goal of improving the relationship between their communities, which is supported by the constructionist principles that meaning comes through relationships with others and that words and language are not just descriptions of reality—they have the capacity to change that reality. Together, representatives from communities with a history of conflict have the potential to change how they perceive and experience that conflict as they engage in intergroup dialogue and their dialogue constructs new ways of being to. Therefore, like intergroup contact, social constructionism offers hope that “the moment we begin to speak together, we have the potential to create new ways of being” (Gergen, 2009, p. 29).

Collective narratives, according to Bar-Tal (2007), hold communities together by societal beliefs that “provide a basis for common understanding of reality” (p. 1435).

These beliefs become a lens through which society members receive and interpret information and experiences. Bruner defined collective narratives as “accounts of a community’s collective experiences, embodied in its belief system and represent the collective’s symbolically constructed shared identity” (Bruner, 1990, p. 76). People within each community engaged in intractable intergroup conflict share a collective narrative that makes sense of the conflict, what Bar-Tal called, collective narratives. This collective narrative consists of narratives about the past (collective memory¹¹) and narratives about the present¹² (ethos; Bar-Tal et al., 2014). The collective narrative framework aligns with a more general social constructionist theory because the narratives themselves are socially constructed (Bar-Tal, 2007) and are used to negotiate the conflict between the rival communities (Bar-Tal et al., 2014). Therefore, they provide a framework for investigating both the content that was socially constructed as well as examining the social construction process itself (Gergen, 2009; Hosking, 2011; Pearce, 1992). I found this particular framework helpful because it allowed me to move beyond the micro level of words from the transcripts to better understand what was happening within the dialogue that continued to construct the conflict between district superintendents and charter school leaders.

¹¹ Collective memory: (a) Provide ingroup members with a common understanding of the conflict’s origins and justification for the conflict’s beginning and continuance; (b) present the ingroup in a positive light; (c) delegitimize the outgroup; and (d) present the ingroup as a victim of the outgroup (Bar-Tal, 2007, pp. 1436-1438).

¹² Ethos of the conflict: (a) Justness of own group’s goals; (b) security; (c) positive collective self-image (attributing positive traits, values, and behavior to the ingroup); (d) the victimization of the ingroup (that the ingroup is the sole victim of the conflict); (e) delegitimizing the rival group (outgroup); (f) patriotism (loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice);(g) unity (ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements to unite against the external threat; and (h) peace as the ultimate desire of the society (Bar-Tal, 2007, p. 1438).

Methodologically, the data sources for the qualitative analysis related to RQ3 were primarily the recordings from the first and second focus groups and the four iPED meetings and the written transcripts of those recordings. I supplemented this data with the notes my assistant took during the focus groups and iPED meetings, memos I made after each focus group and iPED meeting, and memos I wrote during the analytic process (my questions and insights). I used Bar-Tal and Bar-Tal and colleagues' narrative frameworks (2007, 2014) to analyze the data at different levels, including narrative content and process. I reported my analysis qualitatively in two sections:

1. Narrative Content: Including four themes I developed to describe the conflict content that I then used as the basis for creating two collective narratives from transcript quotes. The District Narrative and the Charter Narrative serve as representations of collective narratives participants socially constructed over the course of the study. I also analyze each narrative through the framework of conflict-sustaining, collective narratives provided by Bar-Tal (2007) and Bar-Tal et al (2014).

3. The socially constructed narrative process: A narrative analysis of portions of the transcripts through the framework of conflict-sustaining, collective narratives provided by Bar-Tal (2007) and Bar-Tal et al (2014) to illustrate the process participants used to socially construct and negotiate their conflict-sustaining narratives.

Intervention

What can we find that brings us together to have a conversation?

—Jenna (participant, line 420897)

This action research project examined the influence of an intervention designed to increase positive intergroup relations between participating school district and charter

school leaders that could serve as the impetus for improved relations across the state. I formed and facilitated the Arizona Initiative for Public Education Dialogue (AZ iPED), comprised of seven politically active district and charter leaders from my personal network. The members of AZ iPED met four times from October through December, 2016 to engage in intergroup dialogue and discuss potential joint policies that could serve as a basis for collaborative policy advocacy efforts. The AZ iPED provided a space for intergroup contact that met most of Allport's (1954) four optimal conditions. The first, equal status, was addressed by holding the iPED meetings at a neutral location (ASU West), having equal representation at the meetings, and attempting to facilitate the meetings in a way that did not privilege one group over the other. I addressed the second condition, intergroup cooperation, and the third condition, common goals, by setting goals for each iPED meeting and having an overarching goal of the group finding joint policy positions they could support and potentially take back to their respective associations. In retrospect, however, I believe the primary mechanism for cooperation and common goals was the relationship I had with each participant that motivated them to want to help me with my research. Allport's fourth condition is support from institutional authorities. Because of participant confidentiality requirements, I did not explicitly seek support from institutional authorities. However, the Arizona Charter Association and Arizona School Administrators Association provided support by providing space for the focus groups¹³.

¹³ The second superintendent focus group had to be rescheduled to a time when the ASA office was closed. Therefore, the last focus group was held in my conference room rather than the ASA offices.

Prior to bringing the two groups together, I electronically administered the Allophilia Scale (Appendices B and C) to each participant to gather quantitative data regarding the degree of positive feelings and attitudes participants have towards the outgroup. I also administered the Allophilia Scale again at the end of the study to measure changes in feelings and attitudes.

The rest of this section presents an overview of each meeting's design, including my supporting rationale. For each meeting, I also reported how many district superintendents and charter leaders participated along with my description of what happened.

Before the participants began their collective work, I conducted two focus groups (one with charter leaders and another with district superintendents) to elicit discussions within each group regarding each community's perspectives of conflict between the district and charter communities, and their perspectives of the strengths and weaknesses of the school district and charter school communities (see Appendices D and E for focus group protocols). Because focus groups allow participants to interact with each other in order to construct and express perspectives on a given subject (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1998; Hollander, 2004), I believed focus groups were an appropriate method for generating data to answer my research questions. I was interested in understanding at the group level, how participants from the district and charter communities expressed allophilia towards each other (RQ2) and how they socially constructed and negotiated intergroup conflict (RQ3). Three charter leaders participated in the first charter focus groups and three district leaders participated in the first district focus groups. Each focus

group lasted about an hour and a half. Following these focus groups, I facilitated the four face-to-face iPED meetings (see Appendix F for iPED Protocol).

Two district participants and two charter participants came to the first iPED meeting. After brief introductions, I had them share their personal education stories. The purpose of this activity was to encourage reciprocal self-disclosure, which is thought to “facilitate a more in-depth understanding of the outgroup through increased perspective taking and subsequent feelings of empathy for the outgroup, both of which are important for the development of positive intergroup relations” (Swart et al., 2007, p. 185). During the first meeting, I also led the group through some questions based on appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995) to identify strengths in Arizona’s public education system (district and charter), recall times when the two communities worked together for a common goal, and imagine possible futures based on those strengths. This activity was designed to support group members in co-imagining a new, positive future relationship. Participants identified several positive statewide accomplishments including the Joint Technical Education Districts (JTED) system, statewide testing and school performance data, and school choice. In regards to the district and charter communities working together, they discussed the groups recently working together to advocate for adequate funding, as well as specific examples of cooperative efforts between individual districts and charters (including transportation and providing meal services). The group also began to talk about some topics that continued through other iPED meetings: charter school enrollment policies and challenges superintendents felt when working with publically elected school boards, which was contrasted with charter school boards.

Intergroup literature indicates perspective taking is a mediator for positive intergroup relations (Galinsky et al., 2005; Gubbins & MacCurtain, 2008; Head, 2012; Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Zuma, 2014). Therefore, during the second iPED meeting, we used Kittel's (2013) strategic alliance framework to discuss district and charter perspectives of themselves and each other.¹⁴ According to Kittel, attributing others' actions to deviousness, incompetence, or lunacy is evidence one does not understand their perspective (J. Kittel, personal communication, 2013), and it is only possible to move on to mutual value-building after both parties can clearly see themselves through the other person's filter. Three district superintendents and three charter leaders participated in this meeting. Kittel's framework allowed participants to discuss perceptions, including strengths and weaknesses of their own and each other's community. Appendix G shows a completed worksheet that reflects the perspectives discussed during this meeting. One thread of conversation of note was about the costs districts had to pay for bond and override elections and school board elections. During the second charter focus group, participants referred back to this discussion and agreed it provided new information for most of them. From my perspective, the discussion was the most open, honest discussion of the four iPED meetings. Because there were some tense moments, I began the third iPED meeting by asking for feedback about the second iPED meeting. Participants said they thought it was a nice, open discussion, although the women seemed more aware of tension than the men. The women joked that the male-female perspective on feeling tension would make a good a topic for future research.

¹⁴ The four perspectives are district of charter; charter of district; district of district; and charter of charter (Appendix A).

From a social constructionist perspective, narratives are an important topic of study because people use stories to organize, process, and convey information (Berinsky & Kinder, 2006; Gerrig & Egidi, 2003; Klein, 2003). According to the narrative policy framework (NFP; Roe, 1994) in areas of high uncertainty, complexity, and polarization, policymakers use policy narratives to make decisions. Therefore, during the third meeting, the discussion focused on identifying the major policy narratives influencing or attempting to influence Arizona's policymakers. I believed this step was important to the process because identifying these narratives "not only outlines the discursive space [that houses deliberation] but also determines the ideational distance between policy narratives" (Ney, 2014, p. 213). Thus, this step was intended to frame the discursive space for district and charter leaders to identify potential joint policy proposals. Three district superintendents and two charter leaders participated in this meeting. Policy narrative discussions included the narrative that superintendents are all making a lot of money and that is why money is not making it into the classroom, failing public schools, and the accompanying narrative that public schools are something to "escape." Charter participants said there was a parallel charter narrative about money going to administration rather than the classroom (see Appendix H for a list of policy narratives discussed during this meeting).

After participants engaged in the exercises that had been designed to decrease intergroup tensions, increase positive intergroup relations, and set up the discursive space, during the fourth iPED meeting the group discussed potential educational policies they could both support. Four district superintendents and two charter leaders participated in this meeting. Although several policy areas were brought up and discussed, I was

disappointed the group did not reach consensus on joint policies. Possible explanations include my lack of experience in facilitating intergroup dialogue or a flaw in the study design. Other potential causes could be the imbalance between the number of district (four) and charter leaders (two) who attended this meeting and the fact that this was the first time some participants had been at the same iPED meetings. Whatever the reason, whenever someone put a potential policy on the table, someone else changed the conversation. Appendix I lists the policy positions brought up at this meeting.

Overall, I thought the iPED discussions had gone well, and during the second focus groups¹⁵, I was expecting to hear how the discussions had changed the participants' perspectives. The three charter participants met first. I was shocked and disheartened when they began the focus group by stating the iPED meetings had generally confirmed their prior perceptions of district superintendents. Charter leaders did say they did learned a few things (specifically, about district politics and the costs of elections) and they were generally pleased with the meetings. They thought the superintendents were nice, interesting people and they also agreed charters had more in common with the smaller districts. One of the other things that surprised me during the final focus group was how the discussion repeatedly turned into presenting positive aspects of charters in comparison to districts.

Because of the charter focus group, I was not as surprised when the final district superintendent focus group followed a similar pattern. Yes, they learned a few things, thought the conversations were interesting, and agreed that the charter leaders they met shared their passion for what they were doing and seemed to be working in education for

¹⁵ See Appendix E for the second focus group protocol.

the right reasons. The superintendent conversation during the second focus group also repeatedly turned into presenting positive aspects of districts in comparison to charters. In the Findings section, I explain how the framework provided by Bar-Tal (2007) and Bar-Tal et al (2014) about conflict-sustaining, collective narratives helped me understand this phenomenon. Next, I describe how I selected my participants along with general demographic data to describe the population.

Participants

Drawing from my personal network of district superintendents who regularly attend the Arizona School Administrator (ASA) events and charter leaders who are active on the Charter Leader Advisory Council (CLAC), I used an iterative process to create a list of potential participants. I wanted to consider everyone within each target group. Therefore, I used the Arizona Charter Schools Association (ACSA) website listing of CLAC members (N = 16) and Forecast5's 5Share ASA group (N = 272) of school district superintendents to define the pool of potential participants. I attempted to create representative samples of the populations of interest (district superintendent and charter school leaders who were actively involved in their respective associations) by seeking a variety in the size of district or charter, location in the state, gender, age, and ethnicity. Because the charter leader pool was much smaller than the district superintendent pool, I began by listing potential charter leaders and then attempted to match the level/degree of diversity within the charter leaders with the diversity within the district superintendents. From the charter list, I selected people who were the head executive of their charter, who did not serve as a statewide policy maker (not on a regulatory board), and with whom I had had more than one conversation. My original goal was to have three men and three

women in both groups. However, the pool of potential male charter leaders was limited. Eventually, I narrowed my potential participant list to eight district superintendents (five men and three women) and eight charter leaders (four men and four women).

I recruited participants both in-person and through e-mail. All but two superintendents and two charter leaders agreed to participate. The reasons given for not participating included travel schedules, distance, and too many other commitments. Therefore, I began the study with six district superintendent participants (three men and three women) and six charter leader participants (two men and four women).

In reality, five district superintendents (three men and two women) and three charter leaders (one man and two women) participated in one or more iPED meetings. Due to schedules, each iPED meeting had a different mix of participants. Table 2 shows who participated in each meeting (all names are pseudonyms). To protect participants' identities, I reported their demographic information in aggregate. Participants represented both large and small districts and charters, located in urban and rural areas from several different counties in Arizona. Most of them were between 40 and 49 years of age. The length of time district participants had served as superintendents ranged from 4 to 11 years. Each of the charter participants had been a charter leader at least 19 years.

Table 2

Who Participated in Each Meeting?

	1st FG	1st iPED	2nd iPED	3rd iPED	4th iPED	2nd FG
Karen		X	X	X	X	X
Tom	X	X		X	X	X
David	X		X	X	X	X
Billie			X	X		
Matt	X				X	X
<i>Peter</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>
<i>Catherine</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>		<i>X</i>
<i>Jenna</i>	<i>X</i>		<i>X</i>		<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>

Note. All names are pseudonyms. District superintendents are bold. Charter leaders are italic.

Although I tried to include a cross-section of participants, I cannot claim the participants are representative of the populations of interest. Before the study, I made a personal connection at some level with each participant as a colleague. During both of the second focus groups, when asked if they were glad if they had participated in the iPED meetings, the overall response was “yes.” However, the superintendents, who had either completed the doctoral dissertation process themselves or were in the process of getting their doctorates, agreed their primary motivation for participating was to help me with my research. Likewise, the charter leaders agreed that anything they learned and any potential “softening of relationships” with the district community were secondary to their desire to help me. Each of the participants of this study generously shared their time to help me and it would be reasonable to assume they had a higher baseline of positive feelings toward the outgroup (district or charter) than is representative of the general school district superintendent and charter school leader populations. Therefore, because

my participants were not representative of the populations of interest and because of the small n count (n = 8), I do not claim my quantitative findings are generalizable.

Researcher Positioning

As a member of the Arizona Charter Schools Association's Charter Leader Advisory Council and the superintendents division of the Arizona School Administrators I feel a sense of belonging in two communities with a history of conflict. I have relationships with district superintendents and charter school leaders and, at times, have been uncomfortable with the ways the two communities talk about each other. From my perspective, the underlying conflicts stop the district and charter school communities from speaking with one voice to advocate for things that are in the best interest of all of Arizona's public school students. In addition to being a member of two communities, I also come to this study with specific philosophical assumptions.

Cresswell (2012) defined philosophy as "the use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our research" (p. 16). Baxter and Babbie (2003) referred to three theoretical views: premodern, modern, and postmodern (p. 7). Cresswell (2014) categorized them as postpositivism, constructivism, transformative, and pragmatism (p. 6). Although a description of the various possible theoretical frameworks is beyond the scope of this paper (for a discussion see Cresswell, 2012, 2014), I want to be transparent about my own philosophical paradigm and how it influenced how I framed this research. Therefore, I return to the subject of social constructionism and how I reconciled it with my personal Christian beliefs.

According to social constructionism, all meaning is rooted in relationship. This concept aligns with the Christian teaching that people were created to live in relationship

with God and other people. Social constructionists also believe words create realities (Gergen, 1994). According to the Genesis 1, God “spoke” the world into existence (New American Standard Bible (NASB). When I read about the constructionist concept of words creating realities I was instantly reminded of John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (NASB). Social constructionists believe that, because meaning is socially constructed, it can also be socially re-constructed. As Gergen (2009) said, “The moment we begin to speak together, we have the potential to create new ways of being” (p. 29). This quote reminded me of the phrase, “Come now, and let us reason together” from Isaiah 1:18 (NASB). Because of these parallels, despite the potential criticism from those who may brand me as a relativist, I am at peace using social constructionist as the primary grand theory to frame my study.

I also need to acknowledge that my positionality impacted the focus groups and iPED discussions. I facilitated all of them. And although I consider myself a member of both communities, I am a charter leader, not a district superintendent. I have worked in two school districts and have been accepted by the superintendents as someone who “came up through their system.” However, my presence as a charter school leader meant the district focus groups were not a mirror image of the charter focus groups. This fact was noted by the charter leaders at the end of their first focus group and made salient during the district focus groups whenever participants asked for my perspective as a charter leader or said “you” in response to a question about charter leaders. Other than asking questions to start the conversation, I generally attempted to insert myself as little as possible into the discussions. During the third focus group, we had two charter leaders

and four district superintendents and one of the charter leaders left the room to answer a phone call. Attempting to keep a sense of balance to the conversation, I did enter into that portion of the conversation as a charter participant. Although I attempted to remain neutral, my identity as a charter leader cannot be denied and I acknowledge I was an integral part of the study. Additionally, my perspective colored my analysis and how I chose to report my findings.

Data Collection and Sources

Data sources for Research Question 1 included participants' responses to a beginning and ending survey that included demographic items and an adapted Allophilia Scale. The surveys were adapted¹⁶ from the Allophilia Scale (Pittinsky et al., 2011), which was designed to measure positive feelings toward the outgroup. The Allophilia Scale asked participants to respond to 17 closed-ended, six-item Likert scale statements that were structured as a semantic differential (only 1 = *strongly disagree* and 6 = *strongly agree* were labeled).

The survey was administered twice online via SurveyMonkey. I emailed participating district superintendents and charter leaders a link to their respective surveys a few days before the first focus group and the day after the second focus group. Participants took the survey independently online. The survey also collected demographic data I used to describe the participants earlier in this chapter.

During the four focus groups and four iPED meetings, participating members of the district and charter communities engaged in ingroup dialogue and intergroup

¹⁶ To measure positive feelings towards my target populations, I adapted the Allophilia Scale by inserting "school district superintendents" and "charter school leader" as the target outgroups (see Appendices B and C).

dialogue. The recordings and transcripts of these discussions provided rich, layered data appropriate for exploring and interpreting the discourse from two orientations: “the first concerned with the content and the second with process or function.” (Gergen, 2009, p. 64). Therefore, Research Questions 2 and 3 relied on recordings and transcripts of dialogue from focus group discussions (the first and second district superintendent focus groups and the first and second charter leader focus groups). For Research Question 3, I also used recordings and transcripts of conversations during intergroup contact between district superintendents and charter leaders (four iPED meetings). I used the same procedures to record and transcribe the focus groups and iPED meetings.

I audio-recorded each of the eight meetings with two recorders, set at opposite ends of the table. Recordings were made of each meeting in its entirety, approximately six hours of dialogue from the four iPED meetings and four hours of dialogue from focus group discussions. Because I was facilitating the meetings, I had an assistant take notes about non-verbal communication and to help me remember what happened during the meetings. After each meeting, I recorded or wrote memos to make a record of my thoughts and reactions to the meeting. My memos provided me with my initial reaction to the meetings, including my evaluation (e.g., noting there were some tense moments during the second meeting, and being frustrated after the fourth meeting that the discussion avoided coming to consensus on specific policy issues). During my analysis, I used memos to make a record of and think through my questions and insights about the data because “memos are sites of conversation with ourselves about our data” (Clarke, 2005, p. 202, in Saldana, 2013, p. 40).

After recording each focus group with two recorders spaced to maximize coverage, I sent one recording for each meeting to Rev.com so they could complete the initial transcriptions for me. When Rev could not transcribe one meeting because of audio quality, I sent them the second recording, which they were able to transcribe. Although some recordings were transcribed with the pseudonyms I provided, one was transcribed identifying participants as “Speaker 1,” “Speaker 2,” etc. Because the participants introduced themselves to each other at the beginning of a meeting, that transcription used actual participant names instead of the pseudonyms I provided. One transcription identified speakers simply as “male” and “female.” I listened to the recordings in chronological order before I began the process of preparing them for analysis. To prepare the transcripts for analysis, I listened to each of them repeatedly to correctly identify each speaker, fill in missing text, and correct misidentified words. I used the second recording when I could not be certain I understood who was speaking or what was said in the first recording. After I had properly identified each speaker, I used “find” or “replace” to change participant names, schools, and districts to pseudonyms and to mask the locations (cities, counties, neighboring districts).

I imported each of the transcripts into one Excel workbook with a separate worksheet for each focus group and iPED meeting (8 tabs). At the top of each worksheet, I identified the meeting (e.g., 1st DS focus group or 3rd iPED meeting) and listed which participants were at that particular meeting. REV transcribed the recordings by speaking turn, which meant there were large chunks of data in each cell. Although it was easy to read in this format, it limited the usefulness of Excel’s sort and filter features because each cell of text could contain several unrelated codes. Therefore, I eventually broke

most of the transcripts into phrase units. However, I left some of the longer units of speech that were not related to my research questions in one cell. Combined, the eight transcripts produced 17,426 phrase units. I organized the Excel workbook with a different phrase unit per row and renamed columns A-F, respectively as key topic, code, group (which meeting), line number, speaker, and utterance. I also identified whether the speaker was district or charter participant by color coding them (blue for district and orange for charter).

Qualitatively, my study focused on the aspects of the discussions that indicated feelings of allophilia (positive feelings toward the outgroup) and sections where participants socially constructed and negotiated their intergroup conflict. The transcripts included talk about other educational issues outside the scope of my research questions. Please see the Appendix H for the list of the identified policy narratives Appendix I for potential policy recommendations/areas for future action.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this mixed methods, action research project was twofold: to gauge the effects of intergroup contact on school district and charter school leaders' allophilia (positive attitudes towards each other) including changes as to how participants voiced allophilia; and to qualitatively investigate how the participants socially constructed perceptions of intergroup conflict between their communities. My data analysis focused on the following three research questions.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): To what extent does intergroup contact increase allophilia (positive attitudes) between school district and charter school leaders?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): In what ways do participants voice allophilia during ingroup dialogue?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do school district superintendents and charter school leaders socially construct and negotiate narratives that sustain the conflict between their two communities?

Analysis related to Research Question 1 was limited to a quantitative analysis of participants' matched Allophilia Scale responses from the beginning and end of the study. For Research Question 2, I analyzed the transcript data from the first and second focus groups for allophilia-related talk, quantitatively and qualitatively. Analysis related to Research Question 3 was purely qualitative, drawing from the complete transcript dataset of the four focus groups and four iPED meetings. I discuss each analysis in turn.

Research Question 1: Quantitative Allophilia Scale Analysis

Research Question 1 asked, "To what extent does intergroup contact increase allophilia (positive attitudes) between school district and charter school leaders?" The Allophilia Scale asked participants to respond to 17 closed-ended, six-item Likert scale statements that were structured as a semantic differential (only 1 = *strongly disagree* and 6 = *strongly agree* were labeled). I administered the scale before the first focus group and after the last focus group. I entered the survey data into SPSS and ran descriptive statistics, and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test on the data as three separate samples (all participants, superintendents, and charter leaders) for allophilia and each of its five constructs (*affection, comfort, kinship, engagement, and enthusiasm*). I report the findings from this analysis in Chapter 4.

Research Question 2: Qualitative and Quantitative Transcript Analysis of Allophilia

Research Question 2 asked, “In what ways do participants voice allophilia during ingroup dialogue?” I limited my qualitative analysis of expressed allophilia to the focus group dialogue (first focus group and second focus group) because the focus groups allowed me to compare two points in time—before and after the iPED meeting intervention. The previously discussed Allophilia Scale served to bound my study, providing data for two specific points in time—the study’s beginning and end. The focus groups took place just inside those boundaries. The first focus group provided baselines for how much and in what ways participants expressed allophilia before intergroup contact. The second focus groups could signal similarities to and changes from those baselines within each group and between groups. Therefore, I sought to determine whether there was a change in expressed allophilia in district and charter participants’ discourse in the second focus groups compared to their discourse in the first focus groups and how expressed allophilia compared between the district and charter groups.

During the first focus groups, participants engaged in dialogue with others from their ingroup community (district or charter) about questions relating to conflict between their communities and their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the charter school and school district systems (see Appendix C for the protocol for the first focus groups). The second focus groups were held after the iPED meetings, giving participants the opportunity to engage in dialogue with others from their ingroup community about their shared intergroup contact experiences. Analyzing the focus group qualitatively allowed me to add ecological validity to my quantitative survey data because it allowed me to see what allophilia sounded like during actual in-group interaction.

Moving between the transcripts and the audio recordings, I closely analyzed the content of the data from the first and second focus groups to identify allophilia-related talk (labeling allophilia as a key topic in column A). I coded (column B) words/statements in all four transcripts that suggested allophilia using the five categories identified by Pittinsky and Montoya (Pittinsky, 2015; Pittinsky et al., 2011): *affection* (I like), *comfort* (I feel comfortable with), *kinship* (I share something with), *engagement* (I'm interested in), and *enthusiasm* (I'm impressed by).

During this step of coding, I also noticed several expressions of empathy that, to me, seemed to indicate allophilia and I coded them empathy. Although Pittinsky and Montoya (2011) did not include empathy in the five factors that comprise allophilia, the intergroup contact literature nonetheless theorized that empathy and perspective taking are important mechanisms by which intergroup contact improves relationships between groups with a history of conflict (Boag & Carnelley, 2016; Head, 2012; Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). Therefore, I believed the expressions of empathy I discovered in my data signaled positive feelings toward the outgroup because the participants who expressed empathy had to be able to see things from the other's perspective before they could feel empathy. Some scholars theorize that perspective taking is seeing yourself in the other (Galinsky et al., 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), which sounds very much like the third allophilia factor of *kinship*.

Returning to the allophilia literature, I discovered a rare mixed methods longitudinal study of intergroup contact (Livert, 2016). In that study, the author stated that *kinship* (one of the five factors of allophilia) included "perspective taking and/or empathy." However, not only was I unable to find any other allophilia literature that

included empathy as part of *kinship*, but a recent article by Pittinsky and Montoya (2016) made an indirect argument against empathy being part of allophilia. Allophilia was specifically designed to describe positive emotions toward the outgroup (Pittinsky et al., 2011). However, Pittinsky and Montoya (2016) made the case that empathy traditionally indicates empathetic sorrow, which they classify as a negative emotion. Instead, they make a case for a new social construct that they consider to be more positive: empathic joy. Thus, from the perspective of the original allophilia theorists, empathy does not fit under their construct of *kinship* as a facet of allophilia. Therefore, I chose to report empathy statements as separate from *kinship*, but notable because they signal a change in feelings toward the outgroup after the iPED meetings (my intergroup contact intervention). Because of this connection between empathy and *kinship*, and the importance of empathy in the intergroup contact literature, I decided to also code for empathy in my analysis of allophilia.

Following this round of allophilia coding, I then compared data from the first and second district focus groups by looking at both the quantity and quality of voiced allophilia statements. I followed by comparing data from the first and second charter focus group data for the same elements. Finally, I looked at how the district allophilia related talk was similar to and/or different from the charter allophilia related talk. The quantity of allophilia talk could be measured in several ways (e.g., the number of allophilia-related words or phrases, the number of allophilia-related speaking turns, or amount of time allophilia related utterances were spoken). I chose to count each allophilia-related phrase and verbal agreements (e.g., um-hum, yes, I agree), even if the

speaker was repeating himself/herself during the same speaking turn. I report my findings from this analysis in Chapter 4.

Research Question 3: Qualitative Analysis of Narratives used to Socially Construct and Negotiate Conflict

Research 3 asked, “How do school district superintendents and charter school leaders socially construct and negotiate narratives that sustain the conflict between their two communities?” For this question, I sought to analyze how the district and charter participants socially constructed conflict narratives in terms of both the content of the narratives and the interactional processes by which they came into being. Narratives were an appropriate choice because the purpose of narrative research aligned with the purpose of this study. Specifically, “the hope [of narrative researchers] is to close the distance between social groups, and in many cases, to stimulate social or political action” (Gergen, 2009, pp. 66-67). This hope aligned with my goal to improve the relationship between district superintendents and charter leaders. The choice to investigate the content and processes of those narratives was appropriate from a social constructionist stance because, according to Gergen (2009), content and process are the two principal orientations for social constructionists. Examining both the content and the process was also appropriate because the results have the potential to provide a more holistic understanding than either of them could provide alone.

As I mentioned earlier, my analysis process was messy. It eventually led me to reshape the research question itself. However, to avoid frustrating the reader, I erase the messiness here and present my analysis linearly. Readers interested in understanding the entire, iterative, messy process can find it described in the backstage in Appendix M.

As a broad overview of my analytic process, I first sought to holistically understand the content of each group's conflict-related talk in order to understand the elements participants were using to construct their narratives of the conflict between them. I approached the data inductively, exploring the range of each group's talk about conflict throughout the transcripts and developing themes to describe the content. I wove those themes into two composite narratives I fashioned from participants' quotes from the transcripts; the Charter Narrative (big "N") and the District Narrative (big "N"). I further interpreted each Narrative through Bar-Tal's (2007) framework of conflict-sustaining collective narratives. Finally, I sought to interpret the processes used to socially construct and negotiate intergroup conflict conflict-sustaining, collective narratives through reading sections of dialogue from the iPED meetings through Bar-Tal (2007) and Bar-Tal and colleagues' (2014) conflict-sustaining narrative framework. Below, I describe how I orientated myself to the data and provided a detailed description of my narrative analysis process.

Orienting overview of data analysis. Referencing Alexander (1988), Holstein and Gubrium (2012) wrote,

In order to cast the widest possible exploratory net, the researcher needs to read the narrative passages within opened and a discerning mind, searching for ideas that strike the ear especially salient, reoccurring, surprising, or potentially revealing of central psychological dynamics and issues. (p. 18)

Seeking to cast my exploratory net widely in regards to understanding how district superintendents and charter school leaders socially constructed and negotiated narratives that sustain the conflict between the two communities, I oriented myself to the data by immersing myself in it, listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts several times. I listened to the recordings and read the transcripts chronologically and then

juxtaposed sections with and against each other to discover differences and similarities in the way the groups talked about school districts, charter schools, and conflict between them (e.g., first charter focus group and second charter focus group, first charter focus group and first district focus group, first iPED meeting and last iPED meeting, etc.). The recordings became my background soundtrack for everyday tasks like cooking and driving. Because “memos are sites of conversation with ourselves about our data” (Clarke, 2005, p. 202 in Saldana, 2013, p. 40), I continued to socially construct meaning through writing memos as I gained insights or had questions

Interpreting perceptions of conflict. After I was thoroughly familiar with the recordings and transcripts, I investigated the range of each group’s conflict-related talk within the focus group and iPED meeting transcripts. My intention was to understand the content of the overall district story and charter story of the conflict between the groups by identifying the elements each group was using to construct their story. As an initial step, I identified all the talk that indicated participants’ perceptions of conflict. I coded all the conflict-related talk conflict (column A) and then gave each conflict code an nvivo code (column B). Thus, “we get a little jealous” was coded *jealous* and “that misinformation is really, you know, undermining our efforts” was coded *misinformation* and *undermining*.

After all the conflict talk had an nvivo code, I used Excel’s filter feature to show only the coded talk. I pasted this conflict talk from each of the eight worksheets into a single fresh worksheet. Then I sorted by speaker and color-coded district speakers blue and charter speakers orange so I could use Excel’s sort/filter features to look at codes by district and charter. Then, I sorted by code alphabetically in order to combine different forms of the same word (e.g., *jealous* and *jealousy* received the same code, *jealous*). I re-

coded words with the same basic meaning (e.g., jealous and envying were combined as *envying*) and made a copy of the worksheet. Within the new worksheet, I deleted duplicate codes and sorted the codes under a district column and charter column, matching codes used by both groups. As a result of this stage of analysis, I had 58 total codes, including 14 codes in common, 12 that were unique to districts, and 30 that were unique to charters (see Appendix J for codes). Then, I moved to notecards, listing each code on a notecard and sorting the notecards into clusters with similar codes until I did not believe I could combine the conflict codes any further without reducing all of them back to their original “content” code¹⁷. I went through this process for many days until I eventually decided upon four clustering categories and assigned a theme to each of them to describe my interpretation of that particular cluster’s contents.

The four themes I used to describe what I saw in the conflict coded talk are as follows: (a) *competition sets the stage for conflict*; (b) *actions construct conflict*; (c) *perceptions sustain conflict*; (d) *conflict causes feelings*. Together these themes suggested the conflict had narrative elements for both groups. The setting is a competition taking place between the two communities, who become their own protagonist and the other’s antagonists based on actions and perceptions that result in negative feelings that further fuel the conflict. Examining the codes within each theme by district and charter allowed me to gain insights into the different ways each group perceived the conflict and allowed me to interpret why a specific type of talk was considered an act of conflict by the district

¹⁷ This process included grouping and re-grouping the codes—going back and forth from the codes to the specific sections of coded conflict talk and the talk surrounding them that provided context.

superintendents and another type of talk was considered an act of conflict by the charter leaders. I present these findings in Chapter 4.

My first level of analysis served as a foundation for building two collective narratives from the transcripts using my participants' words extracted from the themes from the coded data. The narrative format made sense because narratives have the potential to "increase people's possibilities for hearing themselves and others" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p. 37) and to "close the distance between social groups, and in many cases, to stimulate social or political action" (Gergen, 2009, pp. 66-67). Therefore, a narrative presentation was appropriate because improving the relationship between the district and charter communities was the purpose of my study. My innovation purposefully fostered intergroup contact between district and charter members because of the research that suggests intergroup contact can improve relationships between communities in conflict. By creating collective narratives from their own words, I hoped to increase the possibility that district and charter communities might hear themselves and each other in a new way.

I made the decision to create a compilation of collective narratives for several reasons. First, based on my grand theory of social constructionism, I was interested in perceptions of intergroup conflict as the content was socially constructed at the group level rather than at the level of the individual. Reporting at the group level also provided a way for me to succinctly present a large amount of rich data. Finally, I decided to present the findings as a single narrative to protect the identities of my participants. I believe the iPED meetings could be the basis for collegial relationships between district superintendents and charter leaders. I was concerned that quotes that could be attributed

to a specific participants, especially quotes that present a negative image of the outgroup, could undermine future relationships. The participants have distinct personalities and distinct ways of speaking. Even with pseudonyms, I felt the participants might be able to identify each other. Presenting these findings as a compilation narrative was consistent from both a theoretical and ethical perspective.

Therefore, I decided to further analyze the transcripts for phrases and themes I could use to construct narratives that could reflect my interpretation of the district and charter conflict narratives as they had been constructed by the participants within the context of this study. I named the District Narrative (big N) and Charter Narrative (big C). and described them as composite, collective, conflict narratives: Composite, because they were formed by combining direct quotes from the transcripts; collective, because they represented what I perceived to be each group's collective point of view; and narrative, because they included the narrative elements of characters in conflict with each other. I chose this format because it allowed me to bring together a rich tapestry of words my participants used as they interacted with their ingroup and the outgroup. The use of the (big N) Narrative suggested they were influenced by the (big C) conversations about education at the state and national level.

Because I have engaged in dialogues within each community for many years, I came to this study familiar with many aspects of each narrative. However, for the purposes of this analysis, I restricted my analysis to the recordings and transcripts of the focus groups and iPED meetings. The transcripts provided a snapshot of how these specific members of the charter and district communities socially constructed and

negotiated conflict-supporting narratives within this particular context (ingroup focus group dialogue and intergroup dialogue).

The four themes I created from my initial analysis of each group's conflict-related talk provided the initial structure for the narratives. I went back through the transcripts and highlighted vivid phrases representative of each theme. I also highlighted repeated phrases and ideas that I interpreted to be agreed-upon tenets of each group or that provided examples of terms/ways of talking unique to either the district or charter participants. I copied these highlighted phrases into a Word document and shaped them into a cohesive District Narrative and cohesive Charter Narrative by re-arranging them and deciding what to keep or leave out. I attempted to retain my participants' voices by using their exact wording as much as possible.

However, I recognized my influence in the process of constructing these narratives as the research designer, focus group and iPED facilitator, analyst, and author because I understand "data never speak for themselves" (Gergen, 2009, p. 64), and the researcher is always constructing (interpreting) what the data mean. Therefore, even as I compiled these collective narratives, I continued to socially construct those narratives through my interaction with the recordings and transcripts that served as traces of ingroup and intergroup discussions. My analysis was "a public dialogue carried out privately" (Gergen, 2009, p. 101). From a literary perspective, I wrote each narrative with its own single "voice." However, on a more literal (and theatrical) level, I was so familiar with the audio recordings that I could hear the speaker's voice in my head as I selected his or her portion of talk to piece together each narrative.

As I shaped the narratives, I frequently returned to the transcripts to pull in other quotes to fill in the story. I also went back and forth between the District Narrative and Charter Narrative, attempting to include counterpoints and address the same elements in each. I did not include every element of the conflict-related talk. I intended the narratives to present a coherent, simplified version of the overall conflict talk and therefore did not include many of the nuanced perspectives, exceptions, or participants' perspectives of the outgroup's strengths.

After I wrote the composite collective narratives, I returned to the literature to see how what I had constructed compared to other collective narratives. However, I did not find any compilation narratives. What I did find was Bar-Tal's (2007) work on the sociopsychological foundations of intractable conflicts and his suggestion that conflict-supportive narratives, including narratives about the past (collective memory)¹⁸ and narratives about the present (ethos),¹⁹ have identifiable themes, which I immediately recognized my data contained the four themes. Specifically, within my data participants justified reasons for conflict/justness of ingroup, presented their ingroup in a positive light, delegitimized the outgroup, and presented their ingroup as a victim.

¹⁸Collective memory: (a) Justification for conflict's beginning and continuance; (b) present ingroup in a positive light; (c) delegitimize outgroup; and (d) present ingroup as a victim of outgroup (Bar-Tal, 2007, pp. 1436-1438).

¹⁹ Ethos of the conflict: (a) Justness of ingroup goals; (b) security; (c) positive collective self-image (attributing positive traits, values, and behavior to the ingroup); (d) victimization of the ingroup (that the ingroup is the sole victim of the conflict); (e) delegitimizing the rival group (outgroup); (f) patriotism (loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice); (g) unity (ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements to unite against the external threat; and (h) peace as the ultimate desire of the society (Bar-Tal, 2007, p. 1438).

Therefore, I interpreted the District Narrative and the Charter Narrative I had created through Bar-Tal's framework, focusing on the four conflict-sustaining narrative themes that overlap the past and the present²⁰. Specifically, I analyzed the narratives to understand in what ways members of each group justified reasons for conflict/justness of ingroup, presented their ingroup in a positive light, delegitimized the outgroup, and presented their ingroup as a victim.

Interpreting how conflict was socially-negotiated during intergroup contact.

Not only was I interested in the content of the narratives that each group constructed about the conflict in which they were engaged, I also wanted to understand how the conflict-sustaining collective narratives were constructed and negotiated during intergroup contact in terms of the process. I interpreted how the district superintendents and charter leaders socially constructed and negotiated conflict between their two groups by reading sections of the transcript through the lens provided by Bar-Tal (2007) and Bar-Tal et al. (2014). This analysis included identifying collective narrative themes within the transcript selections and interpreting the function of the talk through the methods ingroups use to socially construct their conflict-supporting narratives. These methods included (a) relying on supportive sources; (b) marginalizing contradictory information; (c) magnifying supporting themes (especially themes about the justness of goals, collective self-preservation, delegitimizing the rival, and patriotism); (d) fabricating supportive contents (details and events unsupported by evidence; (e) omitting

²⁰ The four overlapping conflict-sustaining collective narrative themes are (a) justification for the conflict/justness of goals, (b) present ingroup in a positive light; (c) delegitimize outgroup; and (d) present ingroup as a victim of outgroup.

contradictory contents; and (f) using framing language that triggers emotions, memory, cognition, and motivation related to past events (pp. 666-667).

I selected sections to analyze by looking in the transcripts for sections of talk with rich intergroup interaction (as opposed to one person having an extended talking turn). I had previously identified one particular section in the second iPED meeting I considered especially vivid because it reminded me of a back and forth between siblings. After consulting with my dissertation committee chair, I selected a portion of that part of the discussion for deeper analysis. Then I chose a contrasting section from the same iPED meeting where the conversation was different and the conflict-sustaining narrative shifted when one of the participants expressed empathy for the outgroup and incorporated the outgroup narrative into her own. During the process of providing context for the two excerpts, I also analyzed additional sections of talk. I present these analyses in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

I report the findings in two sections. The first section contains the quantitative and qualitative results to address Research Question 1, which asks, “To what extent does intergroup contact increase allophilia (positive attitudes) between school district and charter school leaders?” (quantitative) and Research Question 2, which asks, “In what ways do participants voice allophilia during ingroup dialogue?” (quantitative and qualitative). To address these questions, I analyzed quantitative data from the first and second administration of the Allophilia Scale and the transcripts from the first and second focus groups.

The second section reports the qualitative findings related to Research Question 3, which asked, “How do school district superintendents and charter school leaders socially construct and negotiate narratives that sustain the conflict between their two communities?” (qualitative). To address this question, I analyzed the transcripts from the first and second district superintendent and charter leader focus groups and the four combined iPED meetings.

Section 1: Allophilia Findings

Because I was concerned about tensions between Arizona’s school district and charter school communities, I implemented an action research intervention (4 AZ iPED meetings) designed to increase allophilia (positive feelings) between the school district superintendents and charter school leaders. Therefore, in Research Question 1, I asked, “To what extent does intergroup contact increase allophilia (positive attitudes) between school district and charter school leaders.” I chose to investigate allophilia as a positive

feeling/attitude rather than negative feelings/attitudes because positive feelings toward outgroups are better predictors of personal and policy support than the absence of negative feelings or prejudice (Pittinsky et al., 2008). It was my hope that the iPED meetings would be associated with an increase in positive feelings towards the outgroup (districts or charters).

Analysis related to Research Question 1 was limited to quantitative analyses of participants' opening and closing Allophilia Scale responses, as well as quantitative and qualitative analyses of transcript data from first and second focus groups. First, I present findings from the quantitative survey analyses followed by quantitative and qualitative findings from the focus group transcripts.

Results of the Allophilia Survey Responses

The Allophilia Scale asked participants to respond to 17 closed-ended, six-item Likert scale statements that were structured as a semantic differential (only 1 = *strongly disagree* and 6 = *strongly agree* were labeled). I administered the survey before the first focus group (opening) and after the second focus group (closing). I analyzed the results through descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, looking at the data as three separate datasets (all participants, superintendents, and charter leaders) for allophilia and each of its five constructs (*affection, comfort, kinship, engagement, and enthusiasm*). Below, I discuss the results of each of those analyses.

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics on the opening and closing allophilia and its five constructs in aggregate and broken out by district superintendents (district) and charter school leaders (charter). The mean allophilia score for all participants before the intervention was 3.39. After the intervention, the mean was 3.93. At the beginning of

the study, the charter mean for allophilia ($m = 3.75$) was higher than the district mean ($m = 3.04$). However, at the end of the study, the mean for the overall construct of allophilia was higher for district ($m = 4.02$) than it was for charter ($m = 3.78$). Therefore, according to the survey results, the district participants had more of a positive change in allophilia than the charter participants.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Allophilia and Its Five Constructs

Construct	Mean (1)	SD (1)	Mean (2)	SD (2)
Allophilia	3.39	.77	3.93	.48
District (n = 3)	3.04	.85	4.02	.54
<i>Charter (n = 3)</i>	<i>3.75</i>	<i>.63</i>	<i>3.78</i>	<i>.46</i>
Construct 1: Affection	3.79	.95	4.33	.38
District (n = 3)	3.67	1.16	4.17	.29
<i>Charter (n = 3)</i>	<i>3.92</i>	<i>.95</i>	<i>4.50</i>	<i>.43</i>
Construct 2: Comfort	4.28	1.24	4.89	.98
District (n = 3)	4.44	1.17	5.56	.19
<i>Charter (n = 3)</i>	<i>4.11</i>	<i>1.54</i>	<i>4.22</i>	<i>1.07</i>
Construct 3: Kinship	2.56	1.03	2.39	.88
District (n = 3)	2.56	1.26	2.33	.88
<i>Charter (n = 3)</i>	<i>2.56</i>	<i>1.01</i>	<i>2.44</i>	<i>1.07</i>
Construct 4: Engagement	3.50	.84	3.92	.79
District (n = 3)	3.22	1.01	3.75	1.15
<i>Charter (n = 3)</i>	<i>3.78</i>	<i>.69</i>	<i>4.08</i>	<i>.38</i>
Construct 5: Enthusiasm	2.33	1.16	3.0	.70
District (n = 2)	1.44	.51	2.50	.71
<i>Charter (n = 3)</i>	<i>3.22</i>	<i>.84</i>	<i>3.33</i>	<i>.577</i>

Note. Bold indicates district; italics indicates charter;
6 point scale (6 = *strongly agree* and 1 = *strongly disagree*)

Because my survey data was ordinal, I had a small n size, and I did not select participants in a manner that ensured they represented the normal distribution in the population of interest. I ran a Wilcoxon signed-rank test, a non parametric test that is appropriate for comparing matched results from surveys given to the same people at two

points in time (Green & Salkind, 2010). As a non parametric test, the Wilcoxon signed-rank does not assume data parameters. One of the reasons this test was useful was because it calculated negative ranks (a decrease in allophilia), positive ranks (an increase in allophilia), and ties (no change in allophilia). Table 4 displays the results, including p values. Although participants overall increased in allophilia, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed that, after intergroup contact, some participants expressed less allophilia through the final survey than they had in the survey prior to the intervention. For example: in regards to *comfort*, two participants ranked negatively (chose a lower number to indicate their level of allophilia on the 1 through 6 Likert scale), three ranked positively (indicated a higher number to indicate their level of allophilia on the 1 through 6 Likert scale), and one had a tie ranking (no change). However, the p values for this test also did not indicate a significant change (significance at .05). This was not surprising because of my small data set.

Table 4

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Comparison of Beginning (1) and Ending (2) Allophilia Scale Results for Allophilia and Its Five Constructs

		All	Mean	<i>p</i>	District	Mean	<i>p</i>	Charter	Mean	<i>p</i> *
Allophilia	Negative Ranks	2	3.25		1	1.00		<i>1</i>	2.50	
	Positive Ranks	4	3.63		2	2.50		<i>2</i>	1.75	
	Ties	0			0			<i>0</i>		
	Total	6		.40	3		.29	<i>3</i>		.79
Affection	Negative Ranks	2	2.50		1	1.50		<i>1</i>	1.50	
	Positive Ranks	4	4.0		2	2.25		<i>2</i>	2.25	
	Ties	0			0			<i>0</i>		
	Total	6		.25	3		.41	<i>3</i>		.41
Comfort	Negative Ranks	2	2.0		0	.00		<i>2</i>	1.50	
	Positive Ranks	3	4.0		2	1.50		<i>1</i>	3.00	
	Ties	1			1			<i>0</i>		
	Total	6		.35	3		.18	<i>3</i>		1.00
Kinship	Negative Ranks	3	2.0		1	1.00		<i>2</i>	1.50	
	Positive Ranks	1	4.0		0	0.00		<i>1</i>	3.00	
	Ties	2			2			<i>0</i>		
	Total	6		.71	3		.31	<i>3</i>		1.00
Engagement	Negative Ranks	2	2.00		1	1.00		<i>1</i>	2.00	
	Positive Ranks	4	4.25		2	2.50		<i>2</i>	2.00	
	Ties	0			0			<i>0</i>		
	Total	6		.17	3		.29	<i>3</i>		.59
Enthusiasm	Negative Ranks	2	2.0		0	0.00		<i>2</i>	1.50	
	Positive Ranks	3	3.67		2	1.50		<i>1</i>	3.00	
	Ties	0			0			<i>0</i>		
	Total	5		.34	2		.16	<i>3</i>		<i>1</i>

*Significance at $p < .05$

To review, I began this analysis to answer my first research question: “To what extent does intergroup contact increase allophilia (positive attitudes) between school district and charter school leaders?” I was hoping to reject the corresponding null

hypothesis (H0): There is no relationship between school district superintendents and charter school leaders' feelings of allophilia and their participation in intergroup contact (the 4 iPED meetings). Because of my small n count, the Allophilia Scale did not provide enough evidence to reject this null hypothesis. The data also did not provide enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis for any of allophilia's five components.

However, the survey results only tell part of the story. As I stated earlier, intergroup contact literature is primarily quantitative and much of it has taken place in an artificial lab situation, which raises the concern of ecological validity. I was interested in what intergroup allophilia looks and sounds like in a more "real world" setting. Therefore, for Research Question 2, I looked to the qualitative focus group data to identify how district superintendents and charter leaders expressed allophilia verbally with their ingroup colleagues before and after intergroup contact.

Results from Analysis of Focus Group Allophilia

I closely analyzed the first and second focus group data to identify changes in expressed allophilia in district and charter participants' discourse in the second focus groups compared to their discourse in the first focus groups, identifying words/statements in the transcripts that suggested any of the five constructs that indicate allophilia: *affection* (I like), *comfort* (I feel comfortable with), *kinship* (I share something with), *engagement* (I'm interested in), and *enthusiasm* (I'm impressed by). I compared both the quantity and quality of allophilia statements voiced by district and charter participants two ways; within group (e.g., first and second district focus group) and between groups (district to charter). For the qualitative count, I considered each allophilia-related phrase and verbal agreements (e.g., um-hum, yes, I agree) as a separate event, even if the

speaker was repeating himself/herself during the same speaking turn.

Table 5 shows the results of this analysis. It is clear participants voiced more allophilia during the second focus groups (first =15, second = 39). The number of times district superintendents voiced allophilia almost doubled (first = 13, second = 21). And, although the charter leaders voiced allophilia during their second focus group (second = 18). similar to the districts, the charter participants only voiced allophilia two times during their first focus group. Therefore, from a strictly quantitative perspective, the charter leaders expressed more of a change than their district counterparts.

Table 5

Focus Group Participants' Use of Allophilia-Related Phrases and Agreements

	Affection		Comfort		Kinship		Engagement		Enthusiasm		Allophilia	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
David	0	0	0	0	8	4	0	0	0	0	8	4
Matt	0	0	0	0	5	2	0	0	0	0	4	2
Tom	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	7	0	0	0	8
Karen	na	0	na	0	na	5	na	2	na	0	na	7
D Total	0	0	0	0	13	13	0	9	0	0	13	21
<i>Catherine</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Jenna</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Peter</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>7</i>
C Total	0	3	0	5	1	5	0	4	1	1	2	18
All Total	0	3	0	5	14	18	0	13	1	1	15	39

Across both groups and times (the first and second focus groups) *kinship* and *engagement* were the most frequently voiced aspects of allophilia. The district participants used *kinship* phrases 13 times during the first focus group and 13 times in the second. District *engagement* was only voiced during the second focus group (9 times). Charter leaders voiced *kinship* once during the first focus group and five times during the second.

However, I was not only interested in the number of times allophilia was voiced. I wanted to investigate what types aspects of allophilia were expressed during each focus group and how they were expressed. My analysis indicated that participants did express more aspects of allophilia during the second focus groups. For example, during the first district focus group, Matt voiced *kinship* with charter leaders when he referred to them as colleagues, saying, “Let's vet it through colleagues in the charter.” During their second focus group, superintendents continued to voice *kinship* but also voiced *engagement*. For example, Tom showed interest in understanding the perspectives of charter leaders when he asked, “But how do people in the charter world feel about that?”

Only one charter leader expressed any allophilia during their first focus group (*Catherine* expressed *kinship* and *enthusiasm* once each). When the group was discussing the conflict between the district and charter communities, *Catherine* noted, “We’re all trying to do the same thing, educate kids” (coded *kinship*). In response to the question, “What are the strengths of the school district system,” she responded, “Their ability to service all types of children is admirable” (coded *enthusiasm*). The second charter focus group was where I saw the most difference in both the quantity and quality of voiced allophilia. Before I begin a deeper discussion of my qualitative findings about allophilia, I present all of the first and second focus group data coded to allophilia with a brief description.

Tables 6 through 9 list all the phrases I coded as containing allophilia across the focus group data. In addition to the utterances, the tables identify the speaker, where it happened during the speech (line) the meeting (charter (CL) 1 or 2 and district (DS) 1 or 2) and the allophilia construct (*affection, kinship, comfort, engagement, or enthusiasm*).

The specific words that signal an aspect of allophilia are underlined in the utterance. Verbalizations of agreement with an allophilia statement made by another participant (e.g. um-hum [agreement]) are also listed and underlined. I included utterances that did not specifically express an allophilia construct if I thought they seemed necessary to justify the coded section of talk.

Table 6

Charter Leader First Focus Group Talk Coded to Allophilia

Construct	Meeting	Line	Speaker	Utterance
<i>kinship</i>	CL 1	CL10123	Catherine:	<i>We're <u>all trying to do the same thing, educate kids.</u></i>
	CL 1	CL11016	Catherine:	<i>Their ability to service all types of children</i>
<i>enthusiasm</i>	CL 1	CL11017	Catherine:	<i>Is. um, <u>admirable.</u></i>

Three charter leaders participated in the first focus groups (one was late).

Allophilia was only voiced twice—by the same participant. *Catherine* made one *kinship* statement about school districts: “We’re all trying to do the same thing, educate kids,” and one *enthusiasm* statement, “Their ability to service all types of children is admirable.”

Table 7

Superintendent First Focus Group Talk Coded To Allophilia

Construct	Meeting	Line	Speaker	Utterance
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS10070	Matt:	let's <u>vet it through colleagues</u>
	DS 1	DS10071	Matt:	in the charter
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS10080	Matt:	that <u>our schools</u> are underfunded.
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS10081	David:	Yeah. We have a <u>common interest.</u>
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS10082	David:	That's what <u>brings us together.</u>
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS10083	Matt	Yeah
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS10091	David:	The real issues <u>that we both face.</u>
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS10093	Matt:	the <u>common interest</u> is quality, uh
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS10094	Matt:	providing a quality education <u>for all of our students</u>
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS10225	David:	You know, we have another <u>common enemy.</u>
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS10242	David:	now we have you know, <u>2 common</u> um-
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS10245	David:	but <u>common goals</u> , as to re-
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS11441	David:	<u>we all face</u>
<i>kinship</i>	DS 1	DS11593	David:	<u>We have</u> you know, <u>2 common challenges.</u>

Three district superintendents participated in their second focus group (one participant was late). As shown in Table 8, two of the three (Matt and David) voiced *kinship* during the part of the discussion where they were discussing conflict between the district and charter communities. David made the final two *kinship* statements later in the conversation, after I asked what districts and charters could gain from working together.

Table 8

Second Charter Leader Focus Group Talk Coded to Allophilia

Construct	Mtg	Line	Speaker	Utterance
<i>kinship</i>	CL 2	CL220055	<i>Catherine:</i>	um, we face more similar challenges
	CL 2	CL220190	<i>Peter:</i>	<u>we</u> stated in several of the gatherings
<i>kinship</i>	CL 2	CL220191	<i>Peter:</i>	<u>common feelings</u>
<i>kinship</i>	CL 2	CL220192	<i>Peter:</i>	that <u>there was commonality in a lot of areas.</u>
<i>kinship</i>	CL 2	CL220462	<i>Catherine:</i>	So <u>I'm not going to throw rocks at that,</u> (laughing) personally.
<i>enthusiasm</i>	CL 2	CL220680	<i>Catherine:</i>	<u>He'd be a good charter leader!</u> (laughing).
<i>affection</i>	CL 2	CL221375	<i>Peter:</i>	and I <u>enjoyed the interchange with her.</u>
<i>affection</i>	CL 2	CL221376	<i>Catherine:</i>	She's <u>a very positive person.</u>
<i>affection</i>	CL 2	CL221377	<i>Jenna:</i>	Mhm (agreement)
<i>affection</i>	CL 2	CL221378	<i>Peter:</i>	Yeah
<i>engagement</i>	CL 2	CL221385	<i>Peter:</i>	[<u>meetings</u>] that probably the Dpt of Ed ought to be facilitating
	CL 2	CL221388	<i>Peter:</i>	or if not the Department of Ed, the Board of Education.
<i>engagement</i>	CL 2	CL221389	<i>Catherine:</i>	<u>Mhm</u> (agreement)
<i>engagement</i>	CL 2	CL221390	<i>Jenna:</i>	<u>Mhm</u> (agreement)
	CL 2	CL221391	<i>Peter:</i>	Um, if there was just <u>more discussions</u>
<i>engagement</i>	CL 2	CL221392	<i>Peter:</i>	<u>that involved both charters and district at the same time.</u>
<i>comfort</i>	CL 2	CL221429	<i>Jenna:</i>	Um, so I was, I did feel good
	CL 2	CL221430	<i>Jenna:</i>	like if I saw these people at a meeting
<i>comfort</i>	CL 2	CL221431	<i>Jenna:</i>	I would feel <u>comfortable</u> talking with them.
<i>comfort</i>	CL 2	CL221432	<i>Catherine:</i>	<u>Mhm</u> (agreement)
<i>comfort</i>	CL 2	CL221433	<i>Peter:</i>	<u>I agree.</u>
<i>comfort</i>	CL 2	CL221434	<i>Catherine:</i>	<u>Mm-hmm</u> (affirmative).
	CL 2	CL221673	<i>Catherine:</i>	yes, <u>we're not happy</u> with the way
<i>kinship</i>	CL 2	CL221674	<i>Catherine:</i>	this school does their enrollment <u>either</u>

The same three charter leaders participated in the second focus group (Table 9). Each of them voiced some aspect of allophilia towards districts/superintendents. I identified talk related to *affection, kinship, comfort, engagement, and enthusiasm* statements (and agreement with) in the transcript of the second charter leader focus group.

Table 9

Second Superintendent Focus Group Talk Coded to Allophilia

Construct	Meeting	Line	Speaker	Utterance
<i>kinship</i>	DS 2	DL220455	Karen:	that they still <u>feel that too.</u>
<i>kinship</i>	DS 2	DL220538	Matt:	there's the <u>same feeling</u>
	DS 2	DL220537	Matt:	and you listen to the other side and <u>they have</u>
<i>kinship</i>	DS 2	DL220558	Matt:	<u>as ...</u> I guess deeply passionate
<i>kinship</i>	DS 2	DL220596	David:	Like, <u>we agree</u> on that.
<i>kinship</i>	DS 2	DL220598	David:	that's a <u>common, common</u> fight
<i>kinship</i>	DS 2	DL220609	Karen:	Public charter. [Crosstalk with David]
<i>kinship</i>	DS 2	DL220696	Karen:	<u>they're just as passionate</u>
	DS 2	DL220697	Karen:	<u>as we are</u>
	DS 2	DL220698	Karen:	about what they do.
<i>kinship</i>	DS 2	DL220707	Karen:	<u>and so are we.</u>
<i>kinship</i>	DS 2	DL220708	Karen:	So you know, <u>we have a common goal:</u>
	DS 2	DL220709	Karen:	We want to serve kids.
<i>kinship</i>	DS 2	DL220775	Tom:	I <u>understand</u> that one.
	DS 2	DL220776	Tom:	I mean, I'm mostly small schools.
<i>kinship</i>	DS 2	DL221385	David:	<u>We're all really underfunded.</u>
<i>kinship</i>	DS 2	DL221386	David:	I think <u>we all</u> felt over-regulated.
<i>engagement</i>	DS 2	DL221507	Karen:	um I <u>would've liked to have heard input</u>
	DS 2	DL221508	Karen:	from the for profit world.
<i>engagement</i>	DS 2	DL221509	Karen:	It would've been, I think, <u>an interesting conversation</u>
	DS 2	DL221510	Karen:	<u>to have with them</u>
	DS 2	DL221537	Tom:	I think <u>conversations on the administrative level.</u>
<i>engagement</i>	DS 2	DL221538	Tom:	I was, I <u>would be interested</u>
<i>engagement</i>	DS 2	DL221539	Tom:	and <u>still am interested</u>
	DS 2	DL221540	Tom:	in <u>what compensation looks like.</u>
	DS 2	DL221542	Tom:	you know <u>the requirements to do the job.</u>

Table 9 continued on next page

Table 9 (continued)

Second Superintendent Focus Group Talk Coded to Allophilia

Construct	Meeting	Line	Speaker	Utterance
<i>engagement</i>	DS 2	DL221600	Tom:	Um, I think that was one area <u>I was interested in</u>
<i>engagement</i>	DS 2	DL221602	Tom:	<u>your perspectives</u> on ...
<i>engagement</i>	DS 2	DL221609	Tom:	then <u>how do you feel</u> about folks
<i>engagement</i>	DS 2	DL221614	Tom:	That <u>still really fascinates me.</u>
	DS 2	DL221615	Tom:	But <u>how do people</u>
<i>engagement</i>	DS 2	DL221616	Tom:	in the charter world <u>feel about that?</u>

The same three district superintendents who participated in the first focus group participated in the second focus group discussion. However, another superintendent joined them (Karen). The presence of an additional participant may have contributed to the increase in voiced allophilia. Each district participant voiced at least one aspect of allophilia. However, I only identified speech relating to two aspects of allophilia, *kinship* and *engagement*.

I noted several differences in the way the two groups of participants (district and charter) voiced allophilia. I also saw differences in how each group voiced allophilia in the first focus group in comparison to how their allophilia-based talk during their respective second focus group. In the next section, I highlight the differences in the first and second district focus groups compared to the first and second charter focus groups. Then, I discuss the changes in the district's expressions of allophilia, followed by a discussion of the changes in the charter expressions. I conclude this section by comparing the changes in voiced allophilia between the district and charter groups.

Close Examination of Changes in Expressed Allophilia

District superintendents Matt and David both expressed *kinship* during their first focus group. They agreed that districts and charters have two common issues/concerns: getting adequate funding and stopping the expansion of vouchers. Primarily, the emphasis of the *kinship*-related talk from superintendents before the intervening intergroup contact meetings was in reference to sharing common political goals. I highlight one notable exception. During the first focus group, Matt spoke about the desire to vet educational issues “through colleagues in the charter.” This stood out to me because, although district participants repeatedly used the term colleague to refer to other district superintendents over the course of the study, this was the only time a district superintendent used the term *colleague* to refer to a charter leader. I will come back to this fact and its significance when I address my second research question.

There is not much to report about the charter leaders’ use of allophilia-related talk during their first focus group. *Catherine* was the only charter participant to voice allophilia. She noted that charters and districts have a common purpose “to educate students” and stated that she admired school districts’ ability to educate all students. I believe the main difference between allophilia-related talk during the first two focus groups is found in what was not said. Although district superintendents repeatedly talked about having common political interests with the charter community, the charter participants did not bring up or talk about sharing common political issues with districts.

During the second superintendent focus group, the issue of shared political interests was raised again. David talked about districts and charters all feeling like they are underfunded and overregulated. Karen expanded the district *kinship* talk when she

made the statement, “So, you know, we have a common goal: we want to serve kids,” which mirrored *Catherine’s* statement from the first charter focus group.

Karen and Matt identified having common feelings with charter leaders. Karen stated, “They’re just as passionate as we are.” Matt added, “As . . . I guess deeply passionate.” Tom and Karen also both made *engagement* statements that indicated interest in hearing charter leaders’ perspectives, including hearing the perspectives of for-profit charter operators, details about charter administration compensation packages and requirements, and what charter leaders with a traditional education background thought of charter operators without an education background.

Another difference in allophilia talk from the first superintendent focus group was when Karen used the phrase “public charter,” the context of acknowledging charters were also part of the public school community. I brought attention to this phrase because, although district participants frequently used the terms public schools, traditional public schools, publics, and public districts to refer to the district community, Karen’s use of the term “public charter” was one of only four times during the study that district participants used the term *public charter*. And this use of phrase was in a different context than the other three times superintendents used the phrase. During the 4th iPED meeting Matt used the term twice “I don’t see a reason why publics, you know, district schools and public charters would not rally around that policy issue” and “Yeah, definitely the regulation piece is something I feel like public, you know, district schools and public charters could support.” From my perspective as a charter leader, I interpreted both of these uses as Matt starting to refer to district schools as “publics” and then changing his mind and correcting himself to include charters. I explain why this matters in the

discussion of Research Question 3. For the record, the one other time a district superintendent said “public charter” was also during the second superintendent focus group when Karen said, “They’re still trying to explain to the public what a public charter is and what it’s not and how they’re funded and how they’re not.” I did not code this statement as kinship because it did not appear to indicate an “also-ness,” the sense of having something in common. The second district focus group did not include other any types of allophilia talk.

The first charter focus group set a low bar for allophilia-related talk because *Catherine* was the only charter participant to voice allophilia and she only did so twice. During the second charter focus group, however, all three participants voiced allophilia and the talk included all five constructs. *Catherine* gave a district superintendent a high compliment I coded as *enthusiasm* (but could arguably have been coded *affection*) “He’d be a good charter leader! (laughing).” *Peter* noted that the two groups shared common feelings. *Jenna* voiced *comfort* when she said, “Um, so I was, I did feel good. Like if I saw these people at a meeting, I would feel comfortable talking with them.”

Although Pittinsky and Montoya (2011) do not include empathy as one of the factors comprising allophilia, I nonetheless included it in my study because of the connection between empathy and *kinship*, and the importance of empathy in the intergroup contact literature (see Methods section for more explanation). There was a distinct and noticeable change in expressed empathy after the intergroup contact intervention. No feelings of empathy were expressed in the first focus groups by members of either group. Likewise, there were no statements of empathy in the second district superintendent group, which made it stand out when I heard it in the recording

and read it in the transcript of the second charter focus group (see Table 10). Empathy statements were notable because they signaled a change in the charter leaders' feelings toward the outgroup after the iPED meetings (my intergroup contact intervention). The presence of empathy in the second charter leader focus group was an encouraging finding because empathy is a mediating factor for prejudice (Boag & Carnelley, 2016; Head, 2012; Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew et al., 2011; Sugawara & Nikaido, 2006; Wasserman, 2004).

Table 10

Second Charter Leader Group Talk Coded as Empathy

Construct	Meeting	Line	Speaker	Utterance
<i>Empathy</i>	CL 2	CL221189	<i>Jenna:</i>	But I did feel some <u>empathy</u> around that-
<i>Empathy</i>	CL 2	CL221190	<i>Catherine:</i>	<u>I did too.</u>
<i>Empathy</i>	CL 2	CL221192	<i>Catherine:</i>	I mean obviously <u>they've got a lot of pressure.</u>
<i>Empathy</i>	CL 2	CL221205	<i>Jenna:</i>	Where I did <u>feel some empathy</u>
<i>Empathy</i>	CL 2	CL221236	<i>Jenna:</i>	And I mean I do have <u>empathy</u> about that, <u>because</u>
<i>Empathy</i>	CL 2	CL221862	<i>Jenna:</i>	<u>I felt for him and also for Karen</u> with their rural districts
<i>Empathy</i>	CL 2	CL221863	<i>Jenna:</i>	and the challenges that they face.
<i>Empathy</i>	CL 2	CL221864	<i>Jenna:</i>	Um, I could <u>feel very empathetic</u>
<i>Empathy</i>	CL 2	CL221889	<i>Catherine:</i>	<u>It is a shame that,</u>
<i>Empathy</i>	CL 2	CL221890	<i>Catherine:</i>	but I mean,
<i>Empathy</i>	CL 2	CL221891	<i>Catherine:</i>	both their funding and their new bosses
<i>Empathy</i>	CL 2	CL221892	<i>Catherine:</i>	are tied to those elections

Section 1: Summary

Both the district and charter participants' allophilia talk relating to *kinship* changed from their first and second focus groups. I thought the most notable change was how both groups expressed having feelings in common with participants from the outgroup. The commonality was no longer related to facts or conditions but shared feelings, which I believe may be a stronger feature of *kinship*. I also noted the second

focus group's expressions of empathy from the charter leaders towards the district superintendents. Together, the *kinship* statements and empathy statements were evidence my intervention did improve intergroup relations because they suggested perspective taking and self-other overlap (Boag & Carnelley, 2016; Galinsky et al., 2005; Head, 2012; Pettigrew, 2008).

Having established that participants increased in feelings of allophilia towards each other after the iPED meetings, I then took a closer, more holistic look at how participants talked about the conflict between their communities. I did this in order to better understand how district and charter leaders socially construct and negotiate their perceptions of their intergroup conflict. This investigation led to insights for my third research question.

Section 2: District and Charter Social Constructions and Negotiation of Intergroup Conflict

In this section, I present findings from the analysis I conducted to address Research Question 3: “How do school district superintendents and charter school leaders socially construct and negotiate narratives that sustain the conflict between their two communities?” (qualitative). Before proceeding, I need to position the term findings from a social constructionist perspective. Social constructionists believe every situation contains the possibility of multiple constructions and there are no methods other than social convention to determine any given construction presents a more “true” version of reality than another (Gergen, 2009). My task as a researcher was not to “get it right about the nature of the world, but to generate understanding that may open new paths to action” (Gergen, 2009, p. 81). Therefore, I readily admit “that the collection could be assembled

and sorted in multiple ways, yielding different analysis; doing those other analyses would expand the dialogue” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p. 45). Maintaining a social constructionist stance, I present several aspects of my narrative analysis, first from the perspective of the content of each group’s conflict-supporting narrative and then the process of how both the district superintendents and charter leaders used to construct and negotiate their conflict in which they were engaged.

Charter and District Conflict Themes

From my analysis of the focus group and iPED meeting conflict-related talk, I developed four themes that served to structure my understandings of the content of the district and charter talk that suggested their perceptions of conflict between their communities, perceptions that shaped the conflict-supporting narratives they constructed throughout the study. The four themes I used to describe what I saw in the coded data are as follows: (a) *competition sets the stage for conflict*; (b) *actions construct conflict*; (c) *perceptions sustain conflict*; (d) *conflict causes feelings*. Table 11 provides a summary of the themes. My analysis follows.

Table 11

Summary of District and Charter Conflict Themes

Themes	District concepts	Charter concepts
<i>Competition sets the stage for conflict</i>	Competition over resources, not fair, starving	Competition is business-based
<i>Actions construct conflict</i>	Superiority	Marginalizing, excluding, ignoring, not listening
<i>Perceptions sustain conflict</i>	Narrative that public schools are failing	Misunderstood, misperceptions, stereotyping, institutional bias
<i>Conflict causes feelings</i>	Envy, jealousy, resentment	Tolerated, not respected, isolated

Charter leader talk within the theme *Competition sets the stage for conflict* primarily used the term competition in sense of businesses competing against each other. This construction of competition is not a zero sum game because two businesses can compete and both can still be successful. And, by framing competition as competing businesses, competition can be good because it forces the businesses to be responsive to customers. Statements under the *Actions construct conflict* theme were primarily focused on acts that marginalized charter leaders, including: ignoring, excluding, tolerating, and tokenism. *Perceptions sustain conflict* included misunderstanding, misperceptions, bias, and stereotyping. Under *Conflict causes feelings*, participants expressed overall tension as well as feeling ignored, tolerated, and not respected.

The same four conflict themes from the district perspective indicate a different understanding of the conflict. The district superintendents primarily talked about *Competition sets the stage for conflict* as being a competition for resources. District participants used analogies of animals fighting for survival and sports teams. This construction of competition is win/lose, a zero sum game. This theme also includes extensive references to charters having advantages that made the competition unfair, specifically in regulations and funding, which stem from charters having more of a political voice than districts. *Actions construct conflict* included superior talk (charters reformed education in Arizona and forced districts to improve). *Perceptions sustain conflict* includes the public narrative that districts are failing. No matter what districts do, it is not good enough. Under *Conflict causes feelings*, superintendents talked about envy, jealousy, and resentment towards charters.

Examples of actions construct conflict. In keeping with social constructionist thought that talk is action (Gergen, 2009; Gee, 2014a, 2014b), I included ways of talking about the other within *Actions construct conflict*. According to social constructionists, ways of talking define and construct the other. Ways of talking construct specific relationships. For example: If my adult daughter is visiting my home and I say, “put these dishes away” I have defined her as my daughter and our relationship as a mother/daughter. However, if I say, “Would you be interested in editing my paper and if so, how much would you charge?” I have defined her as a professional with a valuable skill set, and offered to create a business relationship with her. During the second focus groups, I learned one of the ways conflict between the district and charter communities is enacted is in specific ways they talk about each other.

During the second district focus group, without prompting, the district superintendents brought up one of the charter ways of talking that bothered the superintendents because it takes credit for district accomplishments. This talk elevates charters and belittles districts because charters are claiming ownership for the district’s hard work. I present the district superintendents’ perspective with the following (slightly paraphrased) compilation of what they said during that meeting.

When someone says that charters helped reform education in Arizona for the past 20 years it strikes a nerve with me. The attitude is, “If charters hadn’t done this, then districts wouldn’t be doing this, this, this, and this.” I don’t deny that the open market economy means competition and we have to market more like the schools we are competing with. But the comment about charters pushing districts offends me. It assumes we would be happy just sitting there not wanting to improve. Like, we never had continuous improvement on our mind. That comment implies that for the past 20 years, we would not have done anything differently. We would look exactly the same. We wouldn’t have evolved had it not been for charters. And that’s a comment I resent. That’s where I get that superiority. So you win either way if you push that narrative out there as a charter proponent. Because you know, you’re right. If it wasn’t for charters we’d still

have green chalkboards and fried food. And that type of thinking is especially hard to hear from someone who's never been in the classroom as a teacher.

To districts, this is an example of *Actions construct conflict*; specifically, *superiority*. Although I have been around district superintendents for six years, this was the first time I had heard them express their frustration with this type of talk. I have these types of statements countless times without understanding how it contributed to the conflict or how it felt from the district perspective.

The second charter focus group voiced a similar complaint. Again, without prompting, the participants brought up one of the district superintendent ways of talking that bothered charter leaders because it places charters outside the public education community, defines charters as an "other," and takes away charters' identity as a public school. I present the charter leaders' perspective with the following compilation of what they said during that meeting.

I have to emphasize phrase "public charter" all the time. A district person never puts the word district in front of it. They always put the word public. They don't say "district school." They say "public school." "Public school and charter school." And it frustrates me because either they don't understand or else they're trying to give the impression that charters aren't public schools.

To charters, this is an example of *Actions construct conflict*; specifically *marginalizing*. Because I am a charter leader, I was not surprised about this frustration because I have experienced this type of talk and felt the same way.

The district and charter communities have distinct ways of thinking about, talking about, and experiencing the conflict between them that were evident through the recordings and transcripts. They both talk in ways that elevate their ingroup and delegitimize the outgroup. They both engage in talk that is conflict in action for the other. I discuss the meanings I make of these findings and the implications in chapter five.

Documenting Evidence of District-Charter Conflict

I set the stage for the analysis that follows by sharing the story of how and why I focused on the basic question of how the participants socially construct their perceptions of intergroup contact between their communities, especially when my dataset is so rich and holds the potential for many other inquiries. After all, this action research project was based on the assumption that there was indeed conflict between Arizona's district and charter schools, so it would be reasonable to assume the question has already been answered. I explain below in the Second Vignette why I still needed to document that Arizona school district and charter school communities have a socially constructed perception of intergroup conflict with each other.

Second Vignette

Over the four years I leading up to this dissertation, I have struggled to find acceptable scholarly evidence to support my basic, underlying assumption – the existence of a conflict between the school district and charter school communities. I made the claim out of my personal experience. However, I could not find scholarly literature to document the conflict. The charter/district literature simply assumed there was a conflict. My search for research to support my claim about conflict between the school district and charter school communities was further complicated by the situated relationships between the two communities and the different state charter laws created across the country. Conflict between Arizona's district and charter communities was my problem of practice because I have personally felt it. I feel it every time I hear someone say “public schools and charters” because, from my perspective, that phrase excludes charter schools from the rest of the public education community. I felt the conflict when I sat in a room of district superintendents and listened to their president elect make a speech based on the premise district leaders should not to resent charters any more than they should resent “a wild animal that sneaks into your campsite at night and steals your food.” I have also felt the conflict on behalf of my district colleagues when someone from the charter community says districts have an advantage over charters because they can just go out for bonds, or that we need more charter schools because charters “know what works.” I have heard members of both groups repeat incorrect assumptions about the other and witnessed missed opportunities for these communities to work together towards common goals.

These personal experiences do not count as scholarly evidence for a claim. However, they did inform my study. My response was this action research intervention designed to improve the relationship between the two factions. Specifically, based on social constructionism (Gergen, 2009) within the context of intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), I formed and facilitated the Arizona initiative for public education discourse (AZ iPED).

My interest in providing insight into to how Arizona's school district superintendents and charter school leaders construct their perceptions of the conflict between (the what) them was twofold. First, I had and still have a genuine desire for the relationship to improve between the two communities and I believe seeing themselves and each other in new ways has the potential to lead to new understandings that could provide a basis for new ways of talking and being together (Gergen, 2009). Second, I hoped to fill the gap in the literature regarding Arizona-based district superintendent and charter leaders' social constructions of their intergroup conflict.

In keeping with my social constructionist theoretical perspective, I do not present these Narratives as the last word. Instead, the two Narratives are my interpretation of the representative collective narratives my participants constructed over the course of the study. After I present the Narratives, I analyze them through the lens of conflict-sustaining collective narratives (Bar-Tal, 2007).

Constructing Two Collective Narratives of Intergroup Conflict

Throughout the two Narratives (big N) below, I use capitals to denote that, although I present each Narrative as a story with a single voice, they were each socially constructed collective Narratives that were accepted at the group level. Both the Charter

Narrative and the District Narrative are part of the (big “D”) Discourse, defined by Gee (2011; 2014) as a social language used to “be” a particular kind of person (in this case a charter leader or district superintendent). These Narratives are situated within the larger big “C” Conversations (Gee, 2011; Gee, 2014); in this case, the societal debate over school reform (Ravich, 2013; Smith et al, 2011; Wells et al, 1999).

According to Bar-Tal (2007), groups in conflict socially construct shared ingroup societal beliefs about the conflict. Functionally, these shared beliefs sustain the conflict. Bar-Tal explains that these conflict narratives “do not intend to provide an objective history of the past,” (p. 1436) and are biased accounts that may use selective, sometimes distorted, or even untrue information. For that reason, and in keeping with the social constructionist belief that there are multiple ways of knowing, I do not claim either Narrative presents an objective view of what is real and true or that either Narrative is truer than the other.

For readers from the district or charter communities, I hope reading your ingroup’s narrative provides you with a tool for evaluating your own perspective and that reading the outgroup’s narrative helps you begin to understand the perspective of “the other” so that our two communities can find new ways of being together in order to strengthen Arizona’s public school system.

Conflict from the District Superintendent Perspective

Before I present the narrative, it is important to remind readers that the narratives below are comprised from the words my participants spoke during the focus groups and

iPED meetings²¹. However, “data never speak for themselves” (Gergen, 2009, p. 64) because the researcher is always interpreting what the data mean. I influenced these narratives by virtue of designing the study, facilitating the focus groups and iPED meetings, selecting the quotes, and shaping those quotes into a coherent story. Therefore, even as I compiled these collective narratives, I continued to socially construct them through my interaction with the recordings and transcripts that served as traces of the focus group and iPED discussions. I conducted this analysis as “a public dialogue carried out privately” (Gergen, 2009, p. 101).

Up to this point, I have referred to the two communities as school districts (districts) and charter schools (charters). Because I believe charter schools are public schools, I intentionally use of the term “public schools” to include both districts and charters. However, the following Narrative is a compilation of the district participants’ voices. Therefore, I use their wording that treats *district* and *public* as synonyms. The District Narrative is presented as first person account from a representative district superintendent.

District Narrative

For decades, public schools have been subject to wave after wave of reform based on the false prophesy that public schools are failing and people need to escape these “prisons.” The false narrative being perpetuated out there is that districts have an over bloat of well-paid administrators who suck up all the money instead of paying underappreciated, hardworking teachers. Politicians get pretty far politically with the false narrative because they promise they’re going to fix education. It is frustrating that the same politicians who are lined up against public schools are the same people who champion and support elite charters. As I said, for 20 years we’ve been hit with wave after wave of reform. It’s like a permanent wave (pretty soon we’ll be a nation at risk).

²¹ Words/phrases in [brackets] are not direct quotes but are included in an attempt to provide clarity/context.

Charters seem to have a voice politically, but no one is listening to our concerns, which doesn't make any sense because 85% of the students are in traditional public schools and only 15% are in charter. And a lot of these charter folks have never even been in a classroom as a teacher. How are you going to be an effective educational leader if you've never walked the walk?

Public school districts provide a comprehensive education to all levels of students. We are starved for resources and mired in regulations, but we make it work. And we don't get credit for it. There are amazing things happening in public schools every day, but no matter what we do, it is never seen as a success because someone always says we didn't do it well enough, strong enough, or the way someone else thought we should do it. There are so many regulations that standardize us. Everybody has to do it this way and if you step outside the bounds of doing it this way, we're yanked back in pretty quick.

The legislature keeps cutting funding while at the same time piling on more regulations. And when they do restore funding, they add strings. It is frustrating. If you aren't going to fund us at the level we should be funded, then don't tie the governing board's hands. Every five years, we're forced to come back begging for more money. Give me that \$2,000 in [charter] additional assistance instead.

Well, [for another example of how unfair it is] look at what happened with district sponsored charters. Districts were being innovative and sponsoring charters to give parents what they wanted. So district sponsored charter schools proliferated and then were assassinated [by the legislature]. So now, a public school can't even sponsor a charter but someone who has never been in a classroom before can run one? That doesn't even make any sense.

One of the amazing things about this great country is that we do educate all children. But we all know there are some charter schools that don't educate all children, don't accept all children, and don't keep all children. Everyone knows charters as profit driven. Someone figured out how to make money on the back of a child but it is wrong for people to line their pockets with public dollars. Public education is a sacred thing and it's confusing and disheartening that people have found a way to make a profit off my sacred thing.

I have a bad perception of charters because I've seen examples of charters doing the wrong things for kids for the wrong reasons. And elite charters act like they have the key to educational reform. The only thing the top performing charters have reformed is changing the entrance requirements. There's no transparency [with charters].

As traditional publics, we always say, we don't mind competition as long as it's a level playing field. Well, it's not a level playing field. Charters have an advantage but don't appreciate how good they have it. [As public school administrators], we envy charters because they have fewer regulations, more freedom, and get charter additional assistance money without the time, stress, politics, and expense of begging the local taxpayers for it. We are transparent, accountable to our taxpayers, and concerned about what is happening in not only our community, but also in the neighboring communities. We're doing a great job

with our hands tied behind our back. We're starving while we're doing it. But we're doing it.

In general terms, yes there is conflict between districts and charters. But, the main source of conflict is competition for scarce resources. I wonder if the feeling of competition would decrease if we weren't all starving, fighting for scraps. Because you know the African Proverb: As the watering hole shrinks, the animals look at each other differently.

Conflict-supporting collective narratives for groups engaged in intractable intergroup conflicts have common themes, according to Bar-Tel (2007). The overlapping themes from narratives about the past and present (collective memory and ethos) include justifying how the conflict started and has progressed, presenting a positive view of the ingroup, delegitimizing the outgroup, and seeing themselves as a victim of the outgroup. Through these conflict-sustaining narratives, ingroup members make sense of and maintain the conflict because they provide "unity, solidarity, mobilization and readiness for sacrifice on behalf of the group" (Bar-Tal et al, 2014, p. 666). I identify how those themes are present in the District Narrative

1. Justification for the conflict (how it began) and the justness of own group's goals: The district historical perspective was broad and did not specifically discuss the beginning of charters in Arizona or how the conflict started. The historical indicators districts gave included: "For 20 years we've [districts] been hit with wave after wave of reform" and "we're [districts] now in a world..." I did not hear evidence of a time when things were good for districts. The historical viewpoint presents districts as victims of outside forces they cannot get away from and seem powerless to stop (wave after wave, now in a world). The comment "it seems to me that public schools [districts] have had to deal with some of these changes that we didn't see coming or didn't agree with at one point" could be in reference to districts not seeing charter schools coming and/or that

districts at one point did not agree with charter schools existing (which also suggests they may have changed their views of charter schools). The Narrative also includes justness of their own group's goals (transparent, accountable to taxpayers, concerned about what is happening in not only our community, but also in the neighboring communities). Positive view of ingroup²²: Districts are transparent, accountable, concerned, and working hard.

2. Delegitimizing outgroup²³: Through their talk during focus group and iPed meetings, districts delegitimized charters by using words and phrases such as for-profit, greedy, and doing the wrong thing for kids for the wrong reasons.

3. See self as victim of outgroup: The districts described what they perceived as the advantages charters have over districts (and the disadvantage districts have in comparison to charters). They also talked about districts starving, fighting for scraps, and working with their hands tied behind back. On one hand, the district participants did not necessarily place the responsibility for the victimization on the charters; instead, they appear to place the blame on the politicians/legislature who make the laws that tie districts' hands behind their back. However, on the other hand, they also note that the same politicians who say districts are failing are the same people who are praising charter schools. Therefore, if the friend of my enemy is my enemy, the districts could still be victims of charters by extension, because the same people who bash the district school system support charters.

²² Corresponds with the 3rd ethos theme.

²³ Corresponds with the 5th ethos theme.

All in all, the District Narrative is a victim story that could be titled, “Starving, but Still Serving all Students: We’re not dead, yet!” Districts describe themselves as chained, beaten, starved, yanked back, mired [in paperwork], not given credit for, thankless, unappreciated, etc. I interpret these words as creating the image of a victim.

Conflict from the Charter Leader Perspective

The Charter Narrative is also presented in the first person from the perspective of a fictitious representative charter.

Charter Narrative

Arizona’s school district system has existed for over 100 years. During that time, they worked out their systems and entrenched their culture. They became inefficient, institutional bureaucracies that were unresponsive to parents and resistant to change or innovation. [Educators] working in the big districts were frustrated because the system stymied their attempts to fix even simple problems. [Parents were] concerned schools were using whole language and that the neighborhood kids couldn’t read. [We] tried to work with the district [to get them to offer educational choices], but the districts refused. Districts did not have to be customer friendly or responsive because they had a monopoly on education in Arizona.

And then charters came! When the charter law passed, districts took great offense and entrenched themselves as being anti-charter. However, we are the best thing that ever happened to [families without the money for a private education] because now they can have a choice. They don’t have to take what’s given to [them] or what someone else thought they needed. Charter teachers were empowered because charter schools have a flatter organizational structure without all the district layers. Charters brought the strengths of the free market to public education—an entrepreneurial spirit of adventure and curiosity, as well as innovation and flexibility. As opposed to districts, charters are responsive by nature.

The early charter years were difficult because we were figuring out what rules applied and how charters worked. This was natural, because none of us had ever been there before. When legislators responded by strengthening and fine-tuning charter laws, districts saw the changes to charter law as wins for the (anti charter) district community. The first decade of charters enhanced that conflict narrative and entrenched a culture of conflict between districts and charters. Although I usually have to start an encounter with [a district leader] by justifying my existence as a charter, once they get to know me they think I’m okay, not like those other charters. So, the conflict isn’t necessarily person to person. It’s an institutional conflict.

There are examples of districts working with charters for the good of the students and the conflict is less overtly hostile than it was in the early years. However, although the charter movement has matured and grown up over the past 20+ years, the districts' opinion of charters have not evolved and they still use stories from the early years to judge the rest of us, even though the worst players have been expelled from the system. Districts and others continually paint the entire charter movement with the broad brush of the worst actors within the charter community. We battle bias, misperceptions, and misinformation. The universities are part of the problem because they are giving students misinformation about us. These teachers are our future employees. We are tired of having to explain that charters are public schools, we don't charge tuition, and we have to take all students (including students with disabilities and English language learners). We're also tired of arguing about who gets more funding, because when it comes right down to it, districts get more.

Starting a charter school takes an incredible amount of work and self-sacrifice but we do it for the kids. Many of us put our personal finances and credit on the line. Unlike districts, we have skin in the game. If we aren't responsive or fail to compete, we lose everything. People think we have the freedom to do whatever we want but charters have to meet almost all of the same regulatory requirements as [our district counterparts] without the strength, support, and expertise of a district back office. In fact, in many ways we are more accountable than districts because we are subject to closure if we don't meet the strict requirements of State Board for Charter Schools.

Whenever you have competition, you're going to have conflict. Competing businesses have some level of conflict and that makes both of us better. However, the legislature and government entities seem to enjoy stirring the pot between districts and charters because it keeps attention off things if we're all fighting over the same bone. Due to the nature of charter schools, charter leaders do not have many opportunities for collaboration and collegiality. We sometimes feel like "lone wolves."

We respect district superintendents and want that respect to be reciprocated. But, rather than trying to understand, respect, work with, support, and accept us [as part of the public education community], districts paint all charters with the same brush. They exclude or ignore us. I feel tolerated when they have to tolerate me. Districts have recently decided it is important to have charter representation when they're trying to do an education thing, so they invite a token charter person in after the work of a committee to sign off on it. District superintendents are nice, honest, and well intentioned. They will politely smile and have a pleasant conversation with me at a table. However, districts believe they are public education in Arizona and that we exist outside of that. We are not "their people."

I also looked for Bar-Tal's (2007) four overlapping (collective narrative and ethos) conflict-supporting collective narrative themes in the Charter Narrative.

1. Justification for the conflict (how it began) and justness of own group's goals: According to the Charter Narrative, charters were created because before charter schools existed, districts were bloated bureaucratic institutions that did not have to respond to parents or teachers. The conflict between districts and charters began because districts were offended charters even existed and have been anti-charter ever since. Districts resent charters for forcing them to change.

2. Positive view of ingroup²⁴: Charters are heroes because they gave parents and teachers choices. Charters bring the best of the free market to education, an entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, responsiveness, customer service, etc.

3. Delegitimizing outgroup²⁵: Language the charter participants used that dehumanizes districts include institutions, systems, bloat, bureaucracies, unresponsive, just sitting there, and old system.

4. See self as victim of outgroup: The charter leaders described being marginalized by districts: ignored, excluded, tolerated, not listened to, brought in as token representatives, outnumbered, not respected.

In juxtaposition to the district victim narrative, the Charter Narrative is a hero story that might be titled, "And then charters came!" Within the Charter Narrative, charters arrived, saved public education, and gave families the ability to escape failing schools.

²⁴ The second collective narrative theme corresponds with the third ethos theme.

²⁵ The third collective narrative theme corresponds with the fifth ethos theme.

Social Negotiation of Conflict Sustaining Narratives

After analyzing the recordings and transcripts to understand how the district and charter communities socially constructed the conflict between their communities from a content perspective, I turned my analysis to understanding the process of that construction. Taking an interactive process perspective, I went back to the transcripts to analyze the interactional talk informed by Bar-Tal (2004) and Bar-Tal and colleagues' framework (2014). The framework identifies themes (Bar Tal, 2007) usually found in conflict sustaining collective narratives and methods (Bar et al., 2014) by which communities engaged in intergroup conflict socially construct and negotiate those narratives. I present the findings from this analysis primarily through illustrative analysis of two episodes I call *Audit* and *Finances*. However, I also provide my analysis of some of the talk leading up to each episode. Before I present the examples, I explain the relationship between Bar-Tal's (2007) conflict-sustaining collective narrative themes and the methods Bar-Tal et al. (2014) identified as being used by communities to construct and maintain those narratives as I came to understand the relationship during my data analysis.




As a result of my analysis, I explain the relationship between the conflict-sustaining narrative themes and the processes for constructing and negotiating those themes as follows (identifying the themes and methods both through keywords and by number (e.g., M1 = Method: Relying on supportive information; E3²⁶ = Ethos: Positive collective self-image of ingroup): Group members rely on supportive sources (M1),

²⁶ For this analysis I use the wording and numbering from the ethos themes (1-6), rather than the collective memory themes (1-4) because the ethos (current view) was the salient view during the analyzed selections.

fabricate supporting information²⁷ (M4), and use framing language (M6), IN ORDER TO magnify supportive conflict-supporting narrative themes (M3) OF justice of ingroup goals (E1), positive collective self-image of ingroup (E3), victimization of ingroup (E4), and delegitimization of outgroup (E5). Contradictory information is marginalized (M2) or omitted/ignored (M5)²⁸ by participants from both groups. Table 12 presents how the themes and methods relate to each other.

Table 12

Relationship Between Themes and Methods

Methods to socially construct and negotiate intergroup conflict collective narratives:	Supportive ethos themes found in collective narratives:
Supportive sources: Rely on (M1) Fabricate (M4) Use framing language to present (M6)	
	
IN ORDER TO: Magnify supportive themes (M3)	
	Justness of ingroup goals (E1) Positive image of ingroup (E2) Delegitimize outgroup (E3) Victimization of ingroup (E4)
Conflicting information:  Marginalize (M2) Omit/ignore (M5)	

²⁷ I include the method “fabricate supportive information” (M4) even though I did not see evidence of it within the illustrative episodes I analyzed because it is a method that may be evident in other portions of the transcripts.

²⁸ I identified “ignoring” as “omitting” in this analysis.

One of the primary insights I gained through my analysis was that participants frequently negotiated their opposing conflict narratives by competing with each other for victim status—“out- victiming.” Discursively, this out-victiming usually began with a co-reflecting²⁹ word or phrase that functioned as a segue from the previous person’s talking turn to present the ingroup’s victim story. Gergen (2009) suggested co-reflecting is actually a positive, important form of coordination because “one’s words should carry elements or fragments of what the other has said” (p. 124). Co-reflecting serves to create a connection speaking turns and allows the conversation to be cohesive and I believe many people use this co-reflecting reflexively as way to identify with the speaker. However, as I show in my analysis, the participants missed important opportunities to transform their relationship when what I believed were sincere attempts to identify with the other may have functioned instead to delegitimize the other’s experiences through competitive victimization. And, as Bar-Tal et al (2014) warned, the cycle proved to be very difficult to interrupt. In this section I explain and illustrate with extended examples.

Over the years, as I have participated in in the district and charter communities, I have become familiar with the typical district/charter conversations. However, I did not have the vocabulary or theory to describe the cycle. I just knew that the conversations were usually very predictable and were rarely transformative. They also rarely improved the overall relationship or changed anyone’s perspective. Through the composite Narratives that I presented in the previous section, it became evident each group has a collective narrative that is significantly different than their rival’s. The narrative analysis

²⁹ Co-reflecting happens when a speaker connects what they are saying to a previous speaker (usually the same word or phrase, but it can also happen through linguistic shading, using similar words and slightly changing their meaning; Gergen, 2009).

I conducted for this section illustrates what happened when these specific representatives from the district and charter communities negotiated their ingroup narratives within the context of this study. As supporting evidence and an illustrative example, I offer that, during the first district superintendent focus group, Matt described what he considered to be the typical communication cycle between the district and charter communities (Lines DS10119 to DS10125).

I think evidence of that tension or that conflict that has existed, or that competition; I think that's quickly evident when you have a discussion. You can look at Classroom's First discussions as an example. It doesn't take very much for somebody to say something that seems like one side is condemning the other side, or vice versa. It's, "No, wait a minute. You don't understand that we have to do this, this, and this." "Well, you don't understand that we have" this, this, and this . . . So, that perception piece is a big part of it, as well. (Matt)

In the above excerpt, Matt described what he sees as a predictable communication pattern between the district and charter communities. This description foreshadowed what would happen many times during the iPED meetings. According to Matt, one side says something the other side sees as condemning. By saying, "We have to do this, this, and this," each side attempts to establish that their group has to do more than the other side (victimization, E4). Rather than validating and supporting each other, or creating a new relationship through interactional dialogue, the narratives compete for acceptance. These narratives create and sustain the conflict between the school district and charter school communities. And, as Bar-Tal et al (2014) warned (and I experienced), it is difficult to break the cycle and create new, peace supportive narratives, even when good, well-meaning people from both communities come together in an attempt to build bridges and help a colleague with her research project.

Nonetheless, a few times during the iPED meetings, I recognized a shift in the dialogue when one group accepted the other's narrative and even incorporated it into their own narrative. Bar-Tal and colleagues (2014) argue accepting the other's narrative and incorporating it into their own is a core element of peacemaking. These interactions provided evidence the iPED meetings had the potential to provide a forum for the participants to construct a new narrative, a new way of being together.

For the purposes of illustration, I chose two episodes from the transcripts where the groups' conflict-supporting collective narratives competed. In the first episode, *Audit*, the district and charter narratives compete with each other for dominant "victimhood." The second episode, *Funding*, provides an example of the less frequent transformative talk when, in this example, the charter group accepted a portion of the district narrative and contributed their own insights to expand the district narrative. Both episodes took place during the second iPED meeting, which focused on exploring the district and charter perceptions of their own and each other's communities. In both examples, conflict-supporting narratives were socially constructed through many of the methods described by Bar-Tal et al. (2014), which I show through my interpretation throughout these sections. I also provide some analysis for sections of talk leading up to the *Audit* and *Funding* episodes.

Competing to "Out-victim" the Other: The Audit Episode

The *Audit* episode occurred about a third of the way through the second iPED meeting as the participants explored perceptions of districts and charters. Three district superintendents were present during this meeting: David, Billie, and Karen. Three charter

leaders were also in attendance, *Catherine*, *Jenna*, and *Peter*³⁰. I participated in my role as facilitator of intergroup contact (Researcher). I begin by orienting the *Audit* episode with my analysis of how participants were constructing and negotiating their conflict-supporting narratives in some of the talk that led up to it.

The group began this particular iPED meeting by discussing the charter view of charters and the district view of districts (see Appendix G for the completed worksheet reflecting the perspectives discussed during this meeting). Several turns before this excerpt, I asked how we viewed each other (the charters' view of districts and the districts' view of charters). The following response³¹, which I analyze below, comes from Lines 220325–220343:

Peter: There's clearly—I think goes probably in all four quadrants is what I'm hearing, is that there is competitiveness. I think to put it on the table, it needs to be said. It can go into a couple of quadrants, but under the charter view of districts I think there would be a misunderstanding. That charters feel misunderstood, to a large extent. And I said I think that can go in other quadrants also as to - where the perceptions are. And the common things that we talk about are the services that are provided and/or the requirements that charters have to comply with.

Researcher: So, charters view themselves as misunderstood by districts?

Peter: Absolutely.

³⁰ Throughout this section, the charter leader pseudonyms (*Catherine*, *Jenna*, and *Peter*) are italicized to assist the reader in differentiating between the district and charter participants.

³¹ I removed most speech hesitations and dysfluencies that are part of normal speech (Gee, p. 82) because the information they may have provided were beyond the scope of this study.

After recognizing competitiveness could go in all four quadrants³², *Peter* prefaced the claim he was about to make (that charters feel misunderstood by districts) with three statements. I interpreted “to put it on the table” as a way to signal that what he was about to say was potentially controversial. “It needs to be said” signaled that the upcoming claim was important, possibly a key issue. *Peter* also said, “It can go into a couple of quadrants,” which, at the time I interpreted as an effort to avoid being perceived as attacking the district participants (i.e., maybe districts think charters do not understand districts, too). However, after reflection, I now interpret the statement as *Peter* saying the charters’ perception of districts was that they misunderstand charters and the charters’ view of charters is that they are misunderstood. Then, *Peter* indirectly made his claim. “I think” (a qualifier that allows for someone else to think differently) “there would be” (not “there is”) “a misunderstanding” (avoiding naming who is doing the misunderstanding). Then *Peter* made his claim more straightforwardly, but still avoided directly blaming the districts “That charters feel misunderstood.” “To a large extent” is a modifier of how misunderstood charters feel. To me, it communicates that this is something most charters feel and that the degree to which most charters feel misunderstood is important, but not overwhelming. *Peter*’s claim “misunderstood by districts” could be categorized as a victimhood statement (E4). I interpreted *Peter*’s statement to mean that charter schools talk with each other about being misunderstood by school districts in the two main areas charters discuss is what services charters provide and what regulations charters have to

³² “Quadrants” refers to the Values Impediment worksheet on Perspectives we used during the second iPED meeting. See Appendix A for blank worksheet and Appendix G for worksheet reflecting the discussion.

follow. The district superintendents did not support, deny, or ask questions about *Peter's* claim (ignored, M5). *Jenna* takes the next talking turn in Lines 220344–220:

Jenna: And I think that's something I would add to the charter view of districts. When I think about, in the various settings . . . It feels like even after . . . I've been working in charter schools since about 1998-97. There's a continual need to explain what charters are and explain what we do. So, I'm not sure exactly how to put that. But I think as a view of . . .

In the above section, *Jenna* continued to magnify (M3) the victimhood theme (E4) by using *Peter's* term, “misunderstood” in a different context by saying she continually has to explain “what charters are and what we do.” In response, David asks who she had to explain to (Line 220356). Below, *Jenna* and *Catherine* clarify that this type of misunderstanding comes from the public and colleges of education, not necessarily districts (Table 13).

Table 13

Explanation of Misunderstandings

220356	David:	Explain to whom? To...
220357	Jenna:	<i>Um. <sigh></i>
220358	Catherine:	<i>The public. [crosstalk]</i>
220359	Jenna:	<i>To the public</i>
220360	Jenna:	<i>to the college of education.</i>
220361	David:	So, because like Peter was saying
220362	David:	misunderstood by districts?
220363	David:	Or by the public?
220364	Jenna:	<i>Yeah, I think in this one its</i>
220365	David:	I think that's two different ...
220366	Catherine:	<i>mhm (agreement)</i>

Although David asked a clarifying question, *Jenna*'s claim (continual need to explain what charters are and what they do) was not supported, denied, or validated by the district superintendents (ignored, M5). After the above section of talk *Peter* did support *Jenna*'s narrative (charters are misunderstood by the public) by noting how most charters use the phrase "a free public school" in their advertising because the general public assumes charter schools charge tuition (highlight supportive information, M3). A few turns later, *Billie* said, "I'm glad we are having this conversation" (Line 220424) and gave a disclaimer and then engaged in part of the district narrative about charter schools (Lines 220431-220448):

Billie: So, I think—The perception from a person like me who works in traditional district schools, is that not all charters are the same. But, um, we have some charters in our area that don't educate all children. Don't accept all children. And don't keep all children. So, I don't know (*Jenna*: umm (agreement)). I mean, it seems reality to me, but it might be a perception.

It is reasonable to infer that *Billie*'s statement magnified the supportive theme of (M3) delegitimizing charters (E5) because there is a societal expectation that public

schools are supposed to educate all children. *Jenna* appeared to indicate agreement (umm); however, this interpretation may be re-interpreted based on the fact that *Jenna* takes the conversational floor after Billie's next phrase (Line 220449) below. Throughout the transcripts, I noticed people frequently verbally "interrupted" someone else's talking turn with "umm" a phrase or two before they took the floor with their own speaking turn. Therefore, I did not interpret *Jenna's* "umm" as indicating support for Billie's claim, but as an indication she was preparing to take a talking turn. Thus, I did not interpret the charter participants as supporting, contradicting, or asking questions about Billie's claim (ignore, M5). *Jenna* began speaking immediately afterwards (Lines 220449-220478).

Jenna: And it's interesting that you say that because I find a similar thing. I've been thinking about that particular point for a long time. Because. I guess one of the things I've come to think about on my own, is that, when people are satisfied with whatever they have, they tend to stay where they are. (Billie: umm, agreement) So, I think all of the movement between districts and charters and charters and districts in terms of families, typically happens when there is dissatisfaction. I've very rarely had a family come in and say, "We're so thrilled with everything. We've just decided we'd like to try something else."

Jenna made her talking turn relevant to what Billie said by saying Billie's claim was interesting³³ and that *Jenna* had found something similar. *Jenna* goes on to say some of the negative perceptions came from stories of unhappy students and families told when they transferred to a new school. *Peter* again supported *Jenna* by asking if her perception of the phenomenon she described changed when she was in a room of charter operators. *Jenna* explained in Lines 220523-220521:

Jenna: Pretty much everybody in education, in my way of thinking, are well intentioned, hard working people that want to do good things

³³ Throughout the transcripts, participants frequently used the word *interesting* as a polite way to say "you're wrong" or "I disagree with you" (based on the context of what else they said).

for kids. So, in a room of charter school operators, a lot of times what I think about is how can we help this family find what they are looking for. When I'm sitting in a more mixed audience [with district people], first I have to justify my existence [as a charter school] and then we can have that conversation.

Jenna's statement that charter operators focus on helping the family constructed the conflict-supportive narrative by magnifying the supportive theme (M3) (charters are just because their goal is to help the family) and using emotionally framing language (M5) (justify my existence) to present charters as a victim (E4), thus highlighting (M3) that part of the Charter Narrative (charters are a victim because districts do not believe charters should even exist). None of the district participants supported, contradicted, or asked questions about *Jenna's* claim (ignore, M5). Billie responded by telling a story of her district accepting a student who was expelled from a charter school (Lines 220544-220570):

Billie: So, for us, in the last [X] years we haven't expelled a single student. We did have one long-term suspension in the last [X] years. And we have taken students that have been expelled from both traditional public schools and charter schools. Right now we just worked with a family to welcome a student that was expelled from a charter school. And we are looking at the offenses and we're like, "We would have never expelled for these three offenses." Like, they seem really minor. Like, oh my. We never share this with the families or anything like that. But how do we get the 11-year-old back into school, right? This is an 11-year-old. And I think like that's my—I would say my biggest perception. One of the most amazing things about this amazing country is that we do educate all children. But there seems to be some schools that are not doing that. I'm like—I think that's a huge disservice to Arizona and to the country.

This story functioned to provide information to support (M1) and highlight (M3) themes from the District Narrative; that the district goal is to serve all students, which is a just goal (E1) that reflects the districts' positive values (E3)). The story also served to

magnify negative themes about charters (M3); that charters are not legitimate (E3) because public schools should serve all children and the charter expelled rather than served.

Several speaking turns later, the tensions seem to lighten when *Catherine* expressed respect for districts because they were professional and established (had built their policies and procedures) and David followed with his perception that charters were much better at marketing (as opposed to districts). Karen agreed with David and several comments later, the two of them made caused the group (both district and charter participants) to laugh. *Audit* episode Part 1 began afterwards (see Table 14).

I selected this section for a close analysis because it provides evidence of the participants using Bar-Tal's methods to socially construct and negotiate their conflict-sustaining narratives. This section also began a series of each group out-victimizing the other. David began by expressing envy because charters do not have to do things districts are required to do. I discuss my analysis of the section after the excerpt.

Table 14

*Audit*³⁴ (1 of 2)

Line	Speaker	Utterance
220790	David:	I also think there's some
220791	David:	some envy
220792	David:	at the
220793	David:	from a district perspective about
220794	David:	regulation and things that we have to do,
220795	David:	that we wish we didn't have to do.
220796	David:	We get a little jealous that you guys don't have to (laughs).
220797	Billie:	Like the performance
220798	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>Like what?</i>
220799	Billie:	like the performance audit
220700	Billie:	Um,
220801	Billie:	I have to go be grilled
220802	Billie:	on a performance audit...
220803	Billie:	It's like come on this is...
220804	David:	Right?
220806	Billie:	in front of the senate
220807	Billie:	to talk about a performance audit?
220808	Billie:	Okay, but. So, like that.
220809	Billie:	um
220810	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>So, we have</i>
220811	Karen:	the re-
220812	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>performance audits also, and ...</i>
220806	Billie:	in front of the senate

A central complaint from the District Narrative is that it is not fair that charters do not have to do all the things districts have to do. Here, when David said, “I also think there's some, some envy.” He identified the feelings districts have about this issue as “some envy.” The qualifier “some” (rather than a lot of) may have been David’s way of trying to discuss a potentially contentious subject (politeness). However, when considered in conjunction with the earlier analysis that indicates charter leaders feel

³⁴ To preserve participant anonymity, I use pseudonyms and deleted portions of talk that could be used to identify a speaker.

marginalized by districts (ignored, excluded, tolerated, not accepted), charter leaders could have interpreted “some envy” (and later “a little jealousy”) as an act (M3) of further marginalization (E5). In other words, even though districts and charters are in competition, districts do not consider charters important enough to merit more than “some” or “a little” response.

David then began to say what it was the districts envy by saying “at the.” “The” indicates a specific thing that exists. However, it appears he rethought the wording because he did not continue the thought from there. Instead, he started again, saying “from a district perspective.” This new wording acknowledged David was expressing one perspective (“a” perspective), not the one and only perspective (“the” perspective). By choosing the word perspective, David indicated he was sharing a particular point of view, which offered the possibility that what he was about to say was not necessarily reality, which I interpreted to be a form of politeness. The next few lines are from the District Narrative; that charters have it better than districts “about regulations and things that we have to do that we wish we didn’t have to do.” The statement also frames districts as victims (E4) because “have to do” what they “wish we didn’t have to do.” In other words, districts are not free. Someone (the legislature) is making districts do things they do not want to do. In the next statement, David claimed the same someone who makes districts do things is not making charters do those same things, which carries the implication it is not fair. David ended the section by restating, “We get a little jealous that you guys don't have to (laughs).” Saying districts get “a little jealous” had the potential to communicate the same marginalization message as his earlier statement (some envy). I interpreted his laughter as serving to ease tension.

The idea of charters having it better than districts is not part of the charter narrative. The charter competing narrative is that charters are increasingly overregulated and have to do most of the things districts have to do (which circles back to the narrative charters are victims because they continually have to explain that they are accountable). None of the charter participants attempted to confirm or deny David's assertion or join him in laughter (ignoring contradictory information, M5). Instead, Billie and *Catherine* started to speak almost at the same time, saying "Like . . . *Catherine* stated, "Like what?" "Like what?" is a question that functions as a request for information. In context, *Catherine* asked for an example of what sorts of things districts "have to do" that charters "don't have to." However, several lines later (Lines 220810 and 22812) it appears *Catherine's* question actually functioned to elicit a specific example with which *Catherine* refuted David's assertion (that charters don't have to do things districts have to do). In the recording, Billie begins speaking immediately after David stops talking and it sounds like *Catherine's* question is asked almost simultaneously. I cannot distinguish which of them said "like" first. However, one of them apparently mirrored the other, creating cohesion in the conversation. When Billie said, "Like performance audits," the word "like" indicated she was about to provide an example "performance audits."

Billie further created cohesion when she connected her answer to what was already been said by saying "I have to go be grilled," utilizing some of the same words David used, "have to." Billie also framed her answer with emotional language (M6) that portrayed victimhood (E4) "have to go be grilled." In context, "grilled" meant being questioned or interrogated "in front of the senate" (Line 220806) "to talk about a performance audit" (Line 220807). Then Billie voiced what I interpreted to be a plea to

the person who is making her go through the grilling, “Come on, this is so . . .” with the unvoiced implication it is unreasonable or ridiculous for her to be required to have to answer questions before the senate about an audit. David supported Billie’s assertion that the performance audits are ridiculous when he said “Right?” Billie then identified who is interrogating her “in front of the senate” (Line 220806) and why “to talk about a performance audit” (Line 220807). Billie then kind of trails off, “Okay, but—so, like that, um.” I interpreted Billie’s phrase “Okay, but” as an invitation to disagree with her, to either confirm or deny what she just said. “So, like that” indicated Billie was finished answering Catherine’s question. To this point, David and Billie had indicated they had the perspective that charters do not have to do some things districts have to do.

In Line 220810, *Catherine* began her talk by mirroring one of Billie’s words “so,” to begin her response “So, we have the” and Karen begins to speak “The re-”. However, we do not know what Karen was going to say. *Catherine* continued talking and Karen did not. *Catherine* said “So, we have the performance audits also, and”—which functioned to challenge Billie’s claim (and by extension, David’s) that charters do not have to do things districts have to do (specifically performance audits). However, I knew *Catherine* was wrong because there is a distinction between annual audits³⁵ that are required of both districts and charters and performance audits³⁶.

³⁵ All Arizona public schools (including charter schools) are required to contract with an independent auditor for an annual audit (A.R.S. § 15-914).

³⁶ Performance audits are a specific type of audit performed by the Arizona Auditor General (AG) who chooses a few district schools to audit every year. According to the AG website, “School district performance audits focus on operational areas such as administration, transportation, plant operations, and food service and are designed to determine whether a school district is managing its resources in an effective, economical, and efficient manner. These audits provide the Legislature and the public with information on the use of public monies and identify best

People who work in charter schools refer to the audits they are required to go through as an “audit” or an “annual audit.” I have never heard them called performance audits. Therefore, when *Catherine* said, “We have performance audits also,” she used language to mirror what Billie had said, “performance audit” and connected it with what she as a charter leader had to do an “annual audit.” As I mentioned earlier, using mirroring language is a common technique for creating cohesion in a conversation. However, in doing so here, she ignored contradictory information (M5) (the word performance) and magnified supporting themes from the Charter Narrative (M3); that charters are overregulated.

From previous personal conversations and experience, I knew Billie’s “performance audit” was a distinct type of audit, and charter schools have not been subject to them. As a charter leader myself, I also knew that we have our own victim stories about regulations and feeling like we have to defend ourselves from misperceptions that we are unregulated and unaccountable. Therefore, as seen in the next section of talk, I made several attempts to change the cycle of ignoring each other’s claims and out-victimizing each other by asking for clarification. However, *Catherine* picked up the victim terminology “grilled on” when she continued part of the Charter Narrative that charters are more accountable than districts. I explain my interpretation after the excerpt.

practices or make recommendations to the school districts to improve operations” (n.d.). The reports are also published online.

Table 15

Audit (2 of 2)

Line	Speaker	Utterance
220813	Researcher:	Is it the same thing?
220814	Billie:	Prop 301. Prop 301?
220815	Billie:	And everything and everything
220816	Group:	[Crosstalk at 35:40]
220817	Researcher:	A performance audit?
220818	Researcher:	Define,
220819	Researcher:	because I'm not sure if we're using the same ..
220820	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>It's not academic performance</i>
220821	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>that you're grilled on.</i>
220822	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>We're grilled on academic</i>
220823	Billie:	Oh yeah, yeah, yeah
220824	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>financial, and all kinds of...</i>
220825	Billie:	Definitely.
220826	Billie:	No, it's all, all the,
220827	Billie:	fin- looking at every single financial,
220828	Billie:	um side- side of the house.
220829	<i>Peter:</i>	<i>It'd be what your auditor</i>
220830	<i>Peter:</i>	<i>put you through</i>
220831	<i>Peter:</i>	<i>when he's grilling you</i>
220832	<i>Peter:</i>	<i>to write your audit.</i>
220833	Researcher:	But is - is this performance audit different than your regular audit?
220834	Billie:	Yes.

In the excerpt above, in a continuing attempt to interrupt the ignore/out-victim cycle, I asked, “Is it the same thing?” meaning, “is the performance audit Billie talked about the same as the audit *Catherine* is referring to?” Although I phrased it as a question, my intent was to prompt a district superintendent to explain how the performance audit is different from an annual audit. My question also served to challenge *Catherine*’s assertion that charters go through performance audits. Billie responded with

“Prop 301³⁷. Prop 301? And everything. And everything.” (lines 220814-220815).

Although I knew what Prop 301 was, I did not understand its significance in regards to the Performance Audit. I assumed Billie was saying the performance audit audited the Prop 301 money and “everything” else. At that point, several people started to talk (Line 220816 [crosstalk at 00:35.40]) and I could tell the district and charter participants were not understanding each other. I was faced with two conflicting goals. I wanted the groups to understand each other and I believed that I could explain what Billie was talking about in a way the charters would quickly understand. However, I was also very aware that this was data for my research and I did not want to “pollute it” by guiding the conversations too much.

I tried to negotiate my conflicting objectives by asking for more clarification rather than providing clarification myself, “A performance audit? Define. Because I’m not sure we’re using the same” (Lines 220817–220819). My statements were another prompt for the district participants to explain what a performance audit was. I also specifically said “performance audit” to give *Catherine* the opportunity to correct herself (Yes, charters have audits. No, charters do not have performance audits). I expected *Catherine* to say something like, “I misspoke. We have annual audits but they aren’t called performance audits. Are performance audits different than audits?” Instead, as I realized when I analyzed this section, *Catherine* picked up on my word “different” as a cue to tell the Charter Narrative (that charters are more accountable than districts).

³⁷ Prop 301 refers to Proposition 301 that was passed by Arizona voters in 2000 and raised the sales tax by one cent to fund public schools. Although it is called The Classroom Site Fund (CSF), it is common for Arizona educators to refer to it as Prop 301. There are restrictions for both districts and charters on how CSF money can be spent and part of the annual audit determines whether schools have spent the money in compliance with those restrictions.

Catherine connected her statement to mine by saying, “It’s not” (different = something is not like something else). I had asked if the performance audit was different and *Catherine* stated a difference: districts are not “grilled” on academics but charters are. *Catherine* is telling the charter narrative that charter schools are academically more accountable than district schools³⁸. “We’re grilled on academic, financial, and all kinds of . . .,” which is part of the charter narrative that charters are more accountable than districts because charters can be closed for non-performance but districts are not. From my perspective, Billie’s “Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah” (Line 220823) was a response to my prompt and “definitely” was a signal she was not challenging *Catherine*’s claims of all the things charters are grilled on.

Billie continued, “No, it’s all, all the, fin—looking at every single financial, um side—side of the house.” I interpreted Billie’s “No” as a response to my question “Is it the same thing?” (Line 220813) and my statement “because I’m not sure we’re using the same” (Line 220813) from several speaking turns before. In other words, I interpreted Billie to be saying the performance audit was something else. Billie then described the performance audit as “looking at every single financial, um side—side of the house.” However, this statement did not clear up the misunderstanding as indicated by *Peter* over the next few lines. I was unclear whether *Peter* was addressing me or *Catherine* when he said “your” (Line 220829) and “you” (Line 220831). On the surface, he appeared to be

³⁸ Although *Catherine* alludes to this part of the charter narrative, is not explicitly told during the study and was only alluded to in the Charter Narrative I presented. However, I have heard this narrative numerous times over the years. A brief summary of the essential elements of this story: Charter schools are judged on their outcomes. If they do not perform, they cease to exist because the State Board for Charter Schools closes charters that are labeled failing by the Arizona Department of Education. However, no district school has been closed for failing. Therefore, charter schools are more academically accountable than district schools. If charter schools fail to academically perform (have acceptable student test scores on the state assessments), they close.

answering my question. However, by incorporating the “grilling” terminology, it could also be interpreted as talking to *Catherine*, who was the last person to use the word. *Peter’s* talk continued to omit/ignore contradictory information (“performance” audit) (M5) and magnify supportive themes (M3) through framing language (M6) that presented the ingroup as a victim (“grilled”) (E4). Throughout this excerpt, participants continued to construct their own group’s conflict-sustaining narratives; and, thus, continued to construct the conflict by using framing language to magnify supportive themes (justice of own group’s goals, their own group’s victimhood, and delegitimizing the outgroup) and ignoring contradictory information.

Co-Constructing a New District Narrative: The Funding Excerpt

The *Funding* episode below is an illustration of one of the times the “out-victiming” process I described in the previous section was interrupted. Before presenting the transcript and analysis from the Funding excerpt, I first give an example of how my own adherence to the conflict-sustaining charter narrative regarding funding changed. This background information provides context for the *Funding* excerpt, including why I made efforts to intervene during the discussion.

As a charter leader, I used to believe the larger charter narrative that charters have worse funding than districts because districts got money from the state’s School Facilities Board and therefore did not have to pay for their buildings out of state funding (like charters do). I also thought district funding was better because school districts have access to local tax money through bonds and overrides. When I started attending ASA events, I remember being surprised to hear the opposing district narrative that charter schools have better funding. I learned the School Facilities Board had stopped providing

funding for district schools and that going out for bond and override elections was expensive, exhausting, and many districts could not get their bonds and overrides approved by their voters. The district narrative was that charters have better funding because charters automatically get the Charter Additional Assistance³⁹ money without the work, expense, and uncertainty of going out for a bond election.

During the study's first district focus group, the superintendents had talked about another layer of the district narrative I had not considered before the focus group. Specifically, I learned the districts have to pay the election costs for bond, override, and school board members out of their Maintenance and Operations (M & O) funds. This means it literally takes money out of the classroom when people run for the school board (unless it is an uncontested election). Throughout the analysis offered below, I briefly define terms used during the discussion in footnotes; however, explaining the intricacies of Arizona's school finance system is beyond the scope of this study.

My analysis of the *Funding* excerpt illustrates how difficult it is to change conflict-sustaining narratives but also provides hope it is possible to interrupt the cycle of competing narratives. During the same iPED meeting as the *Audit* excerpt above, the group continued constructing their respective conflict-sustaining (victim) funding narratives. The first section presents part of the district narrative.

³⁹ Charter Additional Assistance is intended to cover facilities, transportation, and other funding categories available to districts through property taxes and other sources unavailable to charter schools (Arizona Senate Reserch Staff, 2016).

Table 16

Funding (1 of 4)

Line	Speaker	Utterance
221684	David:	But it gets a little bit onto
221685	David:	like, because of marketing.
221686	David:	So you as a taxpayer see that
221687	David:	you know, line item on your property tax bill
221688	Peter:	<i>Absolutely</i>
221689	David:	read like, this time of year in particular.
221690	Karen:	Yeah
221691	David:	Read the editorials.
221692	David:	Like, take the West Valley View for example and just you know,
221693	David:	The anti-tax people they're you know,
221694	David:	“Vote no, vote no, vote no” and, you know, it's very visible.
221695	David:	So you know we're not experts as districts in marketing
221696	David:	and we really need to market even further.
221697	David:	Even to stakeholders who have no kids
221698	David:	in the system.
221699	David:	Because our funding mechanism
221700	David:	is very visible.
221701	David:	Like, you know
221702	David:	If you have an override,
221703	David:	there it is on the property tax
221704	David:	and every, you know, 5 years
221705	Karen:	K-3 override. Bond.
221706	David:	We're coming back begging for money.
221707	David:	Then we need bonds
221708	David:	because the state isn't funding the capital.
221709	David:	It's like . . .
221710	Billie:	School Facilities

In the above excerpt, David used framing language (M6) to magnify the supporting theme (M3) that districts are victims (E4) when he explained how every five years districts are forced to come back to their taxpayers “begging for money” (Line 221706) because the state funding was not adequate to meet the district’s needs (Line 221706). I also interpreted his use of the term marketing here as different than when he said charters were better at marketing than districts in an earlier part of the conversation. In the prior context, “marketing” meant “advertising.” However, in the current section,

“marketing” appeared to mean “election campaign.” David was negotiating a new use of the term marketing to include campaigning (trying to get the bonds passed during an election). Upon analysis, I also interpreted David’s reference to the district funding mechanism being very “visible” (Line 221700) as having an additional connotation I had not recognized at the time. Being “visible” is good because it implies openness and honesty (justness of ingroup goals, E1). Although David did not explicitly say anything about the charter funding mechanism, there is an implication (by omission) that the charter funding mechanism was not “visible,” and therefore, not open and honest—and, therefore, not good (delegitimizes outgroup, E5). A few turns later, Billie continues the district narrative with a specific example (Table 17):

Table 17

Funding (2 of 4)

	Speaker:	Utterance
221727	Billie:	Going back to that
221728	Billie:	to the jealousy piece.
221729	Billie:	I'm like okay.
221730	Billie:	Our maintenance and operations override
221731	Billie:	brings about
221732	Billie:	I'm just going to round it, \$700 more per pupil.
221733	Billie:	That capital override brings about \$230 more per pupil
221734	Billie:	So, a little bit over \$900.
221735	Billie:	I'm like
221736	Billie:	I don't want to go and ask the citizens every 5-7 years
221737	Billie:	on the weekends at night.
221738	David:	Mhm
221739	Billie:	All right
221740	Billie:	give me that \$2,000
221741	Billie:	in Additional Assistance instead.
221742	David:	Right. Right.

Billie began this section by indicating she was returning the conversation to a prior topic, jealousy (Lines 221727 and 221728). Specifically, why she (and assumingly other district superintendents) is jealous of charters. She explained; the district she superintends has two overrides⁴⁰ (maintenance and operations, capital) and they bring in a little over \$900 per student combined. However, she has to work nights and weekends to get those overrides approved by the voters⁴¹ and she would rather get the Charter Additional Assistance (Lines 221739-221741) of \$2000. I interpreted this portion of talk as Billie presenting the argument that charters have better funding than districts because charters get a little more than twice as much money (\$2,000 per student, compared to \$900 per student, according to Billie) without being required to “beg” for the money on nights and weekends.

Although hearing district superintendents’ perspectives on elections and charter additional assistance several years ago had caused me to reconsider a portion of the charter narrative, there was no evidence to this point that hearing the same information was having a similar effect on the charter leader participants (ignore contradictory information, M5). The conversation continued the pattern. Each group magnified their

⁴⁰ “Bonds and overrides are voter-approved initiatives that generate additional tax revenue to fund projects and operations. Bonds and overrides are tools that a local community can use to provide funds for their local schools and colleges above and beyond what the state provides (Expect More Arizona, n.d.)

⁴¹ A.R.S. 15-511 prohibits using school district or charter school resources to influence an election (including school bond and override elections). This means district superintendents who are going through a bond or override election cannot do anything to encourage people to approve those bonds and overrides during normal work hours. However, getting those bonds and overrides approved is vital to keeping their jobs. Therefore, the superintendents have to work on the election outside of normal work hours (nights and weekends).

ingroup's narrative themes (justness of goals, victimization, and delegitimizing the outgroup) by relying on supportive sources and using framing language (M6). They also continued to talk past each other by not validating the other's narratives (ignore contradictory information, M5).

In the next section, I attempted to change the cycle by prompting the superintendents to explain the costs districts incur when they have an issue on the ballot (bonds, overrides, or board members). I did this because I had never heard this information acknowledged in the charter narrative (that districts have better school funding because they have access to bonds and overrides.) I hoped understanding this part of the district narrative would cause the other charter leaders to re-consider the charter funding narrative. I present my analysis after the excerpt.

Table 18

Funding (3 of 4)

Line	Speaker	Utterance
222089	Researcher:	I want to go back to something that...had come up in the focus group beforehand talking about ... Because it was news to me, and I think it's a misconception on bonds and how much they cost you to run the overrides and bonds.
222090	David:	To run the election or?
222091	Researcher:	To run the, yeah, because I don't think that most charters know that districts have to pay for the election.
222092	Karen:	We pay for it.
222093	David:	So you know,
222094	David:	the election cost can be pretty significant.
222095	David:	Um, like I think, you know,
222096	David:	Gallifrey District, for example was saying it's a couple hundred thousand.
222099	David:	And then the ...
222100	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>Wow, that's money you just lose if you don't get it.</i>
222101	David:	Right. And then to sell the bonds is another \$50,000.
222113	David:	This, this couple hundred thousand I'm talking about
222114	David:	is district resources.
222116	David:	It's the cost of the election itself.
222117	Karen:	To run the polls... the poll-workers.
222118	David:	So you get a bill from the county office.
222129	<i>Peter:</i>	<i>As a political subdivision</i>
222130	<i>Peter:</i>	<i>don't you receive part of the bill</i>
222131	<i>Peter:</i>	<i>just for district collection</i>
222132	<i>Peter:</i>	<i>also for district board members?</i>
222133	David:	Yeah, it's the school board members.
222134	Karen:	We do.
222135	<i>Peter:</i>	<i>So, this, so they pay for - they pay for those elections.</i>
222136	David:	Yeah and that comes out of M & O.
222137	David:	There's like, there's no money for that.

Karen and David responded to my prompt by affirming “We pay for it” and explaining how expensive the costs of the elections can be. *Catherine*’s contribution to the discourse above is of particular significance in that it interrupted the out-victiming

dynamic the group had settled into in the previous episode and also resisted the established charter narrative. When *Catherine* said, “Wow, that’s money you just lose if you don’t get it” (Line 222100). She was expressing empathy with the district superintendents. “Wow” was a marker (Paltridge, 2012) that referred back to David’s assertion that the elections cost Gallifrey a couple hundred thousand dollars. By saying “wow,” *Catherine* did not marginalize the information or ignore it. She acknowledged the cost as being significant. Then, she legitimized the district’s victimhood claim by saying, “That’s money you just lose if you don’t get it.” To me, using the word lose framed the district as a victim. *Peter*’s question (Lines 222129-222132) also helped constructed the district narrative because it functioned as a statement to be confirmed (districts receive a bill for school board member’s elections, too) rather than a request for information.

In the excerpt below that took place several turns later, *Catherine* continues to accept part of the district narrative and helps construct it by making a claim about the negative consequences of the current system. The excerpt (Table 19) begins with *Catherine* talking about money not going into classrooms because of the elections, which again, I discuss in more detail after the excerpt.

Table 19

Funding (4 of 4)

Line	Speaker	Utterance
222251	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>As we're talking about this,</i>
222252	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>I'm thinking about all of the millions of dollars</i>
222253	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>that's not being spent on education</i>
222254	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>and how much money</i>
222255	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>if they would just raise the M & O</i>
222256	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>and quit with all the other shenanigans.</i>
222257	Billie:	that's true
222258	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>You know, how much more money would go in the classrooms.</i>
222259	David:	Mhm
222260	Karen:	good point
222261	Billie:	That's true. That is true.
222262	David:	And the requirements of ballot language.
222263	David:	Like it makes it sound like you're doing something very illegal
222264	Billie:	(laughs)
222265	<i>Catherine:</i>	<i>(laughs)</i>
222266	Karen:	(laughs)
222267	<i>Jenna:</i>	<i>or bad</i>
222268	David	Exceed that statutory limitation on the expenditure budget
222269	<i>Jenna:</i>	<i>it makes it seem like</i>
222270	David:	If somebody actually reads the ballot they're like "Oh that sounds awful now."
222271	<i>Jenna:</i>	<i>Well, it makes it sound like you can't manage your money</i>
222272	Billie:	Yeah
222273	<i>Jenna:</i>	<i>and you're having to do this</i>
222273	<i>Jenna:</i>	<i>because again, you've done something wrong.</i>
222275	Billie:	Yup

In this section, *Catherine* voiced a new narrative—that millions of dollars are being wasted on election costs and not being spent in classrooms because “they” (the legislature) would not “quit with all the other shenanigans” and raise the Maintenance and Operations (M & O) funding. In doing so, she expressed solidarity with the districts by accusing the legislature of “shenanigans.” I interpret “shenanigans” as framing the

legislature as a recalcitrant child, which could be interpreted as delegitimizing them.

“Money into the classrooms” (Line 222258) is a reference to a larger state-level big C Conversations⁴² because districts have recently been criticized for not spending enough money “in the classrooms,” with the implication that all other district spending does not help students and is wasteful. I interpreted David’s “hmm” as indicating that, to him, what *Catherine* had said was a new way of framing/thinking about the issue. Karen and Billie affirm *Catherine*’s statements. Then, David builds upon the new narrative by explaining another way the elections victimize districts as to “the requirement of ballot language” (Lines 222262) “makes it sound like [districts] are doing something very illegal” (Line 222263). An innocent person purposefully being portrayed as doing something illegal is a victim. Therefore, David again frames districts as victims because the districts are required to use ballot language that makes them appear to be breaking the law. *Jenna*, as a charter leader, also helps construct the district narrative by adding to David’s claim that the required ballot language victimizes districts by saying, “Well it makes it sound like you can’t manage your money” (Line 222271). I interpreted this line as *Jenna* indicating solidarity with David by adopting the words he used “sound(s) like” into her talk. And, in the next two lines, she affirms his claim and builds upon it by offering another explanation of why the ballot language victimizes districts: (Line 222273); “and you’re having to do this because, again, you’ve done something wrong.”

In this section and the previous section, *Catherine*, *Peter*, and *Jenna* supported the district narrative by affirming it and helping to construct it. The new narrative (districts are victims of funding shenanigans) was co-constructed by both the district and charter

⁴² See AZ Central (2016) for an overview of Classrooms First Council. For articles about dollars in the classroom see AZ Central (2017) and Fischer (2016).

participants by building upon part of the existing district narrative. The new narrative affirmed the victimhood of the districts.

This was encouraging because, according to Bar-Tal et al. (2014), “An important step towards reconciliation is an acceptance of the legitimacy of the rival perspective (even if not adopting it or completely giving up one’s own narrative)” (p. 671). Although it would be a huge stretch to say the charter participants were “won over” by the districts and completely abandoned their own narrative, this interaction provided evidence that the charter leaders accepted part of the district narrative (that receiving Charter Additional Assistance has advantages over bond and override elections) even though the charter participants did not completely change their own narrative (that districts have it better because they have access to bonds and overrides). My assertion that the charter leaders accepted this part of the district narrative was supported during the second charter focus group when *Catherine* and *Jenna* referred to the above conversation and expressed empathy for the district superintendents about the elections.

However, what I interpret to be even more important is that the co-constructed new narrative also included a broader definition of “districts.” Within the broader definition, “district” did not just refer to district leadership. It also included the students and teachers within district classrooms (Line 222258). I believe this broader definition is significant because it has the potential to make victimhood concerns more significant to outside groups. I borrow Matt’s wording from the first district focus group; “[having] to do this, this, and this” is not just about what the people who lead the schools have to do. Resources (including finances, time, and personnel) are finite. When resources have to be used for one thing (e.g., paying for elections), they are not available to be used for

something else (e.g., paying teachers). This analysis suggests that when the two communities work together to co-construct a narrative (even when that co-constructing is based on the district narrative or the charter narrative), the co-constructed narrative has the potential to be more powerful because it may communicate a broader view of what is at stake to the policymakers and those who influence them.

In this analysis, I have provided my interpretation of how representatives from the district and charter communities use the methods identified by Bar-Tal et al. (2014) to socially construct and negotiate their conflict-supporting collective narratives within a specific context (an iPED meeting) that was situated within the larger state, national, and historical contexts. Specifically, I illustrated how the participants ignored (M5) and marginalized (M3) contradictory information and instead relied on supportive sources (M1) and framing language (M6) IN ORDER TO magnify supportive themes (M3) OF the justness of ingroup goals (E1), positive presentation of the ingroup (E3), victimization of ingroup (E4), and delegitimizing the outgroup (E5). However, I also provided evidence the conflict-sustaining pattern has the potential to be interrupted when someone from the outgroup affirms the legitimacy of a portion of the ingroup narrative and helps construct a new narrative.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

As a charter leader practitioner, my problem of practice was based on my experience with the conflict between the district and charter communities. Therefore, the purpose of this mixed methods action research project was to increase positive feelings (allophilia) between participating school district and charter school leaders through an intervention based on intergroup contact theory. My hope was that the intervention could also serve as the impetus for improved district/charter relations across the state. I also wanted to contribute to the larger intergroup contact conversation by qualitatively exploring how district superintendents and charter school leaders who are active in their respective associations socially construct their perceptions of conflict between the two communities.

This chapter includes a discussion of findings, implications for practice and research, limitations of the present study, and recommendations for future research.

Summary and Discussion of Findings Related to Allophilia

RQ1: How and to what extent does intergroup contact increase allophilia (positive attitudes) between Arizona school district and charter school leaders?

RQ2: In what ways do participants voice allophilia during ingroup dialogue?

It was my hope and hypothesis that the intergroup contact facilitated by the iPED intervention would increase allophilia (positive attitudes) between school district and charter school leaders. The findings for allophilia indicated a generally positive trend, although I was disappointed the data did not provide a clear, consistent picture. It was encouraging that the quantitative and qualitative data analysis did support the assertion

that the intervention had an overall significant positive effect on participants' feeling comfortable or at ease with the outgroup. The second encouraging finding was the charter leaders' expressions of empathy for their district counterparts following the intervention. In the context of the intergroup contact literature, these two findings are important signals that the iPED meetings had a positive effect in the relationship between the district and charter participants, as explained further below.

One of the reasons intergroup contact is thought to increase positive relationships between groups is because it reduces anxiety at the prospect of interacting with the outgroup (Dovidio et al., 2003; Greijdanus, Postmes, Gordijn, & van Zomeren, 2015; Pettigrew et al., 2011); it is reasonable to assume *comfort* increases as anxiety decreases. Therefore, the increase in *comfort* by district and charter participants following the iPED suggests my intergroup contact intervention had the potential to improve the relationship between participants. Furthermore, when the charter leaders expressed empathy, it indicated they were seeing things from the perspective of the outgroup (Boag & Carnelley, 2016; Head, 2012; Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew et al., 2011; Sugawara & Nikaido, 2006; Wasserman, 2004) which is considered another mediator for improved relationships.

From a quantitative perspective, in the aggregate, feelings of allophilia increased from the beginning of the study to the end as measured by the Allophilia Scale. However, two participants' allophilia scores decreased, which concerned me because the purpose of the intervention was to improve relationships. Another concerning issue was that the allophilia category of *kinship* decreased in the aggregate and by subgroup, which contradicts the qualitative analysis that *kinship* was the most frequently voiced form of

allophilia and that expressions of *kinship* increased from the first to second focus groups. From a quantitative perspective, the amount of overall voiced allophilia increased after the intervention, which supports the assertion that feelings of allophilia increased. I discuss potential explanations.

Although the Allophilia Scale has been validated (Alfieri & Marta, 2011; Pittinsky, 2015; Pittinsky et al., 2011), those validations have been for single use, not to measure changes over time. It is possible the surveys were not sensitive enough to be valid or reliable for measuring change and were, therefore, wrong. However, it is also possible the results were accurate. This possibility is supported by discussions during the second focus group. Both the superintendents and the charter leaders said the iPED meetings did not really change how they saw the outgroup. However, they assured me they felt the discussions were interesting, everyone seemed like “good people” who shared the same passion for students, and they learned a few things they did not know before the meetings. Based on the second focus group discussions, the survey results may be completely accurate and participants simply used *kinship*-related words naturally because of the iPED’s purpose of engaging in dialogue and exploring policy proposals both groups could take back to their respective associations.

Another explanation could be related to the order in which participants took the surveys in relation to the first and second focus groups. Participants took the opening surveys before the first focus group. They took the closing survey after the second focus group. Therefore, the ingroup was more salient for the second survey which may have influenced participants to filter their responses through the group narrative (Bruner, 1990; Bar-Tal, 2007). The socio-psychological foundations of intractable conflicts strongly

suggest collective narratives are serious obstacles for conflict resolution because those narratives filter what group members pay attention to and how they make sense of new information (Bar-Tal et al., 2014; Nasie et al., 2014), which my analysis indicated was happening during iPED meetings.

Because this was an action research project, I was disappointed there was not more of an increase in positive feelings. I was also alarmed when I saw some participants decreased in positive feelings. My concern was not only because of my desire for “significant findings” to validate my hard work. I was also concerned that my inexperience as a facilitator may have caused damage and worsened the perspectives of some of the participants.

Upon further reflection, I believe my findings are probably one of the reasons so much of the intergroup contact literature is situated in artificial situations and measured on a strictly quantitative basis. Action research, like real life, is messy. Action research happens in the field where variables cannot be controlled and findings can contradict each other. More than one participant referred to having had outside conversations with outgroup members that they were confusing with the iPED conversations. And, as I discuss in the limitations, this action research project cannot be viewed apart from the local and national historical events taking place at the same time.

Similarly, I do not believe limiting an appraisal of my effectiveness as an action researcher to the confines of this study’s intervention and data collection necessarily presents the only “true” picture. It may be just as accurate to view my effectiveness as a researcher by taking into account changes that occurred over the four year span of my doctoral studies as I focused on my problem of practice - the conflict between Arizona’s

district and charter communities. I know it changed me. I would like to believe that individual conversations I had and relationships I built during this time had incremental effects on people that translated to shifts in the larger community. My participants all agreed there had been an increase in the district and charter communities vetting things through each other and working together to advocate for common policy positions. There were a few times over the past four years I worried that the conflict might be resolved by the time the Institutional Review Board cleared me to go forth and research. This larger view of the improved relationship between the communities was supported by Jay Kaprosy, the lobbyist for the Arizona Charter Schools Association, when he told me that the charter and district associations had worked cooperatively on an unprecedented number of bills during the current (fifty-third) legislative session.

Summary and Discussion of Findings Related to Conflict Narratives

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do school district superintendents and charter school leaders socially construct and negotiate narratives that sustain the conflict between their two communities?

Through my quantitative analysis I have personally gained new understandings about some of the perspectives Arizona's district superintendents and charter school leaders have about the conflict between their communities. First, I discuss my insights about the narrative content and then the narrative process as I understood it through the framework provided by Bar-Tal and Bar-Tal et al (2007; 2014).

The four themes I developed through my analysis ((a) *competition sets the stage for conflict*; (b) *actions construct conflict*; (c) *perceptions sustain conflict*; and (d) *conflict causes feelings*) allowed me to see and appreciate some of the differences in each

group's perceptions of the conflict and helped me shape the District Narrative and Charter Narrative to reflect the stories my participants constructed during the study. Bartal's conflict-supporting narrative themes provided me with the vocabulary and structure to make sense of those stories within the context of intergroup conflict.

The Charter Narrative has a specific beginning. Their conflict began when charters began. From the charter perspective, their very existence is the cause of the conflict. The charter leaders' talk expressed the perspective that conflict in the form of competition is a good thing, which makes sense because providing free market competition is imbedded in the purpose of charter schools. Competition is part of the charter identity and competition is primarily discussed in terms of businesses competing against each other. However, charters also said districts and charters were "fighting over the same bone." Charter leaders experience the conflict as a minority group, through marginalization terms like being excluded, ignored, tolerated, and tokenization. Like a younger sibling, what charters want is to be accepted and respected by the district community without losing their distinct identity as charter leaders. They fear being "assimilated into the system."

The District Narrative did not refer to the beginning of charter schools as a specific beginning to the conflict. Phrases like, "we are now in a world," and "it seems to me that public schools have had to deal with some of these changes that we didn't see coming or didn't agree with at one point" gave me the impression the history was not as important to them. District talk about competition continually referred to "scarce resources" and was frequently framed as win/lose. The words used about competition repeatedly evoked visions of a starving animal (e.g. "fighting for scraps," "starving for

resources”). Other competition related talk included the unfair advantage charters have over districts in the form of fewer regulations and funding (receiving charter additional assistance without having to “beg the taxpayers” for money). Although they expressed jealousy, envy, and resentment, the district participants did not necessarily place blame on charters for the disparity. However, they did blame politicians who support charters, “I see some of the [corporate charters] who are politically supported and then those folks supporting them also telling us how bad we’re doing.”

One of encouraging finding: because the District Narrative did not have a clear beginning of the conflict and did not necessarily blame charters for their victimization, the District Narrative did not clearly contain all four themes of the conflict-sustaining, collective narratives groups engaged in intractable conflict use (Bar-Tal, 2007).

Therefore, the conflict between the two communities may not be “intractable.” Although I have not been able to find a categorization of different levels of intergroup conflict, it is clear in the literature that intractable conflicts are the most severe type. Bar-Tal describes them as being “existential, irresolvable, and zero sum in nature” (p. 1434). The Israeli Palestinian conflict is considered to be an intractable conflict (Hammack, 2010; Kellen, Bekerman, & Maoz, 2012; Maoz, 2011; Nasie et al., 2014). After hearing about my dissertation topic, more than one person suggested I should start with something simpler, “like going to the middle-east and fixing that issue.” However, it is nice to know Arizona’s district and charter conflict is actually not nearly as volatile.

I found Bar-Tal’s work (2007) late in the process, after I thought I had completed my analysis. My analysis to that point had been fragmented and lacked cohesiveness. The conflict-sustaining narrative framework helped me make sense of my preliminary

analysis for RQ3 and structured RQ3 as a narrative analysis. In retrospect, the study would have been “neater” if I had known about this literature earlier in the process. The knowledge also could have informed the research design and may have helped me provide a more supportive environment for transformational conversations during intra-group and inter-group contact. Instead, as a novice researcher, I was able to fully experience the iterative, messy nature of qualitative research (Anderson & Herr, 1999; McNiff, 2013; Riel, 2010).

At a different level, Bar-Tal’s work on conflict-sustaining collective narratives (2007) helped me make sense of what had happened during the study and why we were not able to accomplish the group goal of finding joint policy positions they could support and potentially take back to their respective associations. Reading the narrative through the framework suggested by Bar-Tal and Bar-Tal et al (2014) also helped make sense of something that had confused me during the second focus groups. As I mentioned earlier, I was surprised during the second focus groups with each group’s propensity to point out faults in the other group and to use those faults to highlight positive aspects of their own group. This tendency is explained by Bar-Tal’s collective narrative theme of presenting the ingroup positively and delegitimizing the rival group. As I had seen during my discourse analysis, it was evident the district and charter conflict was being sustained through their collective narratives and that my participants⁴³ were constructing and negotiating those narratives through the methods described by Bar-Tal et al. (2014).

⁴³ It was not my intent to question the sincerity, motivations, or truthfulness of my participants’ statements by labeling them. I analyzed the dialogue through the lens of conflict-sustaining narratives. Using a different lens would highlight different features of the conversation.

I am confident my participants participated in the study in good faith with a genuine desire to improve the relationship between the district and charter communities.. I was surprised how difficult it was to interrupt the interactive processes of constructing and negotiating conflict-supporting narratives and instead, to co-create new ways of being in the world together (Gergen, 2009). Although I did not discover a magic “sonic screwdriver” to “fix” intergroup conflict in this or other contexts, my perspective has shifted. I have a greater appreciation for how important it is to enter into another’s story, even when it conflicts with my own.

In keeping with social constructionist tradition, I do not claim this dissertation presents the last word on the data at hand. I freely admit “that the collection could be assembled and sorted in multiple ways, yielding different analysis; doing those other analyses would expand the dialogue” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p. 45). My desire is not for my analysis to end the conversation by serving as a summary. Instead, I want to provide another possibility for proponents of each community to hear themselves and hear each other (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). I hope to use the insights I have gained from this study provide tools to open additional dialogue between the two communities.

Limitations

As a mixed methods action research project, the specific context of this study should be kept in mind when determining the applicability of the results. As *Jenna* noted during the study “I think that’s coming out even today, that different parts of the state have different ways of being among districts and charters” (lines 221989 – 221991). Because of the varying state charter laws and educational cultures, districts and charters have different ways of being together from state to state and even within states. This

study was situated in Arizona, designed and facilitated by a researcher with a specific history, viewpoint, and relationships. Each participant also brought his or her own uniqueness to the study.

The obvious quantitative limitations of the study include a very small N size ($n = 8$). And, because of technical issues, that N was even smaller for the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test ($n = 6$). Therefore, the strength of the results would have had validity concerns even if the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test indicated statistical significance. Additionally, although the Allophilia Scale has been validated against other instruments (Alfieri & Marta, 2011), I have not seen it applied as a measurement of change. The instrument may have limited usefulness as a measure of change. And even if it did measure change, the short timeframe for this study (October – December) may have been too short of a time to affect the type of change needed in order to be detected by the Allophilia Scale. It is possible that a longer period of time would have provided more evidence of change.

Another obvious limitation of this study was my positionality as a charter leader. Although I attempted to limit not to insert myself into the discussions, all the participants were cognizant of my identity as a charter leader. This also meant the district leader focus groups were not parallel discussions with the charter leaders because the superintendents were very aware a member of the outgroup was in the room during their discussions. Therefore, the superintendents may have moderated the way they expressed themselves because of my presence.

A related limitation that was pointed out by both the charter leaders and the superintendents was the relationship I had with all the participants. Those relationships

could mean the experimenter effect should be considered as a threat to the study's validity. However, the intergroup contact literature frequently assumes contact is facilitated. In fact, there are arguments the role is important for increasing positive intergroup interactions (Nagda, 2006; Pittinsky, 2010).

The fact that I had relationships with each of the participants also meant my population had something in common at the beginning of the study, which created a bias in my study because the participants were not randomly selected and were not representative of the larger district superintendent and charter leader communities. They were the type of people who were willing to give a large amount of time (approximately 8 hours plus travel time) to help me.

Historical threats to validity may present another limitation of the study. Historical threats should be considered when events outside of the group, especially political events, could have affected the study. When I conducted this research in the fall of 2016, a lot was happening at the national and state level. Between the third and fourth iPED meeting, Donald Trump was elected the 45th president of the United States and he nominated Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary. Her nomination was the most contested nomination for secretary, evidenced by the fact that her confirmation is the only cabinet confirmation to require the vote of the House Chair, the vice president, to break the tie (LoBianco, et al, 2017). Secretary DeVos was criticized for supporting charter schools and vouchers (Grinberg & Kessler, 2017), which may have made the conflict between the district and charter communities more salient for the fourth iPED meeting and the second focus groups.

During the fall of 2016, Arizona was also preparing to submit its plans for complying with the new Elementary and Secondary Education act, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to the US Department of Education (Arizona Department of Education, 2017). Statewide, Governor Ducey's Classrooms First group was meeting to discuss and recommend changes to the school funding formulas (Arizona Governor Doug Ducey Office of Education, n.d.). The Arizona State Board of Education A-F subcommittee was working on a new school accountability model (Expect More Arizona, 2016). However, to a certain extent, political events are embedded in this study, not "outside" it. Political events have created and continue to create barriers to cooperation between district and charter leaders. Alternately, external events can also help the groups identify with each other (a common enemy, for example). During the spring of 2016, the school district and charter school communities worked together to pass Proposition 123, an initiative that ended a lawsuit between the state of Arizona and public education groups (Irish, 2016). Karen summarized the feeling of uncertainty and change during the fourth iPED meeting (lines 420573 – 420603):

Karen: Well, and you know the conversation changed as soon as we had the election. And then it changed again when we had the secretary appointed. So, we're kind of living in a state of flux. Because we have a bunch of unknowns at this point that won't be known until after January. I mean, he's [President Trump's] transitioning right now at the federal level so we've got some things that are kind of shaking out. But, you know, how does that play out on a national level with ESSA and the deregulations that we've got in place right now? And then, at the state level, how are we going to be responding to that in the next year or two years or even you know, five years. What is that going to look like for us? And, you know, it's kind of scary because it is unknown but at the same time, there's a lot of opportunity, like you were saying, Peter. There's opportunity right now to kind of shift directions, if you will..... All kids should have access to good education, whether it's in a charter or it's in a public school, or even the private school setting. And how do

we make sure that we're at the table when those conversations are happening – in terms of where we go as a state?

Future Research

I guess my burning question would be, “What does the future of charters and publics and districts in Arizona look like?” And then, considering that, how do we on a political level strengthen support for all kids, no matter what school they go to?

—Tom (Line 420539)

I suggest two areas for further analysis with this dataset. One suggestion is to investigate how participants negotiated intergroup tension through polite forms of conflict talk. As I conducted my analysis, I noted that the words “interesting” and “fascinating” were frequently used as substitutes for negative language. For example, after a district participant said “Many districts don’t credit years of experience in charters when placing on their salary schedule,” the charter participant replied by saying, “And I think that’s a really interesting one, particularly when it’s an accredited charter because many of us have gone through the same accreditation process.” In context, “interesting one” was a substitute for “wrong thing to do.” Another participant used the word “fascinating” in a similar manner when he said, “That is just fascinating that you would actually construct a bill based on one parent’s phone call.” In context, the participant was using the word “fascinating” as a substitute for, “ridiculous,” “wrong,” or “dumb.”

The second suggestion for further analysis is to conduct metaphor analysis with this dataset. I detected possible conceptual metaphors about districts (e.g. system, just sitting there, came through the system, institution, industrialized) that may suggest a conceptual structure of districts as inert, non-living things. In contrast, charters were

talked about using different metaphorical language (e.g. matured, evolved, created to do something flexible, you [charters] have freedom, you have to market to stay alive), which suggests a conceptual structure of charters as being alive or human. Future research to investigate the structural metaphors used to construct our concepts of districts and charters may provide insights into whether those metaphors may limit our possibilities. “If we changed our metaphors, would there be other, possibly better options available? (Gergen, 2009, p. 34)

My district participants suggested two possibilities for parallel studies with different groups of participants. During the third iPED meeting, based on the different reactions from the men and women regarding tension during the second iPED meeting, Billie suggested I investigate differences in conflict perceptions based on gender. The other suggestion came out of iPED discussions that exposed conflict within the charter community itself. The district superintendents were surprised to hear the charter participants sharing their own concerns regarding for-profit, corporate, “elite” charters. Therefore, the district participants thought a study using intergroup contact between the two charter factions would also be interesting.

I have not found any other studies that compare the Allophilia Scale and transcript data. Livert explored the effects of culinary travel on positive attitudes and used the allophilia factors to orient his analysis of journals and interview. However, he did not administer the Allophilia Scale (2016). I recommend future research to investigate how the Allophilia Scale relates to naturally occurring expressions of allophilia.

This study took place over three months and the intergroup contact (iPED meetings) focused on dialogue. Future studies may consider designing intergroup contact

interventions over a longer period of time and including more variety in the activities (including social time). Based on feedback I received from participants after the study, future studies may also consider following up after participants have had time to reflect upon the experience and potentially realize the intergroup contact had more of an effect on their thinking than they was expressed during the second focus groups.

Any future research informed by this study will have the advantage of understanding the concept of conflict-sustaining collective narratives and the methods groups use to socially construct and negotiate those narratives when designing a new intervention (the work of Bar-Tal (2007) and Bar-Tal et al. (2014)). There is research that suggests raising awareness of the issue (bias towards the ingroup's narrative—"bias of naïve realism") may allow members of groups engaged in intergroup conflict to identify their own biases and, therefore become an intervention to increase the willingness to question their own narrative and co-construct a new narrative with members of the outgroup (Nasie et al., 2014). Therefore, interventions that include raising awareness of narrative adherence are worthy of further study.

Finally, I recommend future studies where the researcher takes a more active role in guiding intergroup contact dialogue. I wrote the Third Vignette after attempting to describe my internal struggle of trying to decide how much to say during the iPED meetings (describing my involvement during the *Funding* excerpt). I was conflicted, because one hand I wanted to help change the conversation. But, on the other hand I was concerned about "polluting" my study with too much of my own voice.

Third Vignette

As I sit here writing this, I realize how positivist my assumption at the time was. I was attempting to be invisible in the study, which was impossible. In hindsight, I

wish I'd fully embraced the action research belief of conducting research "with" the participants and the qualitative stance of the researcher being fully transparent about how they influence the study. How many opportunities for transformative talk were missed because I did not fully embrace my role of boundary broker?

Conclusion

Although this dissertation bounds the beginning and end of a particular cycle of this action research, I began reflecting and taking action to improve the relationship between the district and charter communities when I attended my first Arizona School Administrators conference six years ago. According to social constructionism, speaking is action (Gergen, 1994, 1999, 2004; Gee, 2011, 2014a, 2014b). Therefore, every time I interacted with members of the district community as a charter leader and every time I voiced a district perspective with my charter colleagues, I was engaging in the action of constructing meaning with others. The purpose of this study was to improve the relationship between district and charter communities. However, improvement is a relative term that indicates direction with no specific target. No matter how much something improves, there is always more to improve. And no matter how much one learns about a subject, there is always more to learn. Therefore, although this dissertation has apparently at some point been considered acceptably "complete," my personal journey, including my attempts to improve the relationship between Arizona's school districts and charter schools, will continue the cycle of reflection, action, reflection as I live my theory into practice (Riel, 2010).

Standing before us is a vast spectrum of possibility, and endless invitation to innovation.

—Gergen, 2009, p. 5

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APPENDIX A
VALUE IMPEDIMENTS

Value Impediments

Perspectives	
District view of Charters <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••	Charter view of Districts <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••
District view of District <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••	Charter view of Charter <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••
Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••	

Courtesy of J. Kittel, 2013

APPENDIX B

SURVEY OF SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS

Survey of School District Superintendents

Please complete the following section on attitudes toward charter school leaders, rating your agreement with each item on the scale indicated (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*).

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
1. In general, I have positive attitudes about charter school	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I respect charter school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I like charter school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I feel positively toward charter school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I am at ease around charter school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I am comfortable when I hang out with charter school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I feel like I can be myself around charter school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I feel a sense of belonging with charter school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. I feel a kinship with charter school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I would like to be more like charter school leaders	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. I am truly interested in understanding the point of view	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. I am motivated to get to know charter school leaders better.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. To enrich my life, I would try to make more friends who are	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. I am interested in hearing about the experiences of charter school	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. I am impressed by charter school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I feel inspired by charter school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. I am enthusiastic about charter school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX C
SURVEY OF CHARTER SCHOOL LEADERS

Survey of Charter School Leaders

Please complete the following section on attitudes toward School District Superintendents, rating your agreement with each item on the scale indicated (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*).

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
1. In general, I have positive attitudes about school district	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I respect school district superintendents.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I like school district superintendents.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I feel positively toward school district superintendents.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I am at ease around school district superintendents.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I am comfortable when I hang out with school district superintendents.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I feel like I can be myself around school district superintendents.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I feel a sense of belonging with school district superintendents.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. I feel a kinship with school district superintendents.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I would like to be more like school district superintendents	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. I am truly interested in understanding the point of view of	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. I am motivated to get to know school district superintendents	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. To enrich my life, I would try to make more friends who are school district superintendents.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. I am interested in hearing about the experiences of school district superintendents.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. I am impressed by school district superintendents.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I feel inspired by school district leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. I am enthusiastic about school district superintendents.	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX D

INTERGROUP CONTACT: PRE-FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Intergroup Contact Pre Focus Group Protocol

Pre-intervention

School District Superintendents

Brief introductions.

Explain guidelines and purpose of focus groups – encourage participants to experience this as a discussion rather than a group interview.

- 1) To what extent do you believe the statement “Arizona school districts and charter schools have a history of conflict” is accurate or inaccurate and why?
- 2) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the school district system?
- 3) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the charter school system?
- 4) How do you believe charter leaders view school district/district superintendents/?
- 5) How do you believe charter leaders view charters/themselves?
- 6) What could districts and charters gain from working together?
- 7) What barriers get in the way of district superintendents and charter school leaders working together?
- 8) What is your interest in overcoming these barriers?
- 9) What are you hoping to gain from taking part in the AZ iPED?

Charter School Leaders

Brief introductions.

Explain guidelines and purpose of focus groups – encourage participants to experience this as a discussion rather than a group interview.

- 1) To what extent do you believe the statement “Arizona school districts and charter schools have a history of conflict” is accurate or inaccurate and why?
- 2) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the school district system?
- 3) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the charter school system?
- 4) How do you believe school district superintendents view charter schools/charter leaders?
- 5) How do you believe school district superintendents view charters/themselves?
- 6) What could districts and charters gain from working together?
- 7) What barriers get in the way of district superintendents and charter school leaders working together?
- 8) What is your interest in overcoming these barriers?
- 9) What are you hoping to gain from taking part in the AZ iPED?

APPENDIX E

INTERGROUP CONTACT: SECOND FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Intergroup Contact Second Focus Group Protocol

School District Superintendents

Review guidelines and purpose of focus groups – encourage participants to experience this as a discussion rather than a group interview.

- 1) Talk about your experiences in the AZ iPED meetings.
 - a) How did your experience match or differ from your expectations?
 - b) Describe any specific moments/interactions that stood out to you.
- 2) In what ways did participating in the AZ iPED meetings challenge/confirm your perspective of the statement “Arizona school districts and charter schools have a history of conflict”?
- 3) In what ways were your perspectives changed/confirmed regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the school district system during the iPED meetings?
- 4) In what ways were your perspectives changed/confirmed regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the charter school system during the iPED meetings?
- 5) In what ways were your perspectives of how charter leaders view school district/district superintendents changed/confirmed?
- 6) In what ways were your perspectives of how charter leaders view charters/themselves changed/confirmed?
- 7) What can districts and charters gain from working together?
- 8) What barriers get in the way of district superintendents and charter school leaders working together?
- 9) What is your interest in overcoming these barriers?

Charter School Leaders

Review guidelines and purpose of focus groups – encourage participants to experience this as a discussion rather than a group interview.

- 1) Talk about your experiences in the AZ iPED meetings.
 - a) How did your experience match or differ from your expectations?
 - b) Describe any specific moments/interactions that stood out to you.
- 2) In what ways did participating in the AZ iPED meetings challenge/confirm your perspective of the statement “Arizona school districts and charter schools have a history of conflict”?
- 3) In what ways were your perspectives changed/confirmed regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the school district system during the iPED meetings?
- 4) In what ways were your perspectives changed/confirmed regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the charter school system during the iPED meetings?
- 5) In what ways were your perspectives of how district superintendents view charter schools/charter leaders changed/confirmed?
- 6) In what ways were your perspectives of how district superintendents view school districts/themselves changed/confirmed?
- 7) What can districts and charters gain from working together?
- 8) What barriers get in the way of district superintendents and charter school leaders working together?
- 9) What is your interest in overcoming these barriers?

APPENDIX F
IPED PROTOCOL

iPED protocol

Meeting 1:

- 1) Introductions and guidelines:
- 2) Story from your life journey (encourage reciprocal self-disclosure)
 - a) Can you please share your story of what led you to choose a career in education and to your current positions?

Appreciative Inquiry (support group members in co-imagining a new, positive future relationship):

- 3) Please share a story about a time you were proud of/excited about something happening in the public school system.
- 4) What are some strengths of Arizona's public education system? What do we do well?
- 5) When have the district and charter communities worked together towards a common goal?
- 6) Describe your vision for Arizona's public schools.
- 7) Describe the ideal relationship between the school districts and charter schools?

Meeting 2: Completing the Value Impediments (Appendix A).

- 1) Introductions and guidelines
 - 2) Explain Kittel's strategic alliance framework
 - 3) Discussion
- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| District view of Charter | Charter view of District |
| District view of District | Charter view of Charter |

Meeting 3: Identifying AZ policy narratives

- 1) Introduction and guidelines
- 2) Explain policy narratives:
- 3) Discussion

Meeting 4: Policy discussion

- 1) Introduction and guidelines
- 2) Based on previous discussions, what education policies can school districts and charter schools both support? What policies will help school districts and charter schools support each other's efforts to provide an excellent, equitable education to all Arizona's students (Rofes, 2005)?

APPENDIX G

VALUE IMPEDIMENTS: SECOND IPED MEETING

Value Impediments: Second iPED meeting

Perspectives	
<p>District view of Charters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied • Niche market • Don't have the same regulations • Don't educate all children (accept/keep) • Taxpayer money going to • Good at marketing • Have been given flexibility • Dividing funding and teacher talent • Have better funding (additional assistance money vs. bonds override) 	<p>Charter view of Districts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrialized • Established • Professional • Respected (and respect for) • Aren't criticized for selective enrollment schools • Get more funding (bonds and overrides, transportation, desegregation)
<p>District view of District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required to meet needs of wide range of diverse students • Community based • Schools belong to public • Layers of tight regulations • Collaborative • Forced to be competitive • Taking on charter characteristics (open enrollment) • Accountable • Criticized (audits, public) • Need to get better at marketing • Have to beg taxpayers for money • Outside interests trying to make districts look bad • Underfunded • 	<p>Charter view of Charter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive by nature • Independent • Responsive • Flexible • Diverse • Entrepreneurial • Misunderstood • Don't have the freedom and autonomy everyone thinks • Isolated/excluded (Lone wolf) • Painted with broad brush • Have to prove themselves • Have skin in the game (personal credit for loans) • Taking on district characteristics (industrialized) • Underfunded

Courtesy J. Kittel, 2013

APPENDIX H

DISCUSSED POLICY NARRATIVES: THIRD IPED MEETING

Identified Policy Narratives: 3rd iPED meeting

Narratives

- Public (district) schools are failing
 - Political tool – can't promise to fix something unless it's broken.
- Public schools are something you have to “escape”
- A lot of money is going to district administration (6 figure Superintendents with a huge staff) which is why teachers aren't making enough money
- Districts have freedom because they can tax
- Arizona schools are academically behind

“You can't just throw money at it”

- Charter schools are fantastic choices and we should have more of them.
- Charter schools are better for kids than what is happening in government run schools
- Choice is good (and doesn't include districts)
 - Choice is the answer to everything.
 - Need new tires for your bus? School choice.
 - Teacher shortage? School choice.
- Charter leaders are making a lot of money

Accountability System Narrative

- Schools need to be accountable to a bottom line (like a business).

Teacher Evaluation System Narrative

- Schools were failing but evaluating all the teachers highly
- Schools are failing because they can't fire teachers
- Teacher's unions are a problem (rubber rooms and teacher's unions)

District Narrative (stories told by districts)

- Charters get \$2,000 more per student in charter additional assistance

APPENDIX I

POLICY TOPICS DISCUSSED: FOURTH IPED MEETING

Policy topics

- Predictable, adequate funding
- Unified message
 - Funding
 - How to look at us (A-F)
 - To communicate to policy makers how regulations effect each of us – because there is such variety across the state. We need to make sure they understand the complexity.
- Getting charter freedoms for districts
 - Allowing smaller school districts the same financial flexibility as charters.
 - Allow districts to request exemptions from USFRs.

David: “The premise of their [charter] creation was to be liberated from that and to see, well, can they do it better without all this regulation?”

Tom: And then if it worked, weren’t we supposed to get it too?

David: Yeah, something like that.

Peter: *I agree, that was the purpose*

Matt: Right.

Peter: *I agree. It’s long past time to put that into play.*

- Moving everyone to prior year funding
- Consolidate/eliminate reports (takes administrative time)
- Teacher certification requirements
- Advocate against voucher expansion
- Free schools who are struggling with student achievement from paperwork so they can focus on kids.

Jenna: *and yet we keep trying to force those schools to use research-based practices - To choose from among this menu of stuff. And if that was going to work, it already would have worked.*

- Meaningful study of why families change schools (statewide perspective)
- Hold all public schools (district and charter) to an open enrollment standard.
- Change the mentality of districts owning kids

Tom: They’re all our kids in this larger community. We all have a place for them, you know? How are we serving them together instead of looking at it from this politically charged atmosphere?

APPENDIX J
NVIVO CODES

NVivo Codes

District and Charter Codes		Charter Codes	
1	A feeling	17	Outnumbered
3	Competition	18	Divisive
4	Contextual	19	Excluded
5	Different worldview	20	Expected
6	Fighting	21	Explaining
7	Judging	22	Good
8	Looking down on	23	Being ignored
9	Not empathizing	24	Individual
10	Misunderstanding	25	Initial
11	Political	26	Institutional
12	Secrecy	27	Misinformation
13	Superiority	28	Narrative
14	Tension	29	Normal
15	Unequal	30	Not being respected
16	Within-group	31	Not personal
		32	Being outnumbered
		33	Offending
		34	Oppositional
		35	Overall
		36	Party line
		37	Rumor
		38	Saying untrue things
		39	Silencing
		40	Stereotyping
		41	Systemic
		42	Tokenism
		43	Being tolerated
		44	Undermining
		45	Being unimportant
		46	Requires action

APPENDIX K
AUDIT INFORMATION

Audit Information

A.R.S. 15-183(E)(6) and 15-914 require all charter schools to have an annual audit. If the school receives less than \$750,000 in federal money, the deadline to submit the annual audit to the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools by November 15th of each year for the prior fiscal year (public school fiscal years begin on July 1st). Charter annual audits generally involve several days to a week of the auditors reviewing items for the legal compliance questionnaire and reviewing financial records to make sure they comply with either the Uniform System of Financial Records for Arizona Charter Schools (USFRCS) or, if the charter has an exemption from the USFRCS, that the financial records comply with the Generally Accepted Accounting Principals (GAAP).

Schools that receive more than \$750,000 from the federal government are subject to a Single Audit (that is more involved and has a different due date).

For more information, see: <https://asbcs.az.gov/school-resources/additional-resources/annual-audits>

APPENDIX L

ARIZONA STATE SENATE ISSUE BRIEF

Arizona Issue Brief

<http://www.azleg.gov/briefs/senate/arizona%27s%20school%20finance%20system.pdf>



Arizona State Senate Issue Brief

October 20, 2016

Note to Reader:

The Senate Research Staff provides nonpartisan, objective legislative research, policy analysis and related assistance to the members of the Arizona State Senate. The *Research Briefs* series is intended to introduce a reader to various legislatively related issues and provide useful resources to assist the reader in learning more on a given topic. Because of frequent legislative and executive activity, topics may undergo frequent changes. Additionally, nothing in the *Brief* should be used to draw conclusions on the legality of an issue.

ARIZONA'S SCHOOL FINANCE SYSTEM

CURRENT SCHOOL FINANCE SYSTEM

Prior to 1980, Arizona's school finance system required school districts to rely heavily on local property tax revenues while receiving very little monetary support from state funds. This resulted in funding disparities among school districts, whereby school districts with high-property values could raise significant revenue with relatively low tax rates, while school districts with low-property values and higher tax rates could not generate the same amount of revenue. In the late 1970s, as a result of court cases in which similar systems in other states were found unconstitutional, Arizona began reforming its school finance system to address the potential unconstitutionality of its system and reestablish a "general and uniform" public school system.¹

The current K-12 school finance system is based on a statutory formula enacted in 1980² and substantially modified in 1985. The established formula aims to "equalize" per-pupil spending among school districts, taking into account student enrollment and property values. Under the current school finance formula, school districts receive approximately the same amount of funding per pupil. Spending is also capped, preventing high-property value school districts from generating local revenues in excess of the funding formula and creating inequities. Some school districts with a very strong local property tax base are able to generate their entire formula funding entitlement. However, most school districts require revenues in the form of Basic State Aid in order to receive full funding under the statutory formula. The school finance formula for school districts is as follows:

Equalization Base - Qualifying Tax Rate = Equalization Assistance

Equalization Assistance - State Equalization Tax Rate = Basic State Aid

¹ Article 11, Section 1 of the Arizona Constitution requires the legislature to establish a "general and uniform" public school system.

² Laws 1980, 2nd S.S., Ch. 9

EQUALIZATION BASE FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The equalization base, or a school district's spending limit, is the sum of the following three elements: 1) Base Support Level (BSL); 2) Transportation Support Level (TSL); and 3) District Additional Assistance (DAA). The sum of the BSL and TSL are generally referred to as the Revenue Control Limit (RCL).

$$\text{Equalization Base} = \text{BSL} + \text{TSL} + \text{DAA}$$

Base Support Level – The BSL is the product of a school district's total Weighted Student Count (WSC) multiplied by the Base Level Amount (BLA) multiplied by the Teacher Experience Index (TEI).³

A school district's WSC is determined by applying different weights based on student enrollment. First, a school district's student count is weighted based on the size and location of the school district. Small and isolated school districts receive an added weight to account for economies of scale. Larger and non-isolated school districts do not receive a weight but are not penalized. Second, school districts receive weights that are applied to a school district's student count based on varying factors. "Group A" weights are applied based on the number of students taught in certain grade levels. "Group B" weights are applied using specific student characteristics and needs such as special education, English language learners and severe developmental disabilities. The WSC is then multiplied by the BLA, which is a statutorily set per pupil amount that has historically been adjusted for inflation.⁴ For most school districts, the BLA is also increased by 1.25 percent for "teacher compensation".⁵

³ A.R.S. § 15-943

⁴ In 2000, Proposition 301 authorized a 6/10th of a percent increase in sales tax to fund education programs. Proposition 301 included an inflation provision in the school finance formula that was challenged in *Cave Creek v. DeWitt* and settled with the passage of Proposition 123 (see below) in 2016.

⁵ A.R.S. §15-952 allows districts to get approval from the State Board of Education. This increase applies to most districts.

Finally, the product generated from the previous steps is multiplied by the TEI. The TEI allocates more money to a school district whose combined years of teacher experience exceed the statewide teacher experience calculation. The TEI increases a school district's BSL by 2.25 percent for each year that the district's average teacher experience exceeds the state average. The intention of including the TEI in the formula was to account for teacher pay scales that increased with years of service.

$$\text{BSL} = \text{WSC} \times \text{BLA} \times 1.0125 \times \text{TEI}$$

FY 2015-2016 Base Level Amount = \$3,426.74

Transportation Support Level – The main funding component of the TSL is computed for the transportation of students to and from school by multiplying a statutorily set amount, adjusted annually for inflation, by a school district's approved daily route mileage per eligible student plus an amount spent for bus tokens and passes.⁶ There is an additional component of the TSL formula for academic education, career and technical education and athletic trips; however, the amounts generated by this portion of the formula are lower than the formula that generates funds to transport students to and from school.

The TSL differs from the Transportation Revenue Control Limit, a voluntary program, which allows school districts to assess an additional property tax levy to generate additional revenue for transportation costs above the TSL amount.

$$\text{TSL} = \$ \text{Amount} \times \text{Route Miles} + \text{Tokens/Passes}$$

FY 2016 – 2017 TSL per Route Mile

Approved Daily Route Mileage per Pupil	Dollar Amount
0.5 or less	2.56
Between 0.5-1.0	2.09
More than 1.0	2.56

⁶ A.R.S. § 15-945

District Additional Assistance – In 2013, the Capital Outlay Revenue Control Limit and the Soft Capital Allocation funding formulas for school districts were consolidated into one funding formula. DAA is calculated by multiplying a statutorily set amount by a school district’s unweighted student count for the particular grade ranges.⁷ The formula has six different per pupil amounts based on the number of pupils and grade levels taught. Smaller school districts and grades 9-12 have a heavier weight than large school districts and grades K-8. Although these monies are considered capital in nature, school districts have the ability to move funds generated through DAA into their maintenance and operations account. Currently, the DAA formula is not fully funded, as approximately 84 percent of DAA funding is suspended for FY 2017.⁸

DAA = unweighted count x per pupil amount

FY 2017 DAA Per Pupil Amounts		
Student count		Amount
Less than 100	K-8	\$544.58
	9-12	\$601.24
Between 100 – 600 (amounts multiplied by small school weight)	K-8	\$389.25
	9-12	\$405.59
More than 600	K-8	\$450.76
	9-12	\$492.94

QUALIFYING TAX RATE

The qualifying tax rate (QTR) is a statutory primary property tax rate used to determine the amount of revenue that will be generated from local taxpayers in support of the Basic State Aid formula.⁹ Proposition 301 set the maximum QTR that can be applied at \$2.1265 for elementary and high school districts and \$4.253 for unified school districts. The school district is not under any obligation to levy the QTR or any other tax rate in order to receive state aid; however, the QTR is presumed to be the local

effort of the school district for the purposes of calculating the amount of state aid that a district will receive.

The QTR is subject to Truth in Taxation (TNT) laws. The Joint Legislative Budget Committee is required by February 15 of each year to report TNT rates, which are then used to adjust the QTR annually. The effect of TNT is to offset the statewide appreciation of existing property with a commensurate reduction in the QTR, ensuring that tax liability for existing properties remain unchanged despite increased property valuation.

The actual overall primary property tax rate for a school district may be lower than the QTR, or higher if the district is allowed to budget for items outside of the school finance formula, which include: 1) Desegregation¹⁰; 2) Adjacent Ways¹¹; 3) Small School Adjustment¹²; and 4) Liabilities in Excess.¹³ The FY 2017 QTR was set at \$2.0793 for non-unified school districts and \$4.1586 for unified school districts.

In addition to the QTR, a state equalization tax rate (SETR) is assessed on property owners to collect revenues to also (along with the QTR) offset state costs. The SETR is determined through the TNT process and is assessed in each county. The FY 2017 SETR was set at \$0.5010.

Counties are required to levy a primary property tax rate that is 50 percent of the QTR for property that is located outside of school district boundaries. These monies are collected by the counties and deposited into the state General Fund.¹⁴

Each county is also required to levy an additional primary property tax in school districts that are ineligible for state equalization assistance (“non-state aid districts”). This additional tax rate, sometimes referred to as the minimum qualifying tax rate (MQTR), is determined based on the difference between the levy that would be produced by 50 percent of a

⁷ A.R.S. § 15-961

⁸ Laws 2016, Ch. 124, Section 3.5

⁹ A.R.S. § 41-1276

¹⁰ A.R.S. § 15-910

¹¹ A.R.S. § 15-995

¹² A.R.S. § 15-949

¹³ A.R.S. § 15-907

¹⁴ A.R.S. § 15-991.01

non-state aid district's applicable QTR and its equalization base. If the levy produced by 50 percent of the district's applicable QTR is equal to or less than its equalization base, the MQTR will not be levied in the non-state aid district. Otherwise, the MQTR will be levied at a rate such that the additional tax generates an amount equal to the difference between 50 percent of the non-state aid district's QTR and its equalization base. The revenue generated from the MQTR is deposited into the state General Fund.¹⁵

BASIC STATE AID

After a school district's equalization base is determined, the net assessed property value of the school district is multiplied by the QTR in order to determine the portion of its funding that is assumed to come from local QTR tax revenue.¹⁶ If the amount generated by the QTR exceeds the school district's equalization base, the school district is not entitled to equalization assistance and will be completely funded by the revenues generated by the QTR. If, however, the QTR revenues are not sufficient to cover the equalization base then the school district is eligible for equalization assistance.

Equalization assistance occurs in two ways: 1) revenues generated from the SETR; and 2) Basic State Aid. First, a school district that is eligible for equalization assistance will receive funds generated from the SETR in that particular county. The county school superintendent, in conjunction with the county treasurer, is responsible for administering this form of equalization assistance. If a school district still has a remaining equalization assistance entitlement generated from the formula, the district will receive funds in the form of Basic State Aid. Basic State Aid is funded through the state General Fund.

QTR > Eq. Base = No Eq. Assistance
Eq. Base > QTR = Eq. Assistance
Eq. Assistance > SETR = Basic State Aid

¹⁵ A.R.S. § 15-992
¹⁶ A.R.S. § 15-971

CHARTER SCHOOLS

State aid is also provided to charter schools, which are public schools that do not have geographic boundaries, operate under terms specified in a "charter" and do not have taxing authority.¹⁷ Formula costs for charter schools are completely funded by state aid from the state General Fund and do not have any other revenue sources from local taxpayers. Because the funding formula for charter schools is completely funded with state aid, there is no equalization that takes place between local property tax contributions and state aid. Instead, the charter school funding formula consists of two components: 1) BSL; and 2) Charter Additional Assistance (CAA). The BSL for charter schools is determined under the same computational formula prescribed for traditional school districts, although charter schools are not eligible for TEL increases or a 1.25 percent increase for "teacher compensation."

Charter School Funding = BSL + CAA

CAA funding amounts are established in statute and are roughly comparable to a traditional school district's DAA funding. CAA amounts are larger than DAA amounts, at least in part, due to charter schools being ineligible for the TSL and do not have access to other sources of revenue from a taxing jurisdiction (i.e. bonds and overrides).

CAA = unweighted count x per pupil amount

FY 2017 CAA per Pupil	
Grades K – 8	\$1,752.10
Grades 9 – 12	\$2,042.04

ENDOWMENT EARNINGS

The Permanent State School Fund¹⁸ acts as an endowment account for all proceeds from state trust lands whose beneficiaries have been designated as "common schools." When

¹⁷ A.R.S. § 15-185
¹⁸ A.R.S. § 37-521

designated state trust lands are sold, the sale proceeds are deposited into the Permanent State School Fund by the State Land Department and are invested by the State Treasurer. The monies deposited into the Permanent State School Fund from the sale of state trust lands are not considered expendable.

However expendable endowment earnings on state trust lands held in benefit of "common schools" are used to offset state General Fund costs of Basic State Aid. These earnings include: 1) Permanent State School Fund investment earnings; and 2) proceeds from the lease of state trust lands and interest paid by buyers who purchase state trust land on an installment basis.

Proposition 301 limited the amount of expendable endowment earnings available to the state at the FY 2001 level of \$72.3 million and dedicated any growth above that level to the Classroom Site Fund (CSF)¹⁹, established in conjunction with Proposition 301. In FY 2017, \$69.6 million is estimated to be deposited into the CSF from endowment earnings.

PROPOSITION 123

In 2010, several school districts filed a lawsuit alleging the state did not adequately fund for inflation in FY 2010 through FY 2013 as required by Proposition 301.²⁰ After several rulings and appeals the Maricopa County Superior Court found in 2014 that the state should reset the base level to what it would have been if inflation had been fully funded. The state appealed the decision and the Court of Appeals asked the parties to enter mediation to reach a negotiated settlement. In the fall of 2015, the parties agreed on a settlement and legislation was passed in a special session. In May 2016, voters approved Proposition 123.

Proposition 123 increases the distribution from the State Land Trust from 2.5 percent to 6.9 percent through FY 2025 and allocates the increased revenues to Basic State Aid rather than the Classroom Site Fund. Additionally, Proposition 123 appropriates \$50 million annually from FY 2016 through FY 2020 and

\$75 million annually from FY 2021 through FY 2025. Together, K-12 state aid is projected to increase by \$3.5 billion in the 10-year period through FY 2025.

In addition to increased state aid, Proposition 123 allows for reductions in state aid under certain economic conditions. These potential reductions are referred to as "triggers".²¹

ADDITIONAL STATE AID

The state provides Additional State Aid to school districts through an automatic homeowner's rebate.²² The homeowner's rebate requires the state to pay a portion of each homeowner's school district primary property taxes, up to a maximum of \$600 per parcel. The homeowner's rebate percentage can vary from year to year. For FY 2017, it is estimated to be approximately 47.19 percent.

Article IX, Section 18 of the Arizona Constitution caps primary property tax rates at no more than 1 percent of a home's full cash value. The "1% cap" applies any time a homeowner's net combined primary property tax rate for all taxing jurisdictions exceeds \$10 per \$100 of net assessed value, even after the homeowner's rebate is applied. The Arizona Constitution does not specify a mechanism for enforcing the "1% cap." Historically, the cap has been implemented by having the state General Fund backfill any primary property tax costs for homeowners that exceed the cap through the Additional State Aid program.

Beginning in FY 2016, Laws 2015, Chapter 15, limited the amount of Additional State Aid provided to school districts in excess of the cap was limited to \$1 million per county. The Property Tax Oversight Committee (PTOC) is charged with evaluating each county with school districts who require more than the state-funded \$1 million limit to determine the proportion attributable to each taxing jurisdiction located within the affected school district. The PTOC determines the amount that each taxing

¹⁹ A.R.S. § 15-977

²⁰ *Cave Creek Unified School District v. DeWit*, 233 Ariz. 1, (2013).

²¹ For more information see "Ballot Proposition 123: Fiscal Impact Summary"

²² A.R.S. § 15-972

jurisdiction is required to transfer to compensate the district for the pro rata share of the reduction in Additional State Aid.

The PTOC determined Pima County was liable for \$15.8 million, most of which was due to the Tucson Unified School District. Pima County sued the state and the PTOC arguing Laws 2015, Chapter 15, was an unconstitutional delegation of taxing authority to the PTOC as the power. In May 2016, the Maricopa County Superior Court issued a preliminary ruling in favor of Pima County.²³

OTHER STATE AID PROGRAMS

Other state aid programs include: 1) Assistance to School Districts for Children of State Employees²⁴ (ASDCSE); 2) Certificates of Educational Convenience²⁵ (CEC); and 3) Special Education Fund.²⁶ The ASDCSE program supplements Basic State Aid for school districts that educate pupils whose parents are employed and domiciled at certain state institutions located within the school district's boundaries, such as correctional facilities. CECs allow students to attend school in a school district other than the one they live in if they are placed there by an authorized state or federal agency. CECs also apply to students who reside in unorganized areas. Finally, the Special Education Fund provides funding for special education costs of students at: 1) the Arizona Schools for the Deaf and the Blind; 2) the Arizona State Hospital; 3) developmentally disabled programs administered by the Department of Economic Security; and 4) private residential facilities when a student is placed there by a state agency.

²³ *Pima County v. State of Arizona* (2016)

²⁴ A.R.S. § 15-976

²⁵ A.R.S. § 15-825

²⁶ A.R.S. § 15-1182

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- "An Explanation of Arizona Property Taxes (2013 Edition)", Arizona Tax Research Association, 2013
http://www.arizonatax.org/sites/default/files/publications/books_pamphlets/file/exp_property_tax_book_atra_2013.pdf.pdf
- "Arizona School Finance," Justin Olson, December 2009
http://www.arizonatax.org/sites/default/files/publications/books_pamphlets/file/ATRA-Arizona_School_Finance.pdf
- "Ballot Proposition 123: Fiscal Impact Summary," Joint Legislative Budget Committee
<http://www.azleg.gov/jlbc/16tratesltr.pdf>
- "Estimated Classroom Site Fund Per Pupil Amount for FY 2016," prepared by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, March 2015
<http://www.azleg.gov/jlbc/CSF-FY2016-033015.pdf>
- "Fiscal Year 2016 Appropriations Report: Department of Education," prepared by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, June 2014
<http://www.azleg.gov/jlbc/16AR/ade.pdf>
- "FY 2016 Baseline: Department of Education," prepared by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, January 2015
<http://www.azleg.gov/jlbc/16baseline/ade.pdf>
- "FY 2016 Truth in Taxation Notice," Joint Legislative Budget Committee
<http://www.azleg.gov/jlbc/16tratesltr.pdf>
- "K-12 Inflation Funding Lawsuit Update," prepared by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, July 2014
<http://www.azleg.gov/jlbc/K-12inflationFundingLawsuitUpdateR.pdf>
- Laws 2000, Fifth Special Session, Chapter 1 (Proposition 301)
<https://apps.azleg.gov/BillStatus/GetDocnamePdf/64679>
- Pima County v. State of Arizona (2016)
https://webcms.pima.gov/!userFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/Government/Administration/CH/HiemencFor%20Web/July%202016/Final%20Judgment%20Pima%20County%20versus%20State%20of%20Arizona.pdf
- "Proposition 301 Publicity Pamphlet for November 7, 2000 General Election," prepared by the Arizona Secretary of State
<http://apps.azsos.gov/election/2000/Info/pub/pamphlet/english/prop301.pdf>
- "2014 Tax Handbook," prepared by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, September 2014
<http://www.azleg.gov/jlbc/14taxbook/14taxbk.pdf>

APPENDIX M

BACKSTAGE

Backstage

Backstage 1. I provide the first backstage description in order to be transparent about my methods and to explain how I approached the portion of my analysis that became relevant only after I discovered Bar-Tal's (2007) conflict sustaining collective narrative themes.

My assumption going into this project was that the district and charter communities had different ways of talking and that those ways of talking revealed different underlying "frames" or ways of seeing things (Gee, 2014a; Gee, 2014b), including themselves, each other, and the conflict between them. Although I could not articulate it at the time, I also had an underlying assumption that the conflict between their groups was connected to their perceptions of themselves and each other. My third research question originally asked how districts and charters viewed themselves and each other and the conflict between their communities. This meant I began my analysis seeking to understand six different things: district view of districts, district view of charter, charter view of charter, charter view of district, charter view of conflict, and district view of conflict.

Not sure what data analysis method would bring me the most interesting insights, my first phase of coding was exploratory and eclectic (Saldana, 2013), using both content analysis and metaphor analysis as tools to investigate patterns of how participants talked about the conflict between their communities, including how they presented their perceptions of districts and charters. From a content perspective, I used Excel's search function and bold formatted the words district and charter as well as any modifiers (public, charter school, traditional district, district superintendent, charter leader, charter operator, etc.). I also used Excel's search function to trace repeated vivid and figurative language related to conflict and how each group positioned their ingroup and the outgroup (e.g. scraps, starving, hungry, born, created, world).

I was interested in metaphorical language because of its potential to reflect how people conceptualize/understand their worlds (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Cojocaru, Bragaru, & Ciuchi, 2012). Metaphorical language also interested me because of its potential to change the ways in which we conceptualize/understand those worlds. Gergen explains, "If we changed our metaphors, would there be other, possibly better options available?" (2009, p. 34). Because the purpose of this action research project was to improve the relationship between the communities and metaphors have the potential to transform how we think, I explored the ways in which participants used metaphorical language in order to understand if/how metaphors and metaphorical language were used to construct and negotiate conflict between their communities.

Lakoff & Johnson describe metaphors as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (1980, p. 5). However, scholars have discussed the difficulties of identifying metaphors (Cameron et al., 2009;

Pragglejaz, 2007; Steen, 2007). The transfer of meaning from one kind of thing to another kind of thing can be direct or indirect. From the transcripts, an example of a direct transfer is, “Saying school people [districts] have a monopoly would be like saying the police have a monopoly on their jurisdiction” (metaphor - School districts are like police departments (in terms of monopolizing who they serve). An indirect example from the transcripts is: “We’re fighting over the same bone” (metaphor – we [districts and charters] are like animals fighting for survival). For the purposes of this study, I took a broad view of metaphor to include all metaphorical language (referred to as metaphors for the rest of this discussion).

To find metaphors, I analyzed each line of the transcripts, looking for words that transported meaning from a different context into the context in which it was used. Then, I identified what meaning those words/phrases were bringing to the subject at hand. For example: in the quote from Matt, a district superintendent, “I know that you’re a charter school and you have to market to stay alive,” the phrase “stay alive” was a metaphor vehicle to bring outside meaning to the concept of “charter school.” Obviously, charter schools are not literally living things. Therefore, using the term “stay alive” to in reference to a charter school, means understanding charter schools are like living things (possibly people) (metaphor – charter schools are living things).

During that analysis, I realized I could not articulate how the participants’ views of their own and each other’s communities related to conflict and I was worried that the study was getting too broad (something I kept being warned not to do). Therefore, I decided to narrow the focus of my analysis to conflict-related talk. Metaphorically speaking, I “put this analysis on the shelf” until I discovered Bar-Tal (2007) and Bar-Tal et al (2014). Through their work, I learned that groups engaged in intractable conflicts present positive pictures of the ingroup and delegitimize the outgroup through framing language. Therefore, this initial coding provided insights I eventually used to analyze the collective narratives through the lens of conflict-sustaining collective narratives, which I discuss next.

Backstage 2. I provide this second backstage description to give context to when and how the concept of composite collective narratives became part of this study and how they became conflict-sustaining narratives.

I had narrowed my research question to how the two groups expressed their perceptions of the conflict and eventually organized those perceptions into four themes. But I had a difficult time deciding what to do next. What did it mean and how should I present the data? I wanted to share as much of the data as possible in a way that would preserve the voices of my participants. I wanted to keep my analysis grounded in social constructionism and not substitute my interpretations for my participants’ perceptions. I searched literature at the intersection of social constructionism and intergroup conflict for examples of other studies I could use as a guide. During that search, I skimmed an article that investigated collective

narratives as indicators for examining intergroup relations (Srouf, Sagy, Mana, & Mjally-Knani, 2013). Inspired by the phrase “collective narrative” and informed by the ways in which the term “narrative” is used by high school theatre and English teachers, I worked through the night to create two first-person narratives. I decided to limit the narratives to the actual words spoken during the study, without paraphrasing. I thought of each Narrative as a composite narrative that represented the essential elements of the conflict-related talk from each group.

After I completed these composite narratives, I went back to the online ASU library to find out more about composite narratives and methodologies for creating or identifying them. Instead of finding examples of other people constructing a narrative in the same manner as I had, I discovered literature on collective memory and conflict supportive narratives. As I read, I had an “aha!” moment! I recognized the conflict-supporting collective narrative themes from my data and within the Narratives I had just constructed. I got even more excited when I realized that the narrative themes also made sense of the in-group and intergroup perspectives I thought were important at the beginning of the study but had dropped because I couldn’t articulate a good reason for what those perspectives had to do with the conflict. According to Bar-Tal et al (2014), those perspectives were part of the conflict-supporting narratives rival groups use to sustain conflict. Suddenly, everything made sense!! After some more research messiness, I incorporated conflict-sustaining narratives into my third research question.

Backstage 3. Ascribing elements from Bar-Tal’s framework to my participants’ individual utterances proved to be a challenge. I explain that challenge in more detail in this third backstage installment.

I struggled to use Bar-Tal’s work on conflict-supporting collective narratives to interpret specific lines from the transcript. The version of this dissertation I originally defended did not include examples of discourse analysis. However, I also did not think I had done the subject or my participants justice in that version. Therefore, I was relieved at some level when my (very wise) committee insisted I complete major revisions that included this analysis. On a cerebral level, I could clearly see and articulate what I needed to do for this analysis. However, I agonized when faced with the task of ascribing Bar-Tal’s themes and methods to the actual transcripts and I continually found reasons to re-write other sections instead. When I did work on the discourse analysis, I described rather than analyzed. Then, frustrated, I would edit a different section instead.

However, something changed when I started analyzing Audit 2, which begins with me asking questions in an attempt to clear up a misunderstanding. As opposed to the other sections I had attempted to analyze, I was clearly present in this section of the transcript. Therefore, I stopped attempting to ascribe meaning to the transcript record from a third person omniscient perspective. Instead, I

reflected on my thought process during that iPED meeting, remembering my conflict about how involved in the conversation I should be - and I began to write from the perspective of someone who was present during the conversation. Writing as a participant rather than as a disembodied voice, suddenly, the words flowed.

As I reflected on the difference, I realized why writing this section was so difficult for me. The analysis required me to ascribe meaning to what my individual participants said and to identify what those words did. It was much easier to write, “this is what I thought at the time” because I was simply sharing my perception. It felt very different to write, “this statement by Participant X functioned to delegitimize this particular group.”

I wondered why I didn’t have a similar struggle analyzing the Charter Narrative and District Narrative – and I realized the representative compilation of the words my participants had spoken had allowed me to shift the analysis from the actual people who spoke them to a fictional character. I had taken the words real people I cared about had spoken and ascribed those words to an unknown “charter” and “district” representative.

I am indebted to the five district superintendents and three charter leaders who gave their precious time to be part of my study. They were willing to help me and trusted me to record them as they negotiated some difficult conversations with strangers who belonged to “the other” group.

When I selected my participants, I included people I genuinely liked and with whom I had a sense of connection. From October through December of 2016, we shared the experiences of the focus groups and iPED meetings and my feeling of connection grew. For the next four months, those eight voices were my constant companions as I immersed myself in the recordings and transcripts.

Analyzing the discourse through the lens of Bar-Tal’s themes (2007) and Bar-Tal et al’s methods (2014) felt like betrayal. Ascribing negative meanings to my participants’ words and naming what those words did in the world was painful. These are generous, good people I consider friends and I know they would not intentionally say things to construct and sustain conflict. I also believe they share a genuine desire for the relationship between their two communities to improve.

How did I resolve this dilemma? A mentor reminded me that most people do not want to create or sustain conflict. But, we are human and this is what we do. We all have blind spots. We all say things that hurt people. That is one of the reasons research is so important. Research can pull back the curtain within a specific context and allow us to see things we could not otherwise see. And, by seeing behind one curtain, perhaps we increase our capacity in other settings to direct our words in new ways so that “As we speak together, listen to new voices, raise questions, ponder alternatives, and play at the edges of common sense, we cross the threshold into new worlds of meaning. The future is ours-together-to create” (Gergen, 2009, p. 5).

