

DISSERTATION

A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY:  
THE PROCESS OF CHANGE AT  
A CORE KNOWLEDGE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Submitted by  
Elizabeth A. Urban  
School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, Colorado  
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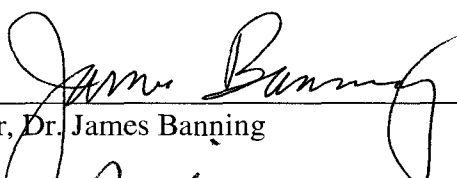
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY ELIZABETH A. URBAN ENTITLED A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY: THE PROCESS OF CHANGE AT A CORE KNOWLEDGE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

Committee on Graduate Work

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor, Dr. James Banning

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Co-Advisor, Dr. Ellyn Dickmann

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Outside Member, Dr. Jennifer Cross

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Member and Director, Dr. Timothy Davies

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION  
A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY:  
THE PROCESS OF CHANGE AT A CORE KNOWLEDGE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

The challenge of educational change and the culture of organizational change have been the focus of research and literature for many decades. A look at the history of American education reveals that change designed in the direction of social fairness traditionally falls short of the objectives or fails completely within its first five years (Benham-Tye, 2000). The need for change and for continual renewal to improve schools is evident. The journey of change and the obstacles of that journey are more complex. The process of change and the puzzling dynamics of that process were the subject of this study. The purpose of the study was to further the understanding of the change process, the conditions which surround success and the obstacles which accompany failure.

The focus of the study was a junior high school, which opened in the fall of 2004. An ethnographic study was conducted at the site over the period of the school's first sixteen months, from May 2004 to August 2005. The purpose of the first study was to record the journey of the school from its inception. In that first year, four key themes emerged: collaboration; visionary leadership; teachers and parents as agents of change; and trusting the process. That original study provided the archival data that were the starting point for the present study. The present study began in August, 2007 and

continued through February 2008. Research questions were designed to investigate the process of change over time. The qualitative research method was a modified version of Phil Carspecken's Model for Critical Ethnography (1996). The research strategies were observation, interview, and examination of school documents. The first stage of the study was an extensive member-checking effort offering the participants at the school the opportunity to evaluate the four themes of the archival data. The data analyzed from interviews revealed that the adults who participated agreed the themes did accurately describe the culture in the first year. The second stage of research focused on the then culture of the school, and how it had developed over time. The intention was to observe closely the functioning of the school to determine where it was in the process of change and how the individuals there experienced the process. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. During the analysis, the data from observations, interviews, field notes, and documents were triangulated to enhance validity. The new findings revealed additional themes and cultural dimensions as well as obstacles and barriers to change.

#### *New Themes in Year Four*

1. The Journey of Change - From "Speed Boat to House Boat to Barge"
2. Change Experienced by the Members – The Teachers' Stories
3. From Trust the Process to Process the Trust – A Dose of Self-Scrutiny

#### *Four Cultural Dimensions*

1. Inquiry – Continual Study and Learning to Improve the Practice
2. Responsibility – Speaking with Integrity and Doing What is Said

3. Care – Practicing a Nurturing Pedagogy
4. Celebration – Working Joyfully and Acknowledging Human Effort

*Obstacles to Change*

1. Growth of School
2. Fiscal Limitations
3. Nature of Profession
4. Conventional Thinking

In an effort to contribute to the body of knowledge around the process of change, the following recommendations were made:

1. Share the story of this school with schools in the district and in other districts, not as a recipe for change, but as a metaphor for the journey.
2. Share the story with students to engage them in the challenges of movement toward a just society and of the authentic work, it will require in their own educational journey.
3. Consider a partnership with the university to enhance pre-service training for future educators and renewal of schools as well as ongoing inquiry and professional development for experienced educators.
4. Continue to conduct critical research to examine the question of privilege in the community of the junior high school.

Elizabeth A. Urban  
School of Education  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, CO 80523  
Fall 2008

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I am forever grateful to my friends and colleagues, many over these years, for valuable feedback and constant encouragement. And to my family, I express deep gratitude to my son, my daughter, my sister, my brother, and their families for never doubting that I could accomplish this task, a task they appreciated as lifelong goal for me. I remember and thank my mother, the first person in her family to receive a college degree. She taught me perseverance and belief in the strength of women. I thank my father for his example of a dedicated educator. He worked for democracy in schooling long before it became a movement.

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Dr. James Banning shared his expertise and respect for qualitative research. And I am grateful. His teaching brings to students the power of that work and the tools to



question deeply, to think openly, and to work honestly. Dr. Banning inspired me to strive always for that new cultural clue just under the surface, waiting to be revealed and examined as in an anthropologist's dig.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the participants in the study, to the staff, parents, and leadership team at the Core Knowledge junior high school. I will be forever grateful to them, for they welcomed me into their world to observe and to learn. In a very real sense, these adults are truly representative of all people working toward this shared goal. This work is dedicated to those people striving toward justice, equity, and compassion.

Their endeavor echoes the words of Pablo Neruda (cited in Nichols, 2000, p.244). May their work and these words inspire us as we care for and teach all children.

I still have absolute faith in human destiny, a clearer and clearer conviction that we are approaching a great common tenderness...At this critical moment, in this flicker of anguish, we know that light will enter those eyes that are vigilant. We shall all understand one another. We shall advance together. And this hope cannot be crushed.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### *QUESTIONS OF THIS STUDY*

*What are the challenges to creating and sustaining educational change?*

*What happens in a school involved in change as it continues to function in the larger system?*

Reform in education and efforts to improve learning for all students have been issues of study and debate since our nation's birth. Who will learn? What will they learn? How will they learn and for what ends? What is equal access to knowledge? How do we include those currently excluded? What is just and equitable? How do we change our schools to achieve our goals? And in truth, what are our goals? These questions have persisted through time as they continue to evoke a great variety of value-laden responses.

History reveals that the efforts of change, which have been made in the direction of fairness, have perennially fallen far short of their proposed objectives (Ladson-Billings, 2006). It is necessary to consider reform in education as it offers new thinking and a renewal of strategies to create places where all students will know the best of experiences and achieve success to their greatest potential (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The need to change and to improve our schools is evident. The question of why we are not making significant progress is far more complex. The complexity and the elusive

quality of creating and sustaining change in the educational organization were the essential questions of this study.

The history of school reform is long. It is a history replete with proposed solutions, curricular add-ons, deletions and insertions, funding decreases, and high-stakes expectations as well as innumerable efforts around re-structuring the system and personnel (Benham-Tye, 2000). In the 1950's and the 1960's, as the Cold War intensified, and especially after the Soviet Union successfully launched the first space satellite, the United States government relinquished its hands-off policy with regard to schooling. The National Defense Education Act in 1958 allowed the government to enter into the school reform arena with greater influence than ever. More than 200 federal programs supporting change in public schools were funded between 1957 and 1967. During the years that followed, there was an increasing number of both federal and private organizations supporting change in both curriculum and structure.

In short, millions of dollars were spent on efforts to improve our system of schooling. Then as the 1960's ended, some researchers began to take a look at what we had gotten for our money. What they found was both surprising and discouraging (Benham-Tye, 2000, p.5).

Among the organizations, looking at this national dilemma of reform failure was the Ford Foundation. It released a report in 1969, which reviewed its own efforts in funding reform. The report concluded that much of the work was neither successful nor lasting. Toward this same goal of research and evaluation, Dr. John Goodlad and a team of researchers from the National Network for Education Renewal in Seattle entered several hundred schools across the nation to understand what was happening there. That study presented the finding that the majority of projects from the 60's and 70's had failed to create any positive change. The students were seen sitting in passive mode in classes,

which were well suited for only a small portion of the student population. The results of that study were published in the landmark work *A Place Called School* (Goodlad, 1984).

In the past twenty-five years, literature has offered insights concerning change efforts, why they fail and what is needed to foster enduring change (Fullan, 1993). The literature suggests programs and systems of implementation; however, few follow the process and progress into the third, fourth, fifth years, and beyond. Benham-Tye (2000) argued that if leaders looked more deeply into societal forces, which come into play before and after implementation of change, the challenges would be better understood. Systems would be better able to sustain the momentum of change. If the deep structures of institutions were examined, the possibility of initiating and perpetuating change would be enhanced. She explained her hypothesis as follows:

Reforms, of any kind won't stick unless they are compatible with the existing deep structures of the society or with the direction in which the deep structures may be shifting. If true, this may help to explain much of the failure of both liberal and conservative education reform in the United States since the end of World War II (Benham-Tye, 2000, p.4).

Change theorists agree innovations often fail when practitioners focus on the surface features of an initiative rather than an understanding of the process, purpose, and meaning of the change (Fullan, 2001; Benham-Tye, 2000; Sparks, 2001; Senge, 1994; Goodlad, 1994). Without an understanding of the underlying mechanism of a change effort as it may align with or conflict with existing philosophies and deep structures, the effort is likely to fail. The term “faddism” has been used to describe the increasing problem of failed reform in the United States (Lewis, Perry, & Murata, 2006). The implementation and evaluation of an educational initiative, without comprehension of its deeper purpose and process as well as how that process fits with the greater culture, will

cause it to become another failed effort, another educational fad. The way a reform effort fits with the larger system and the degree to which the reform is accepted and can move forward were research foci of this study.

Reform efforts fail when they do not begin with the essential questions of education (DuFour, 2004). The point at which to begin is the recognition that most schools and school districts are designed to support and be supported by the traditional hierarchical bureaucracy (Bemham-Tye, 2000). According to Richard DuFour, former Superintendent of Adlai Stevenson High School District in Lincolnville, Illinois and author of *Professional Learning Communities* (2001), school cultures are traditionally the result of top-down directives from administrators concerning mission, vision, goals, and strategies. These directives are delivered to teachers, parents, and students of schools where educators still work in isolation attempting to reach goals in an individual and random effort. In traditional settings, only on those few days designated for staff development and faculty meetings do teachers collaborate and learn together. The teaching and learning process becomes the responsibility of each single teacher alone in her or his classroom. Consequently, real learning takes place in some classrooms, and for some students, while for others it does not. In many schools across our nation, the focus remains solely on teaching and teaching strategies. Progress and change have not been sufficient to insure that learning takes place as well, and what must happen when it does not (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The school culture of the traditional setting does not foster a shared sense of community responsibility for each child's learning. Rather it remains a situation of haphazard success: Who will learn and who will not? Traditionally, one-hundred percent commitment to a shared mission and vision is not required.

Collaboration exists by invitation only and often fails to occur. Today, organizational change experts concur that successful renewal of our schools cannot be achieved in a setting of this kind of culture (Senge, 1994; Fullan, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Wheatley, 1994). There must be a shift from the traditional school setting to a new kind of organization committed to the collaborative process, to continual learning and growing in order to realize a shared mission and vision. The mission and vision must be foremost for each member of the school, and collaboration must be embedded in the structure and culture. Only through a deep and ongoing cultural shift can reform last and schools improve (DuFour, 2004).

Currently, in this twenty-first century, research has manifested critical components that make a difference in student achievement. According to Linda Darling-Hammond (2006, p.15):

These include the quality of teachers and teaching, especially teachers' ability to teach content to diverse students in ways that carefully attend to the learning process (e.g. Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005); access to challenging curriculum, which ultimately determines a greater quotient of students' achievement than their initial ability levels (Gamoran & Berends, 1987; Oakes, 2005); and schools and classes that are organized so that students are well known and well supported (Lee & Smith, 1995; Newmann & Whlage, 1995).

The process of school reform was the substance of this study. The questions concerned profound changes in thinking about schools and schooling. They were the questions that require a paradigmatic shift in creating school cultures that will fulfill the promise of equal access to education to all children. These are the questions of renewing our nation's schools so that they truly are the democratic and just places we say they are (Goodlad, 1994). For those people hoping to change schools for the better, these are troubling times (Benahm-Tye, 2000). Still, it was the hope of this study to contribute to

that conversation and to deepen the understanding of change and renewal of our schools. There is a need to understand and support the changes that are occurring in schools, which will promote the valuing, and nurturing of all students. There is an even larger need to understand the obstacles that emerge from the greater society to deter those change efforts toward fairness in our nation's schools. This is a difficult task, as it asks us to look at ourselves, to look within, and to look at our culture. It is a moral question of seeing a new forest through long standing trees.

### *FOCUS OF STUDY*

We must examine the disparity between what we know is right and what we actually do (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p.8).

Educational researchers and practitioners agree that the solution to the dilemma lies in the cultures we create in our schools and in the greater society. Educational reform must flow from societal reform and must begin with the creation of cultures where:

1. The culture is nurturing to all
2. Diversity is a high priority so that all students are welcomed and valued
3. Good teaching is valued and always improving through collaboration and partnership
4. Good teachers are accessible to all students
5. All students will study and learn challenging, and worthwhile content

The community will be one of character and caring. Where could we go to begin from the ground up to build the kind of education system that would aggressively address the debt, educational, economic, and moral? (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p.10)

The site of this ethnographic study exemplified one such reality. It, in fact, began from the “ground up” where the cultural values listed above resonated with the guiding values and the operating principles. These values revealed themselves in themes, which emerged in the original study of the school’s first year, 2004. The data and analysis of data of the original study appear in Chapter 3. The archival data of that study served as the starting point for this follow-up study. This study examined the school and its culture of change in the fourth year, 2007-2008 (See Chart 1.1 Timeline). Where was the community in its journey of reform? Was it achieving its goals of greater diversity, improved learning for all through collaboration, and the development of a community of character and care? What were the hurdles to reform? How did this school fit in a more traditional school district? What were we able to learn and contribute to the conversation around the change process?

The focus of this study was a small new Core Knowledge junior high school in large school district. The school was the most recently added of ten junior highs in the district. It was, at that time, in its fourth year. It had grown from 200 seventh grade students in the fall of 2004 to 700 sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students in the fall of 2007. During its first two years, the school was housed in the newly constructed high school, which was not at capacity. Therefore, one wing of the upper level was designated for the junior high school. This, in itself, rendered the school unique. Creating a community culture as a school within a school was not the typical or traditional challenge. Other facts of the school’s history made it a particularly appropriate choice for study. From its very inception, the goals created by the Site Based Decision Making Team and the Parent Partnership were to create a place that would welcome all students

and would guarantee that success for all students was the responsibility of the community as a whole. This concept and this direction were non-traditional. The community as a whole would move toward the shared vision and mission, which were co-created by its members. The culture was clearly one of change, one of “going against the grain” as stated by the principal.

The school recently moved to the permanent site in a building, which was designed by collaborative effort. This was a unique story of a school that began in a different way. It was an exciting place where change was key to the process from the outset. It was because of the school’s unusual beginning and the community’s desire to do things differently that this school in its fourth year of reform and growth was of particular interest. There is much literature on the topic of change in schools. There is much discussion concerning the impact of school culture and leadership, as well as the process to create positive and nurturing environments for all students. Still, there remains much to learn in these areas. Of equal significance, however, is the need for deeper investigation concerning lasting change; why it is so challenging, and why so many efforts have failed (Benham-Tye, 2000; Fullan, 1993).

**Table 1.1.     *Timeline – History of School and Phases of Research***

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
History of School				
2003	Spring 2004	Fall 2005	Fall 2006	Fall 2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents and administrators discussed possibility of a Core</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents, principal, staff, and students collaborated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Year Two - school doubled in size - 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School moved to permanent site, new building -</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Year Two in permanent site - grades 6, 7, 8, and 9 - student</li> </ul>



Knowledge JH <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New school approved by school board. Principal hired</li> <li>• Parents and Principal planned together</li> <li>• Established “foundational pillars”</li> </ul>	to complete hiring of staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defined mission, vision, and operating principles</li> <li>• Fall 2004 - school opened - 200 students - 7<sup>th</sup> grade only housed in high school</li> </ul>		grades 7, 8, and 9	enrollment 700.
Phases of Research				
	May 2004	August 2005	January 2006	August 2007 to February 2008
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Began original study – Ethnography: The Journey of the Opening of a New School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed 16 months of ethnographic data collection and analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final research report on file at the R&amp;D Center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The present study, data collection, and analysis</li> <li>• Use of original study - archival data for present study</li> </ul>

### *PURPOSE OF STUDY*

As seen in the literature on organizational change, there are obstacles and social forces, which work against deep and ongoing change. As previously noted, momentum fades and efforts fail in the third, fourth, and fifth years (Benham-Tye, 2000). The purpose of this study was to further the understanding of the process of change, the challenges, the successes, and the obstacles to continued success. Through observations and interviews, members of the community were encouraged to share their stories of working in a culture of change. One research effort was to obtain an insider appreciation for the struggle and reward of such work. Another focus was the pressure, which surfaced

from the larger school system not involved in the same reform efforts. Entering and observing this setting offered unusual possibility of witnessing the journey of change from its inception through the first four years.

This school began with a deliberate and expressed mission to create a place where all students would learn. This was the responsibility of the school community as a whole. The vision grew in the belief that all students learn best in a setting that is as diverse as possible. It developed through the conviction that success involves not only individual competence, but also a democratic community where differences are essential to real learning where support for each person is embedded in the culture of the school and character of the people. This study was intended to evaluate those concepts, as they were initiated in the first year, and to observe and understand what they looked like and meant for students and teachers four years later. Those concepts were the building blocks for the vision created by the community members. They grew from the desire to create a different reality. Change from the traditional setting was a guiding force. It was anticipated that observation of the ongoing process would further the understanding of the challenges of change and the forces that deter its progress.

The school has been the focus of previous study. The archival data from the previous study represent the starting point for this study. The school district, in partnership with the university, conducted a research project to record and share the story of the opening year. A sixteen-month ethnographic case study at this school was accomplished through the partnership in research and development for improved student achievement. That research was guided by the following objectives:

1. Provide resources to the junior high in order to support the development of a professional learning community
2. Record the journey of the school as it opened
3. Measure the impact of a professional learning community on student achievement
4. Measure the impact of Core Knowledge curriculum on student achievement

#### *ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER*

It was a team of researchers that conducted the First Year Study. The role of the team grew over time. As a member of the team, I, along with two others, observed and participated in the development of a professional learning community. We were able to offer resources from the university, lead professional development activities, and participate in conversations on the development of a learning community. These projects reflected objective number one.

Objective Number Two, recording the journey, was the primary endeavor in this preliminary study. As research team members, we attended, observed, and recorded hours of planning sessions, decision-making team meetings, faculty retreats, mission and vision development conversations, curriculum writing workshops, parent volunteer sessions, faculty meetings, department meetings, and teacher collaborative circles. It was from those hours of observations and tape-recorded conversations that data were gathered and then analyzed. The analysis of the data was presented in a final report on the school's first year, and the essential cultural themes of that year. The findings of the original

study, which was conducted from spring 2004 to fall 2005, were summarized in Chapter Three: Archival Data.

The report of the original study served as a starting point for the current study. The findings of the previous study offered archival data and reference points from which to understand the original goals of reform as well as the mission and vision of the junior high school. Returning to the school at that point in its history offered time and place to review and validate the findings of the original work. It began with a period of intensive member checking, followed by the opportunity to gather new data around the process of change.

It was a unique opportunity to begin this study with access to the background information of the original work, and then, with access to observation and participation in the culture of ongoing change. Working with the community members on site during their fourth year offered the rare possibility to discern the difficulties of change over time and with respect to the larger district. This study also afforded the opportunity to connect the work of this school involved in non-traditional reform with the ongoing growth of the school district. This site offered the occasion of experiencing and describing the reality of a new paradigm of schooling, one which reflected the philosophical changes called for by educational leaders today (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Goodlad, 1994).

As this research project began, the goals of checking the findings of the original study, of observing the ongoing process of change, and of understanding the challenges to change, directed the investigation.

A summary of the archival data, the study, and the findings, appear in Chapter Three.

### *RESEARCH QUESTIONS*

How did the purpose and the questions of this study connect to the purpose and method of critical ethnography? Critical ethnography demands an awareness of the need for change in our society, change that is identified through a critical examination of the society. The purpose of this study was to deepen the understanding of the change process, the challenges, the successes, and the obstacles to success. The first stage of the study was a member checking collaborative effort, “dialogic data production” (Carspecken, 1996) in order to understand the progress of change as experienced and described by the people there. The second stage was to understand challenges of change with respect to the situation of this non-traditional school in the larger, traditional district. These two directions of research were reflected in the following questions:

1. How do the members of the junior high community perceive the findings of the original study?
2. Where is this school in its journey of reform? How have the community members experienced the journey?
3. How is the school functioning? Have they created the culture they wanted? What does this mean for students and teachers in terms of their everyday work?
4. What are the challenges at this point in time?
5. How does this school fit in the larger system?

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Because the essence of school reform is to improve learning for all students, an understanding of the cultures and environments where students will learn is preliminary. How do we begin to understand culture and how to change it? What is the link between school leadership, school culture, and the improvement of student learning?

The Governor's Institute for Educators: Improving Academic Achievement by Improving School Climate, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, was held in July and August 2005. The focus of the Institute was improving schools' learning environments by creating cultures that promote academic achievement. One of the strategies of the Institute was to have participating educators share perspectives and research. Conversations revolved around accomplishments concerning holistic approaches to increasing academic performance by creating supportive cultures and a stronger sense of school community. In the keynote address to the Institute (2005), Alison Adler, Superintendent of Schools, Palm Beach County, Florida, stated:

While school culture may involve other aspects such as leadership, staff development, resource allocation as in a systems approach, there is little disagreement that school culture influences student and teacher motivation, school improvement, leadership effectiveness, and academic achievement.

Adler shared data from a project in her school district. The Single School Culture Project focused on empowering all members of schools in shared decisions and

improving efficacy for teachers and students. Among the reported results, Adler explained:

Every school in the project demonstrated significant student achievement as measured by the FCAT. Students demonstrated exceptional increases in learning gains as measured by the FCAT in all subject areas. The percentages of students meeting high standards and making learning gains in reading, all increased dramatically. (Brezin, FL DOE, 2003)

According to Adler, as a result of this work in Florida,

Good things happen when staff realize that they have the power to make school-wide changes and when students realize that they have the power to succeed.

In another noteworthy study, the meta-analysis of thirty years of research on school level factors connected with student achievement, the McREL research team (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003, p.8) reported the following:

Maintaining an orderly environment correlated to a nine percentage point gain in student achievement. Involving staff in shared decision-making reflected an increase in student achievement of four percentage points.

In the McREL report on Balanced Leadership (2003), researchers analyzed and summarized quantitative data from seventy projects selected from the thirty-year period. These projects met certain criteria for design, controls, analysis, and rigor. Although there has long existed the belief that school leadership has a significant impact on both school culture and student achievement, the reality of what that means in developing good leaders and supportive cultures has remained vague and often inaccessible. The specific data concerning what kinds of leadership characteristics and what norms for behavior in school culture connect with and influence student achievement have been anecdotal and theoretical. The findings of this study not only specified the leadership skills necessary to effect change, but also supported the importance of knowing how, when, and why to do such work. The findings revealed while leading for change is necessary, protecting

positive values and norms is equally necessary. According to the data, a balanced approach to creating positive learning environments is key. The knowledge, skills, and resources analyzed and presented in this report reflect the “Balance Leadership” needed to create cultures that support people and connect them with other people in the community.

The findings of the McREL study demonstrated a significant and positive relationship between leadership ability, culture, and student achievement. The average effect size between leadership and student achievement was .25. This correlation was attained by examining the relationship between the extent to which principals achieved certain responsibilities and the achievement of students on standardized and norm-reference tests. The list of responsibilities is long. Some are included here, as they connected to the goals established by the junior high school in this study.

The following responsibilities achieved by principals resulted in more positive learning environments for all members of the school community:

- Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community
- Develops a shared purpose and shared vision
- Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum
- Recognizes individual accomplishments while fostering cooperation
- Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling
- Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular practice in the school culture



- Involves parents and community members
- Provides a safe and orderly environment

The list continued. The conclusion reinforced that although there was not a single answer or solution to the challenges of public schooling and organization, there were data to support the continued effort to study school leadership particularly as it connects to changing school cultures and improving student learning.

Richard DuFour (2001) insisted the effort must be to create cultures in schools that are collaborative, collective, and coordinated focusing on learning and the response to student learning. In traditional schools, what happens when a student does not learn is left up to the individual teacher. The student may or may not receive needed assistance. In cultures where student learning is the purpose of the school, then, each student's learning is the responsibility of every person in the school.

This coordinated system of support for students never occurs by chance. It can only occur when school leaders work with staff to develop a plan of intervention, carefully monitor the implementation of that plan, and confront those who disregard it. Furthermore, an effective system of intervention is not merely an add-on to existing school structures and assumptions, but represents a natural outgrowth of strong school culture dominated by certain unifying concepts (DuFour, 2001, p.3).

The intent of this study was to understand a new school developing a culture of change based on shared beliefs and unifying constructs. In the archival data of the original study of the junior high, themes emerged that offered evidence of this kind of reform. In the fourth year, the questions arose whether or not the culture of change continued to be strong, and whether the reform efforts had achieved the desired goals.

### CHAPTER THREE: ARCHIVAL DATA

The purpose of the original study of the Core Knowledge junior high school was to record the journey of a new school as it opened in the fall of 2004. The goal was to observe the culture in order to understand the creation of a professional learning community, which could ultimately produce increases in learning for all students in that school. There was an abundance of literature to support the process and direction of the school's development (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Senge, 1994; Wheatley, 1994). In developing the story of the first sixteen months, data were collected and themes emerged validating the growth of a community, which was meeting the challenges of the current conversation of educational reform.

The school did not begin in the traditional manner. There was no building, no concrete, or glass to limit what this school would become. It began, instead, with the ideas and beliefs of parents and educators in the larger school district. During the 2002-2003 school year, parents and district leaders met and agreed to move ahead with a Core Knowledge junior high school. The foundation for the new school was three-fold: 1) Core Knowledge curriculum, 2) character education, and 3) parent partnership. It was through discussion of goals and consideration of philosophy in those early months that the new school was created.

Research supported the way this school began. In order to do things differently and to create a reality in line with beliefs, the deeper structures of society and school must be examined (Benham-Tye, 2000). In order to create a successful learning community, the members must begin with the mission, the vision, the goals, and operating principles; the very language they will use (DuFour, 2001). In order to create a successful organization, which is inclusive and nurturing, shared leadership and collaboration must be embedded in the culture and the structure (Senge, 1994; Fullan, 2001; Wheatley, 1994). In order to achieve the moral dimension of public schooling, all students must receive the best content and the best teachers (Goodlad, 2001). Learning for all members of the community must be the purpose to which all are committed (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Ethnography was the primary research method used. The researchers worked not only as observers, but also, as participants in the new setting and culture as they were being created. The school was designed under new leadership in a collaborative effort with faculty, staff, and parent partnership. The yearlong research process began with a meeting with the principal where focus, purpose, expectations, and strategies were discussed. Both the principal and the researchers supported the study and believed that the benefits would be mutual.

Research has shown that if we want to improve schools and education in the nation, we must know what goes on inside the schools (Goodlad, 1984). This was the rationale for the project. Ethnography has as its goal to look at and understand the everyday functioning and values of a culture (Stake, 1994). This was the selected method. With those ideas to guide the work, the research questions were:

1. What happens in a new school as the work of co-creating a learning community begins?
2. What is said and what does the reality look like as collaboration and partnership become embedded in the culture?
3. What processes are initiated to achieve the mission?
4. What is the school becoming as it realizes its vision?

In the complete report, a list was included of events, activities, classes, and meetings, which were attended and observed over the course of sixteen months from April 2004 to August, 2005. Field notes were collected at all sessions. Those notes were analyzed according to recurring themes and summarized in the report.

The analysis of the pages of notes was an ongoing process. The analysis revealed many themes pertaining to creating a learning community. The themes emerged through reading and coding the data in an inductive approach. For the final report, four themes were chosen for discussion as they connected most closely to the literature around professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The four themes were: collaboration; visionary leadership; staff and parents as leaders and agents of change; and trusting the process. The report was not organized chronologically. The presentation was thematic and most of the data were the actual words, either written or spoken, by the community members. A brief definition of each theme, as it developed from the data, follows.

## *THEME 1: COLLABORATION*

“There is a ceiling effect to how much we can learn if we keep to ourselves” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p.63). From the school’s beginning, parents and teachers shared this thinking.

Collaboration, from the Latin *co laborare* means to labor together. In American schools, it has been the hope to create good schools and safe schools where all children will flourish. At times, that work has been collaborative, and at times not. Collaboration was not a suggestion at the new junior high school, and it was not simply by invitation. Each staff member was informed from the first and expected to commit to a culture where collaboration was not merely an appropriate add-on, but a core belief. The new faculty, as they were hired, worked together to clarify values and to create operating principles. In the first section of the school handbook, created by staff members on board in 2004, they wrote in bold print, “**Most importantly, we are here together to do what none of us can do alone.**” As the year continued, the challenges and rewards of this way of conducting business were observed. It began to emerge that this construct would take more time and more work, and that it would be key to what they would become.

## *THEME 2: VISIONARY LEADERSHIP*

When we follow the way of the visionary, we are able to make the truth visible. When we express the inner visionary, we know and communicate our creative purpose and life dream, act from our authentic self and are truthful... (Arrien, 1992, p. 79).

The term visionary leader, with its multiple interpretations and connotations, was defined in the report as it was witnessed in the junior high school setting. The first indication of a different kind of leadership surfaced during the time of developing the

vision itself for the school. That task was shared by the principal, the staff, the parents, and the students. Consequently, all members were leaders in the task of seeing what this school could be. Peter Senge and his colleagues (1994) identified this kind of leadership in terms of the discipline of “systems thinking.” It is a shift in the way of thinking about leading. And it is a shift in the position of the leader. It is a leadership that requires healthy relationships with people as well as healthy interactions among people. Senge’s “Systems thinking” is the way a group works together to lead together to create what they truly want. It involves a community in developing a language together as well as ways of learning that could not happen under the control of a traditional top-down personality or with members working in isolation. It is the non-linear process based on feedback and interaction. The kind of leadership that relies on Senge’s “systems thinking” requires questioning of status quo, personal effort to clarify and deepen beliefs, and pursuing the shared vision through continual learning together. This was the leadership we observed; rather than a style, it was a process. The process of developing the picture of the future for this new community was, as they called it, a co-visionary process.

Being a visionary leader in this sense involved not only clear sight straight ahead in the present, but also hindsight, foresight, and peripheral vision. The leadership effort of the principal, as witnessed during observations, was to consolidate the wisdom of past experiences of members to create an idea of what they would want in the future while working side by side in relationships that thrive due to diverse perspectives. It was a kind of leadership, which was relational, complex, and at times, emotional. The leader was observed asking colleagues as well as himself to look inside themselves for the direction of this school. The principal frequently asked the question, “If we make this decision,

what will it say about who we are?” This leader, with a vision of what could be, continually asked the community to search for answers so the organization as a whole could arrive at its most authentic reality.

One way of making sense of this kind of leadership is through the ideas and words of Margaret Wheatley (1994). Using nature as the model in her new science of leadership, Wheatley insisted that organizations can move forward in harmony by a force that she called “self-reference.” Living organizations can achieve their visions as nature does if the parts are working in harmony toward the common goal. Self-reference is the commitment to continually checking that actions are in line with beliefs and that all beliefs lead to the shared vision. The visionary leader of this small school reinforced on a daily basis the vision, the mission, the agreements, and the responsibilities of each member to itself and to the whole. Wheatley suggested the possibility that nature itself may be guided by Shakespeare’s words, “To thine own self be true” and that leaders and organizations can follow that path. The leader does not hold the answers but assists the community toward answers created together. It was the intent of the principal to assist in the work of defining the self and the vision for this school, and then to continually evaluate the reality with regard to the vision, Wheatley’s “self-reference” (p. 146).

Writers, such as Arrien (1992) who was quoted in the original study, have considered for hundreds of years the human need to search for the authentic self. This drive seemed to be a force behind the leader. This leader asked the living organization to see and create its authentic self. The role of visionary leader suggested one who will lead others out of themselves to create what they envision as honest and just. This principal stepped aside to allow the creation of what the community said they truly wanted. The

principal, in his own words, explained that he was not the owner of the vision; rather he was the “protector of the vision”.

### *THEME 3: STAFF AND PARENTS AS LEADERS AND AGENTS OF CHANGE*

This theme emerged from the observations of countless numbers of adults recognized as contributing members. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) explained some of what was observed concerning these changing roles of adults.

Within these challenging and complex times, teachers must find more and better ways to work with others in the interests of students. They must define their sense of professionalism so that it does not set them apart from or above each other and the wider public, but gives them the confidence and courage to engage openly with others. Moreover, they must do this even when the conditions do not favour it (p.26).

Over the period of sixteen months of observations, teachers and parents were engaged in discussion during team meetings, faculty meetings, and collaborative circles. They were responsible for the accomplishment of the mission, and therefore for the education of every child. Members were obligated to do their work differently. No parent could say “just for my child.” And no teacher could say “just for certain students”. In lieu of any such limiting perspective, there was a growing consciousness for the stewardship for the entire school.

Adults were together and involved in conversations around the purpose of school, what real learning is, and what kinds of environment and activity lead to that learning. Teachers questioned old ways and each other while looking for new ways together and with students.

In the school handbook 2004, the teachers wrote of the focus of their work in the first year:



- Positivity...as we get our school up and running
- Grow the vision together
- Honor the operating principles and values
- Consult and align with the Core Knowledge Foundation
- Establish safe and healthy relationships and school culture
- Focus on learning, collaboration, celebration and perseverance
- Take personal responsibility. Demonstrate Character
- Ask, How can I? What can I? How can we? What can we?

These statements of focus of energy called teachers and staff members out of the traditional isolation of individual classrooms and offices, into conversation with colleagues. These statements of belief led them to leadership and collaboration, both purposeful and deliberate.

#### *THEME 4: TRUSTING THE PROCESS*

Trusting the process, as experienced during the first sixteen months, involved several concepts to observe and appreciate. This notion of trusting was difficult to define, easier to describe, and more complex than initially thought. Growing and strengthening trust in the process required community members to go to the discussion table in as diverse fashion as possible, to demonstrate a confidence to stay in the moment, to focus together on the core beliefs with regard to current issues and challenges, and to allow the energy of the conversation to take them to a new level of understanding. The process asked each person's commitment to deeper understanding of issues and creation of knowledge together. It asked members to be comfortable or at least willing, to accept

some degree of ambiguity acknowledging that pre-set agenda and done-deal solutions, and although they offer some sense of security or efficiency, contradict and are detrimental to the process.

In the words of the principal, the becoming, the process of creating, takes time, energy, participation, and trust. It means listening to each other's perspective with the hope of learning and the possibility of changing one's own view. The process does not foster the goal of convincing others of the correctness of one's personal view. It is not a debate; it is not about winning or losing the discussion. The process witnessed at this new school echoed Senge's concept of "team learning" (1994) where the pedagogy is dialogical calling for the sharing of insights to create something that could not be created in isolation. More than the previously described themes and pieces of the community, trusting the process was identified as the most essential. The democratic process where dialogue is embedded is, indeed, fundamental to the underlying ideal of American education (Goodlad, 2002). At this school, the way the school functioned was as important as what it would become.

Much has been written in educational literature about trust in school settings: trust between principal and teachers; trust among teachers; trust between staff and student; and between parents and staff. The findings of this study revealed another level of trust, which seemed to transcend those listed above. Beyond the trust among the human beings, there must be a trust in the way the human beings work together and function; there must be a trust in the way the school functions. Regardless of turnover of leadership and change in personnel, there must be an allegiance to and trust in the process—the dialogic, inclusive, and democratic process.

## *CONCLUSION*

It was important to observe and discuss what happened at this new school and consider what would continue to happen. It was their goal to do things differently and to improve school for all. The ethnographic study was a deliberate effort to enter the culture from its inception to understand what was happening, what life was like there, and what it was becoming. The hope was to analyze and share the findings as a source of knowledge and impetus for discussion. Ladson- Billings (2000) explained that this is the challenge for educational leaders.

The conditions under which people live and learn shape both their knowledge and their worldviews. The process of developing a worldview that differs from dominant worldviews requires active intellectual work on the part of the knower, because schools, society, and the structure and production of knowledge are designed to create individuals who internalize the worldview and knowledge production and acquisition (p.259).

Research indicates that lasting reform will occur only as the ideological underpinnings of the Euro-American tradition as it has influenced schools are examined. Institutions that have been hierarchical, patriarchal bureaucracies have been able to subordinate, rank, sort, and limit students and teachers by race, gender, and economic status, as well as by ways of knowing and seeing the world.

From the time Southern states made it a crime to teach an enslaved person to read, through decades of separate and unequal schooling, which continue to the present, the right to learn in ways that develop both individual competence and a democratic community has been a myth rather than reality for many Americans (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p.13).

Research and study offer emerging theories to effect change in the realities of schools. A deliberate effort to examine traditional assumptions with the expectation of elucidating their origins and deconstructing their power was witnessed in the first year of this school. According to Darling-Hammond (2006, p15):

Much is known about critical components of schools that make a difference in achievement. These include the quality of teachers and teaching, especially teachers' ability to teach content to diverse students in ways that carefully attend to the learning process (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005); access to challenging curriculum, which ultimately determines a greater quotient of students' achievement than their initial ability levels (Gamoran & Berends, 1987; Oakes, 2005); and schools and classes that are organized so that students are well known and well supported (Lee & Smith, 1995).

By the end of the first year, the researchers witnessed that the junior high school was in many ways becoming what it truly wanted, a safe, fair, and nurturing place where all were known and valued, and all would learn. Reports from parents, students, and teachers indicated successes, in collaborative efforts to improve teaching and create community. And by the end of the first year, they had defined direction and goals for the future. The school would work toward growth in diversity, in service to others, and in enhancing student efficacy and leadership. Structures were established for the second year to continue their work in collaboration and Core Knowledge training, to grow the parent partnership, and to develop more deeply the sense of personal character. Not only would the focus be on individual achievement, but also equally important would be the development of a democratic community of caring. These were the pillars on which the school began and on which it would proceed into the future years.

It was the hope of the research team that the stories told and the history shared in the final report would be worthwhile to other schools in the district as well as to the members of this school community as they continued their work in school improvement.

The complete report of the first study is available at the Research and Development Center for the Advancement of Student Learning. The findings of the past study served as the starting point for this study. The research design, which included the archival data, is outlined in Chapter 4, Methodology.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

### *QUALITATIVE RESEARCH*

Rich descriptions of people, places, language, and behaviors; research questions designed to be open and changing, not framed by variables or hypotheses; ongoing analysis of data not handled well by statistical strategies; subjects in context revealing complexity and ambiguity; researchers involved in long term observation and participation in the natural setting; in-depth interviews developing rapport with persons of the study; a desire to understand cultures and phenomena; developing new insights to realities not seen before and making sense of those realities from the perspectives of the people there—are characteristics of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Although researchers in anthropology and sociology have employed many of these techniques in their work during the past century, the term “qualitative” was first used in the mid 1900’s.

This kind of research has a long history and has been surrounded by debate. As a result, terms can be confusing, and at times, overlapping. For the purpose of this study, I offer a brief explanation of terms. The above list of characteristics applies to qualitative approach, in general. Anthropology is a disciplinary source of this kind of work where the research is referred to as “fieldwork” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.3). In education, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) reframed this work as “naturalistic” because it was to be done

in the natural setting. According to Bogdan and Biklen, some researchers refer to this approach, generically, as “ethnographic” (2003, p.3). Although some researchers use the term “ethnographic” to refer to the approach described above, ethnography here refers to a specific type of qualitative research, one that derives from anthropology and involves the work usually done by anthropologists. That work requires entering a culture, to collect data with the hope of understanding the culture, and especially to understand how the people there make sense of their culture. Anthropologists, for a long time, have observed and questioned in order to understand and describe.

In qualitative research, in general, and in education specifically, changes in ideology have occurred over the years fostering an interest in not only description of cultures and phenomena, but also for deeper understanding of the roles played by power and position in lives of people. Qualitative research is capable of revealing where power is in societies. Who and what are studied? Who conducts the research? Who funds the studies and benefits from them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003)? This change, taking place in the 1960’s, in interest and focus, enhanced the capability of qualitative work toward social justice.

Many clamored to know what the schools were like for the children who were not making it, and many educators wanted to talk about it (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.16).

Federally funded research projects were looking inside schools to effect change due to the realization that we did not know what was happening there. Qualitative research methods, which incorporated what are presently identified as ethnographic methods, grew not only in popularity, but were recognized as appropriate ways to understand these systems in society.

## *ETHNOGRAPHY IN EDUCATION*

Many anthropologists engage in phenomenology in their efforts to study schools. Often, the phenomenon studied is the culture.

The framework for these anthropological studies is the phenomenon of culture. The attempt to describe culture is ethnography. At its best, an ethnography should account for the behavior of people by describing what it is that they know that enables them to behave appropriately given the dictates of common sense in their community. (Spradley, 1980, p.6, cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

According to these definitions, an ethnographic study meets its objective and is successful if it informs the reader how to behave well and to “fit in” in the culture. In order to share this information, the researcher offers meanings of behavior, of words, and of acts. The ethnographer can accomplish this by presenting rich descriptions from data that have been gathered, and meanings that have been gleaned in a shared process, reflecting the points of view of the members.

Creswell (1998) identified ethnography as one of the qualitative traditions. Others are biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. These traditions overlap the studies and the frameworks of studies. Creswell offers the metaphor of an intricate fabric of many threads, many colors, different materials, and textures. This metaphor suggests and approaches the complexity and beauty of qualitative work and ethnography. For Creswell, qualitative research is a process of building understanding and rapport that open social and human problems for discussion. It is a “complex and holistic” picture that takes the reader into multiple dimensions of a problem (Creswell, 1998, p.15). For the ethnographer, the intent is to describe with great detail the culture, to pose many questions to get inside the thinking of people, to examine cultural themes as they emerge, and to tell the story of people sharing those cultural beliefs and behaviors.

The ethnographer hopes to offer a journey to the reader into an interesting and different place.

### *THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK*

Another means to define and understand ethnography lies in the philosophical assumptions that support the approach. From an epistemological perspective, the researcher needs to elucidate an understanding of knowledge, what it is and how we attain or create it. For the ethnographer, knowledge evolves and is created during the processes of observation and interview. Knowledge is created in partnership with the members of a culture and is shared through their words and the meanings they give to their world (Creswell, 1998). Often, the story or interpretation of a culture is told in the very words of the people there.

With respect to reality, ethnography acknowledges the existence of multiple interpretations. Ontologically, for the ethnographer, the understanding of truth and reality is derived through the voices and stories of the participants in the study. Reality relies on the time, the place, and the interpretations of individuals. Reality not only changes over time, but at the same time can be very different for different people. It is the role of the ethnographer to gather the data which will reveal multiple realities, and then, to report those details with as clear distinction as possible.

Because the voices of many are engaged in the process and product of ethnographic work, many values are also included. This renders strong implications for the axiological assumptions underlying this approach. The qualitative work of ethnography is, by its nature, value-laden and one of individual bias (Creswell, 1998).



The researcher wants to place herself as close as possible to the subject being researched and for as long a time as necessary. This is true because the goal of the study is to uncover and present the values and meanings of everyday life and everyday existence in the culture. This presentation does not develop from the perspective of the researcher alone, rather from the various perspectives of the informants. The bias of the researcher will affect the study, the questions asked, and the interpretation given. The researcher must offer her own values as they enter into the process. The notion of searching and respecting various perspectives and values of individuals is part of what enhances the democratic nature of this type of research.

These philosophical assumptions have significant influence in all qualitative work, including ethnography and critical ethnography, in education and other arenas. Similarly, different ideologies have influenced ethnography and what has developed into critical ethnography. Their impact and differences deserve discussion. Postmodernism, feminism, and critical theory have influenced the focus and design of ethnographic study. Much of the qualitative research effort has been designed to give voice to those individuals traditionally without voice, marginalized, or oppressed by the dominant culture. Along with the hope of empowering those without power, there are specific ideologies, which have been intended to create concrete changes.

Postmodernists, according to Thomas (1993, cited in Creswell, 1998), engage in work to change the way people think, and do not focus necessarily on changing action. Postmodernist thinking is a reaction to the positivists of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In the 1960's and 1970's, this ideology asked researchers to acknowledge the multiple worldviews and ways of knowing of certain groups determined by race, gender, and class. Researchers

engaged in these efforts hoped to reveal the hierarchies of society and the power held over certain groups.

Feminist theory echoed the tenets of postmodernism. An important scholar in this literature is Lather (Creswell, 1998). Lather explained that the essence of this type of study concerns gender, and the unequal social position of women. The effort in this research, like postmodernism, is to change the thinking around the status of women, and to bring to the surface the oppressive forces in a patriarchal society. Feminist researchers might well choose to engage in critical theory to realize action and reform.

Critical theory also attempts to examine assumptions and deep structures, which privilege some while oppressing others. This theoretical framework, however, insists on the transformation of reality in order to re-create a society free of oppression. There are variations on this theory, but certain tenets are consistent: an effort to study and to critique historical and current social life, which demonstrates domination, alienation, and struggle for some, and to offer the possibility of change not only in dialogue but also in praxis, so to end the oppression. In ethnography, the researcher might incorporate in the study design a way to make changes in the way people think and act. The hope would be that individuals become empowered to examine their own worlds, recognize oppression, and re-create realities to end oppression. The influence of this theoretical framework serves to distinguish an ethnographic study from a critical ethnography.

### *CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY*

Where does ethnography end and critical ethnography begin? For Harry Wolcott (2002), there is an orthodoxy of ethnography. In order to qualify, the work must fit the

rigor and requirements of anthropology from which ethnography is derived. This qualitative researcher sees ethnography as the “research arm of anthropology.” Wolcott’s concern is that too much research has born the title of anthropology of education or ethnography, and in fact, does not demonstrate the quality needed for either. Writing ethnography becomes a way of seeing the world. As in an anthropological dig, one stumbles across new evidence, an idea, a meaning, and an object, which adds new light to the understanding of a culture. In an effort to “tease out the essence of ethnography,” Wolcott offers a list of things that the anthropologist/ ethnographer must do very carefully: the work must be “holistic, cross cultural, comparative, first-hand in natural settings, and long-term, flexible, individualistic, corroborative, and non-evaluative (p.33).” Reconsidering this list, Wolcott determines that none of these is the essence of or essential to ethnography. He, then, offers a metaphor to capture the essence.

The making of ethnography is rather like the making of a loaf of bread. Both demand a skillful combining of customary, everyday ingredients, none of which is absolutely critical. The end product takes form and shape at the hand of the ethnographer—or baker—familiar with local expectations as to how it should look and who therefore selects, combines, and shapes the ingredients accordingly (p.38).

Wolcott further insists that ethnography is more than a method. There must exist the specific intent to produce an ethnography as well as to use ethnographic data gathering and analysis. All researchers may borrow the techniques and still not complete work worthy of the title. Wolcott admits that he does not accomplish the task of outlining specifically the ingredients necessary; he concludes that by its very nature the essence of ethnography is elusive, and “resists rigid specification (p.41).” One’s understanding of ethnography is deepened by reading Wolcott. Certainly, a deep respect for the work is

shared. However, Wolcott did not address a part of the ethnography, which seems to be central and meaningful.

In the same text edited by Zou and Trueba (2002), another researcher examines the Wolcott piece. James J. Scheurich's critique of the preceding article clarified the element, which seems to take the researcher from ethnography to critical ethnography.

Scheurich challenges Wolcott's thesis of remaining objective and non-political while engaging in the rigorous work of ethnography. Scheurich states that in writing about ethnography in a way that does not address reality, theories of reality, and the researcher's role in reality, Wolcott is attempting to separate himself from the world he is observing. In critiquing the article, Scheurich suggests that this is a most dangerous kind of politics because it is insidious and oppressive. The paradox lies in the fact that it works to encourage and continue the kind of oppression and inequity it is trying to address.

Scheurich offers many examples of how ignoring the ontological framework of ethnography demonstrates contradiction and hypocrisy on the part of the researcher.

You cannot just discuss what ethnography is when society sends an extraordinarily disproportionate number of men of color to prison. You cannot just discuss what ethnography is when in our schools from kindergarten to graduate, students of color are mistreated. Adults of color disproportionately hold the lowest paying jobs (p.50). Our society is, in fact, this massive hierarchy of inequality by race...Our world, our society, is a social construction (p.51).

Because of this ontological framework, because the world is a social construction, the researcher cannot profess to walk along side that constructed reality in order to observe and critique from a safe and separate position. Researchers must see that they have participated in the social construction of a system of inequity and racism. They are a part of the construction of this reality and this reality is a part of them. The researcher's stance in the co-constructed reality becomes not only influential in the research project,

but the biases therein must be shared openly as well. The ontological questions with which one must grapple in ethnography or any research approach, then, pertain to the understanding of a reality which is both inequitable and white racist (Scheurich, 2003). In a concluding paragraph, Scheurich writes:

The question for me then is how can we participate in the world in a way that acts to create a world of sister and brotherhood that is open, supportive and loving, and critically struggles with each other about our own subjectivities? How do we participate in the world as researchers in a way that brings our subjectivities inside the circle of our critique and struggle? Transforming the world is not just about critiquing it while living safe and easy lives in our elite white subjectivities. Transforming the world requires, through loving struggles with others, our very selves becoming part of the ongoing struggle (p.53).

These words written by this researcher render a distinction between the work of ethnography and that of critical ethnography. I find my own research stance strongly aligned with the focus and purpose of critical ethnography. I entered the research setting with the hope of beginning dialogue with others who are interested in transforming the world, at least the world for students in that particular setting. I further explain that position in the next section of this chapter, Researcher's Perspective.

Carspecken (1996) credits the foundation of critical ethnography to Paul Willis in the 1970's with his publication of *Learning to Labor*. This is a re-stating of the theory of praxis and its connection to a life of participation or a life of alienation. Paulo Freire (1970) explicates that it is only through a human being's action in the world that the world and the human being can be transformed. It is this transformation that is the life-giving experience for human beings and organizations. Carspecken explains this as a need for each human being to create his own dignity and self-understanding through his own work. Praxis is one's life work, and "praxis needs are basically the need to become a self, maintain a self, and develop a self through expressive activity (p.63)." Carspecken

offers Marx's theory of human motivation in the theory of praxis, and concludes that in the capitalist society workers are alienated from the self because they are oppressed and limited by the system. As a society, we are part of a system that separates people from human motivation. The transformation of that reality demands hard intellectual effort, examination of deep and traditional structures, and dialectic efforts including many voices to begin to see the oppression and eradicate it. This is the work of critical theory; this is the framework of critical ethnography. It is a theory, which, although it began in Germany over seventy years ago, still holds its ability to disrupt and challenge the status quo (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003).

#### *RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE*

It was my hope to disrupt and challenge the status quo of the greater society. It was with a critical perspective that I intended to look at school culture. It was with the purpose of understanding our ability to change and to improve life for all students that I began this work. We must look at what we have created and be willing to change it and ourselves. It is difficult work for we have been in the midst of madness for so long.

Every student, parent, and educator today has been marinated in Eurocentric colonial thought and ideologies that continue to create multiple forms of domination and oppression... (Dei & Kempf, 2006. p.3).

There is much work to do in public education, much to re-think. As I say this, I am not considering the individuals who work there, in our schools. During my thirty years as a public school teacher, I witnessed the dedication of teachers and administrators. I felt the positive and hopeful spirit of students, parents, and communities. I have known the hard work done by many for many. The source of the problem lies not

in the people, but in the system (Senge, 1995). Students, parents, and educators have been “marinated” in a cultural system of oppression (Dei & Kempf, 2006), and have been taught well to perpetuate the dominant paradigm. The system renders throughout its greater organization inequities and injustices, which privilege some of the members and punish others (Goodlad, 1994). We have created a system that does not nurture consistently across all communities, all schools, and all neighborhoods (the Coloradoan Newspaper, 2006, the Denver Post, 2006). The system causes us great difficulty in valuing the gifts of women, of children of color, of those of poverty, and of those who learn differently. All this calculates to what Ladson-Billings called the “education debt.” There seems to be a force at work, so deeply embedded that, although it may be invisible and elusive, its consequences marginalize, oppress, and diminish the majority of young people in our schools (Ladson-Billings, 2006). There is a shadow side of the system, which has been the subject of discussion for many writers from the beginning of the last century to present time. John Dewey (1916) professed that if schools do not offer shared, life experiences to all children in an equitable fashion, the final results will be that some are educated to be “masters” and others to be “slaves.” Paulo Freire (1970) spoke of those oppressed by deathlike non-participation in their own education and lives. John Goodlad (2001, p.2) wrote:

Humans have accomplished amazing things. Nothing phenomenological and little mythological deter their imagination, creativity, and technological prowess...But in what pervades these wonders lurks an enemy: humankind itself. The malaise that humans have been unable to eradicate persists: the inhumane treatment of some humans to and by other humans.

And most recently, Dei and Kempf (2006) offered the unappetizing assessment of the situation, that all people have been “marinated” in thought and paradigm that continue to dominate and oppress.

As educators and stewards of free public schooling in a democratic society, it is our moral obligation to question the system, to deconstruct the assumptions upon which it has been constructed and to rebuild our schools as realities that are what we say we want. This is the challenge of educational leadership today. It is work that must begin at the core beliefs and missions of school settings. The language, the very words, used each day, as well as the ways of creating knowledge and policy must be held up for examination. They have the power not only to oppress, but also to deter the progress of reform of the magnitude and direction that are needed (Benham-Tye, 2000). It is in the words used and the ways in which people come together in a dialectic process that will allow the necessary transformation (Freire, 1970). It is complicated and demanding work. It is my purpose for this research. There is no easy route to the needed change. In my own career, I often focused on the positive aspects of my teaching world and the work I could accomplish within the system. Now, however, it is imperative to acknowledge the wrong that has been done to many, and to pay the “debt” of the injustice of which Ladson-Billings wrote so eloquently (2006).

My orientation toward educational research is influenced by a concern for social inequity and injustice, as well as a strong desire for positive change in our schools and society. There is much literature today concerning critical social research. My effort and design are primarily influenced by critical theory as defined by Carspecken (1996) and Lincoln and Guba (2000).



The goal of critical theory is to examine, deconstruct, and transform established systems in order to create new realities, which align with the understanding and valuing of multiple truths, and multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Further, it is the goal of critical theory to emancipate those oppressed by the dominant Euro-American paradigm. This dominant paradigm is at work in our schools; it may be subtle or not; it is clearly powerful. It is my belief that few change agenda have begun at the core belief systems concerning knowledge and learning. It is there, at the epistemological foundation that we must question, and with the system of language that we must begin. Through this critical lens, I conducted an ethnographic study of a Core Knowledge junior high school, which initiated a non-traditional change effort, change that began with beliefs of the power of language and learning. This junior high school grew and evolved in a culture of collaboration, question, and change. My intent was to enter the culture to understand the change and its barriers, and to uncover insights and contradictions.

The theory of ethnography is to study a culture in the natural setting over a prolonged period of time, primarily through observations, with the hope of understanding that culture and what it is becoming (Creswell, 1998). Carspecken (1996) combined the directions and assumptions of both ethnography and critical theory in educational research. His chosen methodology, critical ethnography, requires that the researcher enter the setting with the goal of making sense of what is going on, and at the same time with the goal of supporting change efforts in order to improve society.

The values within this ethnographic study align closely with those of Carspecken (1996) as he explained the beliefs common to critical ethnographers. His foundation for these beliefs was derived and modified from the work of Kinchloe and McLaren (2002).

That research be employed in cultural and social criticism. That certain groups in any society are privileged over others. That the oppression which characterizes societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status. That oppression has many faces. That mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, part of the oppression.

Consistent with the views of Kinchloe and McLaren, Carspecken is clear about his purpose in critical ethnography. “Criticalists find society to be unfair, unequal, and both subtly and overtly oppressive for many people. We do not like it, and we want to change it (p.7).”

I acknowledge in my own work that this is my purpose. I do not like what I see in public education. I want to work for change in that world. I borrow Carspecken’s words, for his passion and clarity resonate with my feelings and thinking. As I entered the site where reform had begun and where data had already been gathered and analyzed, I anticipated looking more closely at the change process. I hoped to examine the reality of the new school as it emerged in its fourth year. Critical theory guided the research. Acknowledging that, traditionally, schools have been bureaucratic hierarchies that alienate certain members of the community, I observed with a critical eye and with a collaborative effort including the voices of students, teachers, parents, and administrators. My sincere hope was to understand the kind of change toward which they were striving, and the hurdles presenting themselves from the larger society. Eventually, then, the goal is to share the findings with the greater system, with the hope of being part of some movement forward and positive change.

## *RESEARCH DESIGN*

The design of this study was both ethnographic and critical. In connecting the design to the purpose of the study, it is helpful to reflect on the position of current experts of organizational change. According to DuFour (2004), Senge (1994), Fullan, (2001), Darling-Hammond (2006) and Wheatley (1994), there must be a shift from the traditional school culture to a new reality committed to the collaborative process of continual learning and growing in order to achieve a shared mission and vision. The purpose of this study was to further the understanding of the process and the obstacles to change. The purpose of this study was achieved through observations of a small school community three years into its process of change. An ethnographic design offered the possibility of seeing and describing where this community was in its journey. Secondly, only through deep and ongoing cultural shift can reform last and schools improve. It was the further purpose of this study to examine, through a critical lens, the process of change with the hope of gaining new insight into the difficulties of the change to which this community was dedicated.

The research questions toward achieving that purpose were:

1. How do the members of the junior high school community perceive the findings of the original study?
2. Where is this school in its journey of reform? How have the community members experienced the journey?
3. How is the school functioning? Have they created the culture they wanted? What does this mean for students and teachers in terms of their everyday work?

4. What are the challenges at this point in time?
5. How does this school fit in the larger system?

Phil Carspecken (1996) presented both a theoretical and practical guide to critical ethnography. The above research questions became part of the Carspecken model for ethnography. With regard to the practical guide, he outlined a five-stage plan for critical qualitative research (p.43):

Preliminary Steps: Creating a list of research questions, a list of specific items for study, and examining researcher value orientations.

- Stage 1. Compiling the primary record
- Stage 2. Preliminary reconstructive analysis
- Stage 3. Dialogical data generation
- Stage 4. Describing systems relations
- Stage 5. System relations as explanation of findings

In Chapter 3, archival data including the findings of the preliminary study conducted at the junior high were summarized. The preliminary study was conducted during the first sixteen months of the school's existence. The method was ethnographic and the results were compiled and analyzed in the final report. The design of the preliminary research project, the compilation of data and the analysis by the researchers were accomplished in a method comparable to the preliminary steps and stages one and two of Carspecken's model.

The Preliminary Steps included creating a list of research questions, which would be general, comprehensive, and flexible (p. 41), as well as an examination of the

researcher's value orientation. In the archival data, the research questions were listed as they appear here:

1. What happens in a new school as the work of co-creating a learning community begins?
2. What is said and what does the reality look like as collaboration and partnership become embedded in the culture?
3. What processes are initiated to achieve the mission?
4. What is the school becoming as it pursues its vision?

The value orientation for the researchers in that first study was well expressed in the words of Ladson-Billings (2000):

The conditions under which people live and learn shape both their knowledge and worldviews. The process of developing a worldview that differs from the dominant worldview requires active intellectual work on the part of the knower, because schools, society, and the structure and production of knowledge are designed to create individuals who internalize the dominant worldview and knowledge production and

It was a value of the research team to do the intellectual work involved in understanding the conditions in the school setting as well as the way in which the new culture developed.

## *PROCEDURES*

This particular school setting was chosen because it offered as its mission to create a place where all students would learn in an equitably nurturing and safe culture. The school community determined to do things differently, questioning the traditional structures and processes in order to create a reality in line with its mission, vision, and

beliefs. It was stated by faculty and the principal that they would be “going against the grain” in order to create the kind of school they really wanted. It was the purpose of the original study to understand what that meant. How would they do things differently? What would this different culture look like? Would they be able to effect the desired change?

The preparatory work was accomplished by the research team before the data collection began as prescribed in the Carspecken model. Carspecken referred to this work as the Preliminary Steps (p. 41). When this planning step was completed, the research team began Stage 1.

*Stage 1: Compiling the primary record through collection of monological data (p 41).*

In Stage 1, the researcher makes herself as unobtrusive as possible within the social site to observe interactions. A primary record is built up through note taking, audio taping and, if desired, videotaping. An intensive set of notes is built up for the site of focus and a looser journal kept on observations and conversations made by frequenting the locale.

Stage 1, as part of the original study, was conducted at the Core Knowledge junior high school from April 2004 to August 2005. During those sixteen months, many pages of field notes were written from observations and conversations. The notes were written by the researcher from her perspective taken primarily from a third person position. For that reason, Carspecken referred to this stage as the monological stage. In the next stage, the data were analyzed.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### *Stage 2: Preliminary reconstructive analysis (p.42).*

In Stage 2, the researcher begins to analyze the primary record. The analysis is reconstructive because it articulates those cultural themes and system factors that are not observable and that are usually unarticulated by the actors themselves. Putting previously unarticulated factors into linguistic representation is reconstructive: it takes conditions of action constructed by people on non-discursive levels of awareness and reconstructs them linguistically.

Stage 2 required many hours of reading and re-reading the field notes. A variety of techniques was used to construct the meaning of the data gathered. According to Carspecken, the initial analysis is actually a back and forth play between low-level coding and meaning construction. This was accomplished by mentally noting patterns and unusual events, which created larger meanings and concepts leading to a framework of understanding. This process in human understanding is hermeneutic in that it is a circular process beginning with holistic understanding and moving toward explicit meanings and returning to the holistic. The return to the holistic then offered a modified conceptual framework for emergent themes. All the data then were examined line by line to support and deepen the understanding of themes, which emerged. As a result of this analysis, in the original study, several themes became key in understanding the culture of the school. These themes were listed and explained in Chapter 3 (Archival Data). An explanation of themes was included in this section, also, in order to clarify the connection of the archival data to the research of this present study.

## *THE PRESENT STUDY: RETURN TO THE SITE*

### *Stage 3: Dialogical data generation (p.42).*

In Stage 3, the researcher ceases to be the only voice allowed. Here, the idea is to begin conversing intensively with the subjects of one's study through special techniques of interviewing and the use of discussion groups. Stage three generates data with people rather than records information about them. It is crucial to critical qualitative research because, if used properly, it democratizes the research process.

The current study began with Carspecken's Stage 3 and was guided by the research questions:

1. How do the members of the junior high school community perceive the findings of the original study?
2. Where is this school in its journey of reform? How have the community members experienced the journey?
3. How is the school functioning? Have they created the culture they wanted? What does this mean for students and teachers in terms of their everyday work?
4. What are the challenges at this point in time?
5. How does this school fit in the larger system?

Stage 3 of Carspeckens's model offered to the present study the appropriate place to begin. By returning to the site using the thematic analysis of the archival data as the reference point of research, an examination and discussion of those themes afforded the school community the opportunity for a thorough member-checking experience as well as a deeper study of their learning organization.



The themes that emerged in the original study were:

1. Collaboration
2. Visionary Leadership
3. Staff and Parents as Leaders and Agents of Change
4. Trusting the Process

The principal intent of Stage 3 was to enter into intense conversations with the subjects of the study in order to examine, challenge, modify, eliminate, and clarify the findings of Stages 1 and 2.

#### *ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER*

The role of the researcher was to observe the functioning of the school, and to conduct interviews with teachers, administrators, and parents. The researcher was able, at this point, to give voice to the members of the community. This third stage included observations of meetings and classes. The observations were followed by interviews with both the teachers involved and parents involved in the school partnership. The process was dialogical. One hope was to create a safe place for the participants to explore findings and feelings, and ideas and issues in their own words. This promised to be a time of new insights and deeper understanding of the school, its purpose, and reality.

#### *PARTICIPANTS*

Stage 3 gives the participants a voice in the research process and a chance to challenge material produced by the researcher (p.155).

All members of the junior high school community were invited to participate in this study. Teachers, administrators, and parents were asked to volunteer for interviews

during their unscheduled hours at school. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the content, and process of the interview and the intention of the researcher. The researcher asked to observe their meetings, classes, and normal work experiences. The interviews were based on the observations, the data of the original study, and the research questions of the current study. The duration of the interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one hour, and the volunteers were able to terminate their participation at any time. The data from the interviews were used toward the accomplishment of the purpose of the study. The identities of the participants remained confidential, as did the identity of the school and school district. The interviews took place in comfortable settings on the school site. With the permission of the participants, the observations and interviews were recorded.

### *THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW*

The data collection technique used was the qualitative interview. It was semi-structured to allow for greater flexibility and freedom to participants. In order to prepare the interview protocol, I referred to school observations, the research questions, and the themes of the archival data. Each theme offered what Carspecken referred to as Topic Domains (1996, p.157). For each of the four topic domains, the researcher formulated leadoff questions, which took participants directly to the topic for discussion. Carspecken also suggested a list of “covert categories” which would remind the researcher of items on the topic that one would like the participant to discuss without asking about it directly. For example, as Carspecken explained (1996), there are certain beliefs common to critical ethnographers which must drive the research. They include:

- Certain groups in any society are privileged over others
- Oppression is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status
- Oppression has many faces
- Often research practices are part of the oppression

These are essential inquiries in the effort to conduct thorough critical research. It must be the focus of the researcher to approach and understand these most sensitive and often hidden aspects of a culture. It is likely that it will be in these questions that the most meaningful understandings will surface. Finally, in preparation for interviews and discussions, it was necessary to write follow-up questions for each topic to encourage more in-depth and complete responses. Carspecken summarized the method for developing a protocol in the following four steps:

1. Two to five topic domains
2. One lead-off question for each topic
3. A list of covert categories for each topic
4. Several follow-up questions for each topic

### *INTERPERSONAL PROCESS RECALL*

In this third stage, Carspecken also suggested “Interpersonal Process Recall.” This technique involves asking individuals or groups to react to a recording or a document of a previous discussion or interaction. Because the archival data were accessible to the researcher, this was an excellent source of previous discussions and documents. It offered rich possibility for stimulus for discussion and reflection. It allowed the researcher to lead

the participants in a journey back in time: to the goals and beliefs of the beginning months and years. It allowed the participants the opportunity to question those original objectives and to examine the hurdles as well as the progress of their efforts toward change.

Carspecken's Stage 3 was the starting point of this study and central to this research project. Stage 3 is the point at which the research takes a more democratic turn, calling for the voices of many. This dialectic approach can accomplish several important tasks. It is clearly a method of member checking, as well as an opportunity to look more closely at a community of change. It can deepen the understanding of the changes desired by this community. It may help to answer questions from the community of their successes and obstacles to change. Because of the democratic nature of this stage, it was completely appropriate for use in this culture, as it aligned with beliefs and strategies of the collaborative community.

This stage necessitated returning to the site for an extended period of time. A timeline of four to five months was proposed. The projected schedule included observations, conversations, in-depth interviews, and collaboration. This amount of time allowed for a variety of interactions taking place at various times of the day. The process of analysis of data was ongoing during this time period. It was accomplished as it was in stage two, the coding of data allowing themes to emerge.

## *CONNECTING TO THEORY AND REPORTING FINDINGS*

### *Carspecken's Stages 4 and 5: Conducting Systems Analysis.*

Stages 1 through 3 of this model focus primarily on the single research site. These first three stages offered the opportunity to conduct an ethnographic investigation of the culture and its development. Although the researcher worked from a critical perspective, much of the study to this point was descriptive, reporting new insights and meanings created with the participants at the site. Stages 4 and 5 differed. They took the research to another level, to the level of connecting with the greater community and social theories.

Why was it necessary to continue to these stages and to this level of research? How did these levels of study connect to the work at the Core Knowledge junior high school? Not only do stages four and five offer a framework to organize and present findings of the study, but, perhaps more importantly, a means of contributing to the current conversation around social change and needed reform. Carspecken explained that it is often these final stages of the model that give meaning to the study and possibly render it a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge. Because the junior high school in this study was involved in non-traditional reform, it was essential to understand the relationship with the larger school district as it supported or challenged those reforms.

### *Stage 4: Discovering Systems Relationships.*

In Stage 4, the idea is to discover specific system relationships, such as relationships between a school and its surrounding community... (p 172).

Carspecken outlined several techniques to accomplish this goal of discovering and describing existing relationships. In this study, qualitative interviews were conducted. The effort was to design discussions which would encourage the members of the junior high to speak about specific experiences and connections with other sites in the school

district. The purpose was to gain insight into those connections. Were they positive and supportive or did they portend obstacles? Was it a larger community that encouraged change and growth? How did the junior high fit in? Carspecken suggested using questions of concrete substance about the reality in order to gain insight into these more abstract concepts.

*Stage 5: Using System Relations to Explain Findings.*

In Stage 5, the level of inference goes up appreciably as one seeks to explain one's findings in stages one through four by reference to the broadest system features (p. 43). This stage goes beyond stage 4 by looking at your findings in light of existing macro level social theories.

This stage of the research plan asked the researcher to return to the literature in search of related theory. In a sense, it became a full circle experience to question once again existing social theories, to draw conclusions, and possibly new theories. It was possible to know what literature and which theories to retrieve and review only after the collection and analysis of data in Stages 1 through 4. It was critical to the study that the data collection and analysis be valid and the study trustworthy in order for the fifth stage to be of value. If the research to this point was well-conducted incorporating techniques to ensure its trustworthiness, then the possibility of new and valid understandings of the complexities of social change would be greatly increased.

*VALIDITY*

Carspecken (1996, p. 64) cited Lincoln and Guba's Naturalistic Inquiry as the source of the most comprehensive list of validation strategies. Carspecken suggested several of those as methods of supporting validity claims. In order to achieve consistency

in the method of research and method of ensuring validity, those strategies were employed in this study.

1. Use of multiple observers and recording devices. In the original study which produced the archival data for this project, there was a team of researchers who were able to observe at different times with different viewpoints. This technique known as “triangulation” leads to trustworthiness of a study. Also, field notes were taken as the tape recorders were running. These techniques support the validity claims of the archival data.

In this study, the researcher again took notes as the recorder was running.

2. Use of flexible observation schedule. Observations were made in a variety of settings at the school at various times of the day and evening. The focus of observations varied including classes, meetings, students, teachers, and administrators in the everyday work.
3. Prolonged engagement. This meant returning to the site frequently and spending much time there. In the original study, the research team spent sixteen months gathering and analyzing data. In the current study, the researcher spent six months for the member-checking and in-depth interviews. This extended period of time contributed to reducing the Hawthorne effect which is the effect that the presence of the researcher has on the people and their interactions. It also afforded adequate time to complete the data collection for stages three and four.

4. Peer-debriefing. During the original study, the team members from the Research and Development Center were able to meet to share field notes, observations, and strategies of data collection. The researcher in the current study involved the participants in a final member checking effort.
5. Member-checking. Stage 3 of the research model is a form of member-checking. This current study was inherently a kind sharing of data to see whether or not there was agreement.

The goal was to create a valid interpretation of the culture while attempting to understand its growth and change.

### *ISSUES OF ETHICS*

A good researcher is an ethical researcher. Ethical issues pervade all of qualitative research (Shank, 2003, p.97).

Shank (2003) suggested four notions, which concern ethical issues and may assist in meeting those challenges. They served as guides to this research.

#### *1. Do no harm.*

It is the obligation of the researcher to cause no suffering to the participants during and after the study. In order to accomplish this, certain tasks must be attended to. Permission to enter a site must be obtained well in advance of any research there, and as much detail of the study must be shared so that all understand the project and its ramifications. Informed consent documents are the essence of this step. Especially when working with children or other special populations, others in charge must know what is happening and what they will be asked to do. For this, the researcher must ensure that identities are protected and that all are treated fairly and with sensitivity.



## *2. Be open.*

The researcher must be willing to share the findings with the participants and always inform the participants of what she is doing. She must not observe people without their knowledge and permission. Although participants may not edit the findings or the report, they are always allowed to withdraw their comments or terminate their participation. It is important always to accept the points of view of participants.

## *3. Be careful.*

It is necessary to be able to trace claims and conclusions to the data. The work must be based on the evidence documented and accessible in an audit trail created by the researcher. Throughout all of this documentation, however, the researcher must always be mindful of the confidentiality of the setting and the participants.

## *4. Be honest.*

First and foremost, a researcher may never lie to participants, misrepresent the project, or make promises that cannot be kept. One may not use information or documents without permission, and not delude or deceive the participants or oneself. If it became apparent in the research process, that the researcher was wrong or had changed views, she must admit those changes to all involved.

## *CONCLUSION*

Finally, in preparation for the important challenge of qualitative evaluative research, there was one notion, which seemed essential to honest and good work. This, also, was borrowed from Shank (2003, p.187), and seemed most appropriate especially for researchers who may have strong feelings or biases around the work they are doing.

Qualitative research is not an envelope that you use to deliver a message. One of the worst sins is to be convinced that we are right about something before we begin. The essence of qualitative research is the search for that fresh insight, that new understanding.

It was with that word of encouragement and inspiration that I began this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

### *INTRODUCTION*

Chapter Five of this report includes five sections. Section One provides background and history of the school as well as the larger school district. The information for this section was gathered and summarized from the district website, the school handbook, and documents examined at the site. This section includes the presentation of the participants in the study. The participants' letter of informed consent appears in the appendix.

Sections Two, Three, Four, and Five have been organized with reference to the research questions with which this study began. The story is not written in chronological order; rather, it is developed in a thematic telling through the words, experiences, and metaphors of the people there.

Section Two provides qualitative data, from both interviews and observations, in answer to the first research question:

1. How do the members of the junior high community perceive the findings of the original study? This section offers the participants' responses and reactions to the four themes, which emerged in the original study: Collaboration, Visionary Leadership, Teachers and Parents as Agents of Change, and Trusting the Process.

Section Three provides an explanation of new themes that emerged in the culture over time as witnessed through observations, discussions, and interviews in the fourth year. These themes provide answers to research questions two and three:

2. Where is this school in its journey of change? How have the community members experienced the journey?
3. How is the school functioning? Have they created the culture they wanted? What does this mean for students and teachers in terms of their everyday work and learning?

Section Four provides a summary and discussion of the findings in answer to the remaining research questions:

4. What are the challenges and obstacles at this point in time?
5. How does this school fit in the larger system?

This final section offers a look at the current state of this school in its efforts to do things differently, to question the status quo of society, to make and stick to tough decisions.

Section Five presents a review and summary in chart form of all findings (Charts 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6).

## *SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF THE CORE KNOWLEDGE*

### *JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL*

#### *BACKGROUND*

The junior high school studied is a school of choice, offering Core Knowledge Curriculum. It is located in a large school district in northern Colorado. It is the only specialized non-neighborhood junior high school in the district and the newest of the junior highs.

The school district is the ninth largest in the state and the third largest employer in the city. The district covers 1,856 square miles with schools within city limits as well as those in rural and mountainous areas. The total number of employees is 3,287, which includes 1,713 certified, 1,491 classified, and 83 administrators. The teachers in the district have an average of eleven years of experience and approximately sixty percent hold master's degrees and above. More than 8,000 parents and community members directly support student education by serving on School Improvement Teams, the District Advisory Board, or by volunteering.

The student population of the district is 24,629, approximately. The ethnicity is shown below.

African American	1.9%
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.2%
Hispanic/Latino	15.0%
Native American/Alaskan	1.1%
White	78.0%

Students participating in free and/or reduced lunch programs (K-6 only)	24.4%
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Students served by Special Education Programs	9.6%
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The organization of the school district is the traditional hierarchy with the superintendent of schools, at the top, who reports to a board of education of seven members. The superintendent's cabinet consists of three assistant superintendents, two executive directors, and one legal counsel. The assistant superintendent of secondary school services is the direct supervisor of the principal of the junior high school studied.

### *HISTORY*

During the 2002-2003 school year, several parents and leaders from the school district met to consider a Core Knowledge Junior High School. It was to be the first in this district. Core Knowledge had grown to four elementary sites and the number of students transitioning to junior high was increasing. In the fall of 2003, parents from the four elementary schools joined the newly hired principal in the planning of the new junior high school. Members of this school development team implemented a communication plan for the school. They served as liaisons to each of their respective feeder schools. This laid the foundation for the collaboration among parents, students, and staff to create what is now the junior high school. The Parent Partnership was one of the foundational pillars for the building of this community, and continues to play a major role in the development. Early in the planning stages, the parents stated that they believe that schools should not presume to educate children alone. In today's society, genuine family and community involvement are fundamental components of successful schools for

young adolescents. Therefore, parents have been involved from the beginning, and continue to be involved primarily in six ways: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, making decisions at school, and collaborating with the school district and larger community.

The new school opened in the fall of 2004. The school was housed in the upper level of the school district's new high school. The building and permanent site for the junior high school were to be completed for fall of 2006. In 2004, the new high school was at less than half capacity of student population and the junior high had a population of slightly more than 200 seventh grade students in its first year. The permanent site, however, opened in 2006 with 750 sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students.

Currently, in the fourth year, the student population and demographics are represented by the following percentages:

Undeclared Ethnicity	0.89%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.51%
Asian/ Pacific Islander	3.30%
Black	0.80%
Hispanic	4.45%
White	89.96%

The free and reduced lunch count is as follows:

Free	6.23%
Reduced	2.42%
Neither	91.36%

Students are involved in curricular and extracurricular activities. They participate in the school district's athletics, as well as in a wide variety of school clubs including Math Counts, drama, art, atlas, student council, boosters, yearbook, Science Explorers, and Odyssey of the Mind.

This junior high school is part of an increasing network of schools across the nation that uses Core Knowledge Curriculum. The schools in this network have experienced success in both standardized testing and evaluations of students' enjoyment in learning. Core Knowledge curriculum embraces the concept of the Four S's and these underscore the junior high school's content-based curriculum. The Four S's are:

1.     Sequenced: Instruction is sequenced because children as well as adults learn by building on what they already know.
2.     Specific: The content is specific. By clearly specifying important knowledge, the sequence presents a practical answer to the question, "What do children need to know?"
3.     Solid: The content is part of a lasting body of knowledge.
4.     Shared: It is the goal to provide all children, regardless of background, the shared knowledge they need to be included in the national conversation of ideas.

It is this curriculum, which attracted students in the beginning years to the new junior high school. It is considered a school of choice and not a neighborhood school. Students come from all sections of the city, albeit with limited transportation provided by the school district.



Along with the choosing of Core Knowledge curriculum, at the very inception of the planning efforts for this school, parents, students, and staff worked together to create certain agreements for the functioning of the school and guidelines for conduct of all members in the school community. This work was done collaboratively, and resulted in their commitment to character development, staff agreements, and operating principles.

### *CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT*

Character is expressed through beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes. The attributes embraced in this commitment were meant to foster strong and healthy relationships and a culture hospitable to learning.

1. Caring: to be compassionate, considerate, helpful, and understanding of others
2. Respect: to show regard for self, others, and the environment
3. Responsibility: to be accountable for one's actions
4. Trustworthiness: to be worthy of trust and confidence, to be reliable and honest

### *STAFF AGREEMENTS AND OPERATING PRINCIPLES*

1. Effective and healthy relationships: to seek healthy and effective relationships through trust with one another. When in dialogue, to seek to learn, to speak the truth, to produce results, and strengthen relationships. When there is a concern, to speak directly with the person with whom the concern exists.

2. Collaboration: to make effective use of time together while seeking to improve teaching and learning.
3. Attitude toward learning: to be committed to creating an environment that engages students in academic work that results in high-level achievement
4. Data: to develop and implement curriculum, instruction, and assessment with the support of data.
5. Shared leadership: To arrive at consensus when all points of view have been heard, including the list of “dangers and opportunities” and the “will of the group” is evident even to those who are most opposed.

#### Mission and Beliefs

Educate...Every child, Every Day.

We Care and Challenge with Character.

We're All In This Together.

#### *PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY*

In the initial research proposal, it was planned to interview ten staff members, one principal, one assistant principal, and eight parents. By the end of the data collection phase, the numbers were slightly different. There were twelve staff members interviewed and six parents. There was remarkable enthusiasm from the staff to participate. It was more difficult for the parents to schedule interviews due to their schedules outside of school. The following table lists the participants, their pseudonyms to ensure anonymity, and the methods of research used with each. The invitation to participate was offered to

all staff members and parents through the distribution of a letter of introduction and explanation of the study.

**Table 5.1**     *List of Participants and Research Methods*

Participant	Pseudonym	Interview	Follow-up	Observation	Group Interview
Principal	Jay	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Assistant Principal	Bob	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
History Department Chair	Joe	Yes	No	Yes	No
English Department Chair	Pat	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
English Teacher	Liz	Yes	No	No	No
Science Department Chair	Bryan	Yes	No	Yes	No
Math Teacher	Linda	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Spanish Department Chair	Laura	Yes	No	No	No
Music Teacher	Shaun	Yes	No	Yes	No
Special Education	Bev	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Counselor	Anna	Yes	No	Yes	No
Counselor Department Chair	Rick	Yes	No	Yes	No
Office Manager	Tamara	Yes	No	Yes	No
Counseling Secretary	Sarah	Yes	No	No	No
Parent	Carol	Yes	No	Yes	No
Parent	Aaron	Yes	No	No	No
Parent Volunteer Coordinator	#1	No	No	Yes	Yes
Parent Volunteer	#2	No	No	Yes	Yes
Parent Volunteer	#3	No	No	Yes	Yes
Parent Volunteer	#4	No	No	Yes	Yes

It was also possible, during the six months of data collection, to attend and observe classes, student activities, Site Based Decision Team meetings, Parent Partnership meetings, department meetings, and general staff meetings. This afforded the opportunity to observe the participants in large groups working collaboratively as well as to witness the everyday functioning and relationships of staff members, parents, and students. The enthusiasm and openness on the part of all members were remarkable, and resulted in great opportunity to experience and understand the culture.

Stories of the participating individuals, along with their insights into the work and experience, are included in the following four sections.

## *SECTION TWO*

### *RESEARCH QUESTION 1 – MEMBER CHECKING OF ARCHIVAL DATA*

*How do the members of the junior high school community perceive the findings of the original study?*

Beginning with Stage Three of Carspecken's Model for Critical Ethnography (1996) (explained in detail in Chapter 4: Methodology), the research began with a thorough member checking effort. Stage Three is called Dialogical Data Generation, "Stage Three generates data with people rather than records information about them. It is crucial to critical qualitative research because if used properly, it democratizes the research process (p. 42)." The participants were asked to respond to the themes, which emerged and were analyzed in the first study (2004). Those themes were Collaboration, Visionary Leadership, Staff and Parents as Agents of Change, and Trusting the Process

(explained in detail in Chapter Three, Archival Data.) In this stage of the research, the themes are examined with the participants during interviews. They are evaluated in their words as they reflect on Year One through Year Four. In order to honor the validity requirements outlined by Carspecken (p.165), the interviews were recorded to check for subject consistency, several participants were interviewed repeatedly, subjects were asked to explain terms and vocabulary, and consistency checks were conducted between activity and what was said in the interviews. In order to comply with the effort toward validity, the following excerpts from interviews are followed by summaries from observations. The findings are presented in four categories according to the themes studied, beginning with Collaboration.

### *COLLABORATION*

Collaboration at this school, Year One, was incorporated in the daily schedule and structured not as an appropriate add-on, but as a core principle of operation. It was not, as in many schools, implemented by invitation or suggestion. It was an expectation. Each staff member, even during her or his application process and interview, learned of the school's way of doing things, and the responsibility of each person to collaborate in order to create the school they wanted. When the participants were asked to react to this theme, the response was very similar for 100 percent of them. They perceived the findings to be accurate and reflective of their experience. In each interview, the conversation affirmed both the importance of collaboration as well as the challenges and changes it had undergone over time.

In an attempt to define collaboration at this school, in the first year, the slogan, written by the staff, appeared in bold print in their handbook, and read, “**Most importantly, we are here together to do what none of us can do alone.**” That slogan changed over four years to the new version, which is displayed on banners in various places around the school. It reads, “**We are all in this together.**” The staff and parents gave meaning to these slogans as they shared their thoughts.

A statement by one of the special education teachers, Bev, offered insight into this theme as she saw it in the first year.

In my role as a special educator, collaboration is huge. The goal our first year was to do 100% inclusion. That was the vision and the hope and we did it! The first semester we did total inclusion. During the second semester, we realized that there were a few kids who needed more intensive interventions. We were able to meet the needs of the kids by working together and coming up with a plan. There were just nine or ten of us on the teaching staff that year. We would meet together around the table, in the conference room everyday (she smiles as she recalls those times). During collaboration, every department was represented. It was a pretty neat year because we talked very specifically about every child, about needs and being able to differentiate instruction to meet their needs. From my point of view, it has been an incredible experience to be part of collaboration. In special education that is not always the case, but at this school, we are not isolated. (Interview, September 6)

Bev continued during the interview to explain that the reality of collaboration had changed as time went on and the staff grew larger.

Collaboration was part of our building and growing process. It went from that first year and has only gotten better! We have many more kids with individual learning plans, literacy plans, and academic challenges. Most learning challenges are being addressed in the regular classrooms and our Learning Center Team supports that learning. This year I am teaching 7<sup>th</sup> grade. We have two 7<sup>th</sup> grade teams: the blue team and the red team. We have students on both teams and I get to work with teachers from both of the teams. This year we are talking about more interdisciplinary lessons. The school is bigger, the way we collaborate is different, but our collaboration is strong.

Another teacher's comments provided an example of how collaboration has changed in its form, but remained strong in both presence and influence. The chairperson of the science department shared these comments in an interview shortly after the science team meeting on September 11. It became clear that with the growing numbers and size of the school, collaboration might suffer due to the need to deal with and work in large groups. This fact, he explained, could cause some members to hesitate to contribute. This could have been a real obstacle. More smaller-group meetings exist now, and have relieved those possibly negative influences.

So we still work with consensus. Now with so many more people here we do have to do it differently. We can't have everyone meet on everything so we have a leadership team and the role of it is to bring the issues to the departments. And then take the views of the department back to the leadership team. So the team gets to share all thoughts. So that's why I say it is a really safe environment where everyone gets to share because it would be difficult to facilitate conversations with sixty people all the time. It is still really part of what we do, to get all people to speak. In smaller groups, everyone can speak and be heard. Yeah, you see it is still the same excitement. It is like look how far we have come, and all that is still ahead. We are all the agents to foster that growth and that enthusiasm. (Interview, September 11)

In an interview on September 25, the office manager shared her views that collaboration was still a very high priority. Tamara has been on staff since the first year, and explained that collaboration is just how their school works.

In other schools, you might find teachers and staff working alone in classrooms and offices. They might talk once in a while to figure out things, but here you definitely talk together every day. If you don't have that, you just can't operate at a high level. We meet here as an office. We meet together to discuss expectations, expectations of how we want to work together and interact. We come together as a front office so when people come in we are together. We know how we will address answers and we all are on the same page. And, Jay (the principal) is with us on this. He is inspirational in all of this. (Interview, September 25)

During the first interview with the school principal, Jay explained from his perspective how they had maintained collaboration as the school grew, and what systems were put in place to ensure its ongoing strength. The junior high school was small in the first year. The opportunity existed to have very small classes and a schedule that permitted seventy percent of the faculty to meet every day. There was only one grade level in that year—with approximately 200 students. In the first two years, when they were housed in the new high school, “we are all in this together,” according to Jay, and had a very different flavor and different meaning, which went with those circumstances.

And, now, we have grown and added another twenty teachers each of the three years. We had to enculturate and re-enculturate each of those three years. And we have not had the luxury of everyone meeting every day. But we do have a strong, strong sense of shared leadership here. Teacher and leadership teams meet every week, and we focus on strong communicating both the message and the delivery as when we had those meetings in the early days. We have more teams now and that is how we disseminate information, hold discussions, and support philosophies like this one: ‘We are all in this together.’ So, collaboration looks different but it is just as strong, maybe stronger. (Interview August 25)

During that same interview, Jay reached into a file and pulled out the school schedule. He explained that there is much success in their collaboration effort because teachers want common time. He pointed out sections on the schedule marked in purple and explained that those times are the meeting times for the eighth grade team. The eighth grade team is made up of English teachers who share eighth grade students.

This eighth grade team, I had nothing to do with the formation of. That was a group of teachers saying ‘let’s meet’. Let’s meet because we are all teaching the same eighth graders English, so let’s meet. So they are really the English teachers but they are calling themselves the eighth grade team because that is their identity and that was teacher-directed. This group now has taken it (collaboration) to a whole new level. (Interview, August 25)



There are many examples in the data of the first six months of the school's fourth year where the principal supported the teachers' efforts and desire to collaborate. And, in his own work, as well, collaboration was the method most often used. He was not, in his words and those of his colleagues, a top-down decision maker, or hierarchical leader. "I guess I am a sort of a learn-as-you-go kind of guy. Whatever energy and wisdom I have to share come from the kids and adults that I work with." An example of this leadership perspective effecting greater collaboration was observed on September 12. On that day, Jay called as many teachers as could come to his office for discussion and planning of their upcoming District Collaboration Day. Teachers came during their un-scheduled time to meet with Jay in small groups for 30 or 40 minutes to plan what they would do with their time that day. Jay gave almost his entire day to collaborate with staff. He explained to those present his understanding of the need to make good use of their time and they should be the ones to direct the schedule. The Collaboration Day should be planned around their needs and what needed to be done for the students. He continued to explain that at some time the staff would be involved in writing their goals for the School Improvement Plan (SIP). The hope was that the SIP would in reality come from the thoughts and needs understood by the staff as a whole as well as the parents. It was intended that the document would be one, which could improve their practice and student achievement. In order to create this viable and important document, they would depend on the collaborative efforts of staff members and parents. His suggestion was to use part of the Collaboration Day to work together to create an honest document of their improvement plan. The following is an observation of one of the small group sessions that day. Jay is speaking with eight teachers gathered rather spontaneously in his office.

He shares his thoughts on plans for the day and asks for their input. So, as we looked at the SIP, what we found was really interesting and not surprising that the English teachers had a real handle on the literacy goals and the math teachers had a handle on the math goals, but everybody else was like, huh, what do we do? So there was this drop off, if you will. And there was no excitement around goals or our SIP. So if we are going to better experience the whole thing, we have to improve the experience. So let's talk about it. As you look at the SIP which is in and of itself a good thing. We all want schools to improve. The problem with the plan is that it is just math, reading, writing, science. Now we have lots of other goals, like professional development goals among others. We need to think about this and the whole school and how it all lines up, so that the plan and the goals fit together. So here are the seven parts of the SIP, if you look at the sections we could divide up and deal with the whole thing together. (Jay has his notes on the board and points to some possibilities.) So look at this, and give me your reactions. Now we will probably spend only the morning on this, and obviously, we can't get the whole thing done on Monday but this way we get everyone plugged into the SIP and everyone working on school goals. (Observation, September 12)

Jay met with staff members that day to gather their input, and then concluded the planning at the general staff meeting that afternoon. The staff created the plan and the schedule for Collaboration Day. Other small group sessions were incorporated: sessions that would focus on professional development needs of teachers. These sessions would be conducted by other teachers and would provide the opportunity for teachers to teach teachers. This would, then meet the needs of teachers, and in a very real way, have colleagues collaborate and celebrate the expertise of each other. Jay reinforced that they were the ones to drive the day according to their needs. The staff meeting ended with consensus that together they had developed a good plan.

While gathering feedback on the theme of collaboration, along with the strong support and the positive response from participants, there was mention of one challenging reality: collaboration does, in fact, take more time. Time is always a resource of some scarcity in public schools. Accepting this reality, all the staff members interviewed

agreed that once having experienced working this way, the pros far outweigh the cons, and working in isolation is a choice to which they would not revert. The benefits for teachers and students, as well as the affect on building a team-like positive culture, clearly compensate for the time given. One of the music teachers explained that dilemma in these words:

Well, yes, every time one has to add more peas to the pod, it becomes more demanding, and especially at certain times of the school year. CSAP or in our case, performance times, or those stressful times of year when you are overloaded with paperwork. So, then at those times, taking the time to collaborate can be very time consuming. But at the same time, that effort to collaborate does help. It reinforces that we are not in this by ourselves. For example, the focus is always the kids. So if I am having trouble with a certain ninth grader, and then in talking to colleagues about the student, you discover that you know what, so is the German teacher, and so is the art teacher struggling with him. And then you discover that Bryan, the science teacher is really being successful with this one, and so you ask, What are you doing that I can try in my class. It gives us more support in that way. (Interview, September 27).

In summary, the overall reaction of the staff was positive that collaboration was a key theme in describing the culture of the first year, and that it had grown stronger and perhaps more complex in the fourth year. The conditions around this kind of growth and continued momentum for doing things differently became the focus of further study. As observations and interviews continued, the findings indicated that not only had the culture of collaboration endured, but also it resulted in developments beyond early expectations. There were conditions observed in the culture in the fourth year for which the seeds had been planted in the first. These conditions revealed a collaborative culture of caring, inclusion and re-inclusion, personal growth and responsibility to the whole, and a special sort of affective expression of team building.

The present culture of the school and the new themes of the fourth year will be discussed later in this chapter, in Section Three. This section will continue with the participants' reaction to theme two of the archival data: Visionary Leadership.

### *VISIONARY LEADERSHIP*

In each interview, posing the question of leadership sparked discussion and enthusiasm. Again, the responses across all interviews were similar and positive. Many of the participants stated that working with this principal had not only motivated them to achieve in their professional roles at the school, but had impacted their individual growth and personal lives.

In the archival data, the definition used for visionary leader appears in detail. The definition was developed through the words and actions of the participants in the first study. The term surfaced as those participants in 2004 described the principal's efforts, from the very first, to include all voices in the creation of the school vision. It was not to be his vision, although he viewed himself as the protector of the vision. All members in that first year were engaged in the task of developing the vision for the new school. What would the focus be and what would the future be? What could they create? What words and language would they use to realize their vision? It was, as they called it, a co-visionary process. The character of visionary leadership is summarized in the archival data as relational, complex, courageous, effective, and at times, emotional, and always human. The principal asked colleagues as well as himself to look inside themselves to determine the direction of the school. The principal was often heard asking, "If we make this decision what does it say about who we are? What does it say about what we believe

for kids? What does it say about the vision for our school?” The focus and vision centered always on what was best for the kids. The principal continually asked the community to search more deeply so that they could see and create their authentic reality. This, then, was the definition of visionary leader to which the participants responded in member checking. Examples of their responses follow in this section.

In an interview early in the school year, a science teacher explained that this visionary leadership was a shared leadership and the key piece of the vision embedded in all the themes was that it is always all about the kids. This thinking guided their efforts and was, indeed, the essence of the leadership philosophy. He agreed with the analysis of the culture and of visionary leadership and felt, it was essential to the complete understanding to express that it is all about the kids. That was the vision they all shared and, in that regard, it is a co-visionary leadership.

Well, yes, we are clearly on the same page. But wait a minute, I should mention that there is another theme and maybe it is embedded in all of those, but it should be said. It is all about kids. That is always what we are thinking, what is best for students and learners and young adults? What is best for kids? I have been in many conversations with colleagues and one on one; it always gets re-directed. Okay, we say, it always comes down to what is best for our students. And that is not just from Jay, that is from every adult. Each one of us knows that that is what it is all about here. And so in that sense, it is a shared leadership. (Interview, September 9)

This cooperative style of creating the organization became the leadership style for the school. In interviews, which followed, responses indicated that the shared leadership and its positive results had increased over time. As the school grew in size, sharing the leadership was the way all people could stay connected and involved, including parents, staff, and students. In the interview with the office manager, Tamara stated that the principal’s positive influence with his creativity, his energy, his knowledge of the

profession and understanding of data, and his skills with people have all increased over time. She explained his leadership with regard to “No cobwebs!”

Well, I can’t speak for others but for me working with Jay, there are no cobwebs! And that means that you can’t be satisfied with just sitting there. With cobwebs, you are sitting there doing nothing new until cobwebs form. It is the same old stuff. Here we are learning, changing, never doing the same ol’ thing. We are always going, thinking beyond the limits, thinking outside the box. And so, yes, we do work hard here. But it is good, you are valued as an employee and we are all in it together. And most importantly, it is not just about us, it is about the kids. You just want this for them. You want them to have the best, they are our next leaders. (Interview, September 19)

In the majority of the interviews, credit for creating a positive culture was given to the principal, although it was generally acknowledged that his leadership resulted in a team effort. His leadership contributed to creating a place where it is safe to take risks and try new things, a place where the best solutions become visible when the most diverse group of people works to see them. The teachers expressed feelings of empowerment as well as appreciation, belonging and motivation to do their best work. The assistant principal shared his views of the leadership in terms of working with the best kind of coach. Bob had watched Jay work for several years, and explained that, in a way, it was the “same coaching thing magnified. He is a singular talent.”

I believe Jay has a great sense of personnel and people and where that edge is. He knows how to push, you know, it is almost like Top Gun. You’ve got to be on that edge. Jay has challenged me, live on the edge. It is exciting, and it is safe if we are together. (Interview, September 7)

For various members of the staff, working at this school and with this principal was a deeply moving experience. Some described their growth as personal, professional, intellectual, and spiritual. The leadership had a way of bringing out the best in them, causing them, in many instances, to look within to become aware of their potential and true selves. On several occasions, during interviews, emotions would surface and eyes

would fill with tears as they shared how working with this particular principal brought them to a new level self-awareness, self-actualization. It gave them a new understanding of who they are and what they believe important in work and in life. One staff member said that she is the person she is because she works here (Interview, September 9). Many said they were working harder here than in other places, but none said that he or she would choose to leave. For all they were giving to this school, they felt they were receiving something more important in return, even if difficult to describe. In future interviews, the focus of questioning became this leadership style that was still having significant influence. From the first year to the fourth, their statements affirmed that the influence of visionary leadership was strong.

In an interview with one of the English teachers, she put this feeling in her words.

Actually working in the school here and this culture is wonderful. And I love Jay. We have gotten to the point of taking big risks. I have gone in and I have been able to say, you got to hear me on this one. And he takes that so well. I think at first it was a challenge for me, but Jay is a strong person and he upholds the dialogue and he seeks the truth. So, I am sorry if this is not making too much sense. It is such a deep thing. (Interview, September 19)

Later in that same interview, when asked to explain this kind of leadership, Pat offered an example in terms of Jay's role as a teacher. She found it interesting and worthwhile to watch Jay as he worked with his staff. As a leader, he was, in fact, a model of good teaching. He was prepared, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable and open to the group's learning and creating new ideas. There were others who spoke of Jay as a teacher. What follows here is Pat's understanding of this piece of the visionary leadership. She describes the opening activity of the Collaboration Day, just the day before.

First of all, there was a kind of collaboration of the entire staff, in the sense that Jay started with a kind of questioning process about a circle, a metaphorical circle. If the circle represents the school then, what should be in that circle? It was a collaborative brainstorming. It was facilitated by Jay and the question was where does standardized testing fit in to that circle? And along with that what else fits into that circle? Or do we make standardized tests the whole circle? So you can see that the way Jay runs meetings is so great. He sets the format, and he has questions prepared ahead of time. And he is really good at using metaphors to ground and center the questions. He has a framework but he is not looking for, he is truly not looking for a particular answer. Rather he is open to the staff and what comes out and the collective wisdom. And we had clear goals of what to work on. There were materials set ahead for us to get work done. And there again, instead of a small group of people to get together to write school goals or the principal sitting down and writing the goals, it is the whole staff process which is something and it is highly prepared ahead of time so that the process of collaboration does not get caught up in the problem that we need something to look at, that we need some information and don't have it. No, everything is there for us to get the work done together. And that takes an incredible amount of preparation. You know, everything that Jay presents to us, he puts hours of work into. He always brings up charts or folders or questions or, well, it is like preparing lesson, really. He really facilitates our collaboration which is our learning. And then we went to lunch together! And that was another collaboration. And I know that doesn't sound like it would be collaboration but it is that celebration together. That coming together as a staff that makes people better able to collaborate on a professional level. I remember at the faculty meeting the week before Collab Day, Jay announced that we would all go to lunch together and I remember the laughter, the surprise. And Jay knows that. He knows how important that is. (Interview, September 19)

Various teachers described their principal as a caring teacher and leader, one who challenged and worked with dedication, celebration, and humor. Openly demonstrating these traits in his style afforded the staff the model and opportunity of working that way, and sharing the same encouraging style with their students and each other. As a visionary leader, Jay offered the vision and model of good teaching.

Another teacher explained that somehow Jay knew what needed to happen to move the school forward, and to deepen the understanding of the vision. He kept bringing people back to why they were there, back to the vision and the mission. It was his



expertise, all of his background. And so he was using his expertise to lead. “And yet, it was interesting to watch because he does not put himself into it. He protects the vision but it is not his, it belongs to everyone there and he protects it for us, too.” (Interview, September 20)

During the months of data collection, multiple observations were made of the principal working with teachers, staff, parents, and students. The findings during the observations aligned with the findings in the interviews. Perhaps, the first time it was observed that there did exist a different sort of leadership style was during a faculty meeting before the beginning of year one, in the spring of 2004. During that spring, the faculty began to meet regularly as staff members were hired. Many of the teachers were still teaching at other schools, and yet they attended the pre-opening meetings of the new school. It was during those meetings that staff began to know each other, began to know the principal, and began to create their vision. One meeting, in particular, was remarkable and revealing of a new vision. In May 2004, the principal announced that the special education teacher had just been hired. He introduced her, and the staff welcomed her with applause. (There were consistently applause and show of appreciation at staff meetings.) Jay continued that while they were talking about special education, he wanted to share a story of a new student, too. This student, Bob, was known to have serious problems and a problematic history in the school district. He was placed in special education and labeled, because of his past, to be difficult and not wanted at other schools. Jay took a different approach. He explained that he welcomed Bob to their new school. Without hesitation, he welcomed him. He said he wanted Bob, for he might be the one student who would tell them more about who they are as a school, and as a community of learners and teachers.

This might be the student who would help them see themselves and their reason for being there. This meeting was observed during the first study. It was an instance, in the very beginning, that suggested leadership of a different kind, of a vision of insight and foresight. This visionary leadership set a tone and a model for learning from one another, for relationships and knowledge created on respect and inclusion. It was with reference to this leadership, witnessed in the first year that participants responded to in the fourth year. In Year One, the principal and staff admitted that they would be “going against the grain.” Were they still? Were they still doing things with the best for kids in mind? According to the participants, the leadership and spirit of change were strong four years later.

Observation of leadership in the Year Four echoed the leadership of Year One with a deeper sense of what visionary had come to mean. August 16, 2007, the principal opened the first in-service day before the school opened for its fourth year. His presentation was entitled: Who’s Got the Vision? He began with humor and then a question:

Okay, ready? Listen. I am going to go real fast on this, take notes, everyone, ready, set, go! ...no, just kidding (lots of laughter). Then Jay projected a list of one-line jokes on the screen about teachers, students, and life. More laughter filled the room. He had their attention and, then, he began with a question. (Jay often used the strategy of questioning.) Okay, here is what I would like you to do: Reflect. Draw a circle. In the spirit of teaching, my cue word is Reflect, so for right now, no talking, no collaborating, no dialogue. It is just time to think, and independent work. I would like you to draw a circle, later if you want to draw your answers or sing your answers that will be fine, but for right now, think and listen and write. You have about three minutes to write in the circle the non-negotiables here at our school. (Observation, August 16)

After the time for writing, the staff shared aloud their written responses: “respect and positivity; relationships, relationships, relationships; all kids are welcome; all kids

get the best curriculum and teaching in a safe place; we collaborate; we do whatever it takes; no gossip, if there is a problem go to the person with whom you have the problem; keep learning; communication, rigor, celebration; core knowledge and character; integrity; shared leadership.”

This activity was then followed with another group activity involving thinking and talking in small groups. With art, music and writing the teachers were asked to answer this question: How do we to know what lies within a child/our student?

On this professional development day, as in many faculty meetings to follow that semester, the teachers were students and the principal was the teacher. The teachers were asked to improve their practice by continuing to investigate good teaching together. Deepening the understanding of the vision and the knowledge of the profession was the role of the visionary leader. This role was observed at the school and affirmed in the interviews.

When Jay, himself, was asked, in an interview, about leadership, he offered a simple explanation of a complex role.

Well, I will tell you, my job here is to be clear about my own responsibility as how I am going to help support teachers do their job best. These are super teachers and they need the opportunity to be autonomous and to be free to be really good, and to be empowered. And that is what we know. There was a time when I thought you moved the organization forward from the rear. But then someone said you’ve got the image of pushing an elephant trying to get him through a door. Well, now I lead from the front, acknowledging that they already have all they need and my job is bring them forward by bringing out what is already there inside them. (Interview, August 28)

The theme of the Visionary Leader as developed in the original study was validated by what was seen and what was said by participants in member checking. They did present agreement that theme was strong in the first year and continued to be a strong

positive force in the fourth year. With this theme, as with that of collaboration, new twists and turns eventuated over four years. They will be discussed in Section Three of this chapter. This section will continue with another theme from Year One: Staff and Parents as Agents of Change.

#### *STAFF AND PARENTS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE*

In the school handbook in 2004, the staff presented a list of foci of their work in the first year:

- Positivity...as we get our school up and running
- Grow the vision
- Honor the operating principles and values
- Align with and consult Core Knowledge Foundation
- Establish safe and healthy relationships and culture
- Focus on learning, collaboration, celebration
- Take personal responsibility. Demonstrate character
- Ask: How can I? What can I? How can we?

These statements of focus of energy called the staff members out of traditional isolation of individual classrooms and offices into conversation with each other. These statements of commitment led them to the active role of leadership of their school.

Over the period of sixteen months of observations during the original study, teachers and parents would frequently be seen discussing together at team meetings, faculty meetings, and collaborative circles. In these meetings, they stated that they considered themselves responsible for the achievement of the school mission: Educate

Every Child Every Day. Therefore, they were obligated to do their work differently. No parent could say “just for my child” and no teacher could say “just for certain students.” Instead, there was an acceptance for the caring of every student and the stewardship of the entire school.

In the first year, adults were engaged in conversations concerning the following topics among others: the purpose of school, what learning is, what they wanted students to learn, and what they would do when they did not learn. Teachers and parents were called upon to be part of the change and renewal they wanted in their school. The observation of this work was the basis for theme three, Teachers and Parents as Agents of Change.

In the present study, many examples of this effort were observed in the everyday functioning of the school. Explanation and insight from the adults working there indicated that the theme began in the first year and further developed through the fourth. The following are examples of their work and comments from both staff and parents in the fall of 2007.

During the first parent interview in September, one mother explained that she had begun her work as a volunteer at the Core Knowledge elementary school that her children attended. Carol, her name in the study, also, volunteered at the junior high school when one of her children began to attend it. At the present time, she is a paid staff member working in the media center. The interview took place while she was working and therefore, an observation of her interaction with students was possible, simultaneously. When asked how she and her husband chose this junior high, she replied that they had been a part of its creation, working on what this school would be from its inception.

Pretty much, where it started was with us and other parents. Our kids were going to a Core Knowledge elementary school and so we were looking, early on, for a Core Knowledge junior high. We became more interested when we heard talk among other parents for a C K junior high. We definitely were in favor and wanted to support that movement. My husband actually joined the parent team that wanted to make sure this would happen. There were parents from other schools and there was an administrator from the district office. So, the idea of this school really came from parents, the Core Knowledge community, and there were teachers involved from other Core Knowledge schools. And they felt there should be a CK junior high option. As parents, we really liked the basics, building on the basics. And there was the character education piece, and the other foundational piece was the parent partnership. I was heavily involved in the volunteering. I jumped on board when my husband did. During the hiring time for a principal, Aaron, my husband was on the committee to choose the principal. He was very impressed with Jay. Right from the beginning, he said that Jay stood out among the others. Yes, and he was on the team to hire history teachers, too. And he was on the Site-Based-Decision-Making-Team for the first two years, too. And I was on a hiring team last year for new teachers added to the staff. I try to do more when I can. And that experience was really incredible. I am not really an outgoing person, but still I never felt like anyone questioned or felt like my points weren't valid. (September 28, Interview with parent)

Several weeks later, in an interview with Carol's husband, he affirmed and further explained the efforts and progress of the parents' work in creating this school. Aaron recounted the story, from the initial conversations among parents, to the formulating of grounding philosophies, which came from the parents, to the agreeing to the project by the district administrators. In the school district, at that time, there was no Core Knowledge junior high school. There was, however, a junior high school, which offered a Core Knowledge track. According to the parents coming from the Core Knowledge elementary schools, the opinion was that there was limited success for the students in that track. The parents attributed that to the fact that it was only a section of a school following the Core Knowledge sequence and philosophy. Aaron believed that there could be success for students in a junior high school completely dedicated to the foundational pillars that the parents had determined. They were Core Knowledge Curriculum and

Philosophy, Character Education, and Parent Partnership. The idea for the new school did originate from the community, and from the parents. Teachers from the Core Knowledge elementary school joined in support of the idea, as well. Aaron did recognize that their idea for a new school was well received and appropriately timed. The district acknowledged the need for this junior high school. Further contributing to the problem, in the years preceding, students had begun to choose to attend one of the two Core Knowledge charter schools in the city. The district was already motivated to create a way to meet the needs of students within the district. Therefore, the timing was appropriate, and this had its influence. The parents were able to launch their idea and create the change they wanted. Aaron with the other members of the Parent Advisory Board drafted the original documents proposing the new school. (Copies of the documents are included in Appendix D.) These documents were presented to the district administrators and the work of a new school began with the hiring of the principal. In the documents, the founding principles were outlined. The school would be designed with fairness and excellence in education, and the parents, teachers, and students would work in partnership. From the outset, the goal was to develop the new school in collaboration with the school district. In summary, Aaron agreed that the role of change agents for parents began with the first meeting and has continued and grown in the years that followed. (Interview, October 17)

In February 2008, a focus group of parents met at the school for an interview. The interview was a follow-up to an observation of a meeting held several weeks earlier of the parent volunteer representatives and the principal. In this follow-up session, there were four parents: one couple, and two mothers. The interview lasted ninety minutes. The

parents were very willing to stay and talk about their school. They enthusiastically shared their feelings and thoughts about the Parent Partnership, how it developed over the four-year period, as well as their aspirations for their roles and the future for parents' contribution at the school. These parents, also, were among those with children who had attended the Core Knowledge elementary schools. Generally, they were very pleased with the creation of the junior high and with the direction of this school. They agreed that the positive attitude among teachers and the general positive feeling in the culture that originates with Jay, affect their children in attitude and behavior. The students are positive, too. The parents believe that they can see this everyday in their children who are enjoying school. This group of parents attributed the positive culture, in part, to the excellent communication between school and home as well as the support for their presence and participation. They openly stated that they want to be in the school and they want to participate. And as importantly, they appreciate that they are welcome there, and supported by staff and administration. These parents stated their goals and strategies to increase the possibilities for their work at school. The principal has supported them in those goals and made possible more opportunities for parents to connect with staff. The parents affirmed their understanding that learning is improved when parents and educators work together. The following section of the interview offers an example of the work they are doing, and the support they are receiving.

Parent #1: When I think about our role, well we are always working on it. That is our big push. And I think the best way to move forward is to get right with Jay. We bring positive good ideas that are doable and he accepts them.

Parent # 2: Like that last meeting we had with Jay, well you were there. We were understanding that it was the teachers that present some block. I don't mean that at all in a bad way. It is just that they have never had what we want to give, not in a junior high. They don't know quite what to think of us or to do with us. So a



couple of us are going to go right to the teachers. Jay has given us a whole staff meeting or at least most of it next week to talk with the teachers and let them know what we can do here. Now, Jay is their leader but we still want to go right to them to let them know, here is what we can do. How can we help you? Gosh, it is like you have a big resource here and so use us. We respect you, this is your arena and we want you here and we want you to teach. We want you to be with our kids teaching, so let us help you so you spend more time with them. So what is it we need to do to keep you in the classroom teaching?

Parent #3: So here is what our role is, we can do the multi-tasking, We can do the things that teachers don't have to, so they can teach more and better. We can do some of the clerical and prep work, so they can do what they do best.

Parent #1: And so to help especially the neophytes so they don't get bogged down in the minutia rather than excited about being with the kids. So for right now, it is just the lack of communication and we are working on that. It is just that they don't know what to do with us and we don't know what they need. Maybe part of the challenge is that we have had lots of experience at the elementary level and here at the junior it will be different. Junior high is very different and our roles will be different but we can overcome that.

Parent #4: (the father) Yes, I have a story about that. It will be different here. But first let me mention this, the data you are getting might be somewhat skewed because you are getting these views and opinions from parents who are very active here at school, and who insist on good communication. So this might not be the views of all parents. These three families represented here happen to be the most active and were the most active at the elementary too. So that being said, I do have a story...Our role here will be different. Different in the way it looks, but not in any way less than. For example, when I volunteered at the elementary school, because there were so few men there, one of my jobs was to escort the boys to the bathroom. Now here at the junior high, (he pauses, and everyone laughs), here that would not be part of my work. (more laughter) But there is other work. That other work could include previewing books, working in small groups, giving remedial help, visiting as guest speakers, clerical work, or just having more adults in the building.

Parent #2: So that is why we are going to the staff meeting, just to have this conversation with the staff. Jay has distributed a questionnaire that we prepared so teachers can think about these questions ahead of time and think about what they would like us to do. We are excited about this time with them.

Parent #3: And we are excited about increasing the participation of other parents. Just a couple of weeks ago, I was calling parents to chaperone an event and for the first time here at the junior high, I had more volunteers that we could use, and

I actually had to turn some away. That was a good thing and so we are growing all the time. (Interview Feb 13)

These parents expressed joy in participating at school, and displayed a sense of empowerment in terms of making positive changes. Several examples follow of teachers, also, feeling empowered and involved in creating new ways and improving old ways of doing their work. In an interview with the new chair of the counseling department, he shared that his work was filled with challenge and possibility. His decision to come to the junior high this year was based, in part, on the fact that he found it to be a very dynamic place with a strong sense of community and unusual leadership. He understood that it was a goal of this school to grow the counseling department, and that interested him a great deal. He also wanted to grow the department with supportive curriculum, pro-active student mental health focus, and inclusive parent partnership. He was very attracted by the specific and deliberate effort to improve and enhance the work of counseling. He felt support from his colleagues and his principal to move forward, to “go with it,” as he said in the interview.

We are always working on ways to improve. I can tell you about one thing we are working on that is exciting. It’s a six-week unit on Bullying based upon a book by Barbara Coloroso called “The Bully, The Bullied, and The Bystander.” It’s an effort to stop bullying through relevant conversations, information, assemblies, clear expectations, and support groups for kids. These are changes we want, a sort of forward thinking to create a good and safe place for kids. (Interview, October 18)

The course description (see Appendix D) he shared during the interview informed students briefly of research discussing the reasons for and make-up of bullies, illustrations of different kinds of bullying, and questions for conversations. Rick had created the outline and was passionate about being able to stop bullying with information,

insight, and caring. He was enthusiastic about this positive change they could make for kids.

Another example of teachers' innovations to improve their practice came from the science department. During an interview with a teacher and chair of the department, he explained how they had revised their grading system to show more clearly, what each student had really learned. This made possible better communication with both the student and parent in order to improve learning.

Change agents, I would say we are and, well here's an example of what we are doing. We said, you know, historically you throw a grade up and the assignment is worth, say 30 points. And what does that mean? What does that tell us about the learning? And you know, what we are trying to do and get a measure of is the student's learning. So we came up with this. This was a real collaborative effort. This was the science team. For every assignment, we look at concept, the analysis, and the process. We evaluate all three. The concept is defined here. It is the foundational knowledge, the key pieces to understand. Then we wanted to get the kids to the higher order of thinking. We got the analysis, compare and contrast, take this apart and pull this together, how is this related and how does it fit in another context. Then to the understanding the process, to what we do in the process of working through all this. Well, you might think all this is more work for teachers, but we do have spreadsheets and templates in place, so maybe not. But let me say that this works really well with students and parents, and we are excited about it. (Interview, Sept 11)

As staff and teachers shared their experiences of creativity and freedom to contribute to the progress of the school, there was a sense of joy and meaning in their expression for this work. Words they used were empowerment, autonomy, and being valued individually and personally. One final example was sent by an English teacher in response to follow-up questions after her original interview. She responded to questions on email, and she wrote about her experience as a peer coach.

I have looked at Peer Coaching through a more non-traditional lens, I guess. I don't see it as just working with individual teachers. For me, it's more of an overall support position and an opportunity for me to coordinate some school-

wide growth. One thing I've really been wanting to work on is getting people more familiarized with the idea of holistic grading, in which a group of teachers looks at student work, uses a common rubric, "ground" to that rubric by discussing the rubric's elements and some samples of the student work, and then grade holistically. Serendipitously, we decided to pilot a new standardized test that included written responses. The test itself has been very difficult, but it gave me an opportunity to coordinate a staff-wide training on holistic grading. Every teacher got to participate in the process, and now they can use that same process, hopefully, to design common rubrics and grade student work as a group from time to time.

In all of these preceding excerpts and examples, there is evidence of teachers' and parents' abilities to look at the whole system, to create ways to improve the reality so that it continually moves toward the vision and mission. They are agents of change and, in fact, they perceived themselves as such.

The three themes described above were evaluated by staff and parents. They agreed during the member checking that all three were strong in the first year and, although somewhat different in form, still strong pieces of the culture in the fourth year. As the interviews touched on the fourth theme, trust in the process, there was again a new insight into its development over time. In the first study, the theme acknowledging the presence of a dependable way of conducting business became the most significant and complex of the four. Equally important in this study was the developing awareness that the preceding three themes contributed to and represented integral parts of the process. The process was the "glue" that held the community together. The visionary leader and the agents of change working collaboratively, according to their agreements and operating principles, created the process they would come to trust. The development of the process and the trust of the process occurred slowly, over time. The process appeared to be the heart of this organization. The following section will look at the theme of trusting the process as the members understood and evaluated it.

### *TRUST THE PROCESS*

As summarized in the archival data, Chapter Three, there has been much written in educational literature about trust in schools: trust among teachers and trust between principal and staff, between staff and parents, and between staff and students. However, the findings of the first study revealed another level of trust, one not fully developed in literature. Beyond the trust among the human beings, there must be trust in the way the human beings work together and treat each other. One might say, trust in the way the school, as a living organization, functions. There must be trust in the process or processes established by the people, regardless of turnover of personnel or other influencing factors. In this school, an allegiance to a dialogic and inclusive process appeared in Year One.

As part of the process in the first year, members of the community were asked to come together in as diverse a group as possible, to demonstrate confidence to stay in the moment, to focus on the core beliefs with regard to current issues, and to allow their discussion to take them to a new level of understanding. They were asked to accept some degree of ambiguity as well as an openness to new opinions and possible change of their own views. In dialogue, the intention was to learn, not, necessarily, to win. In the words of the principal, in that first year, the process of creating a new community and all that they would like it to be, would take time, participation, positivity, and trust.

In the member checking stage of the present study, participants were asked to share their understanding of how the school was working in the first year and over time. The following are several of the responses. The responses were lengthy with stories and examples. They were consistently supportive of the process. The process was stronger

they said, and had developed new dimensions, which became visible in the conversations and experiences of staff and parents.

Both the principal and assistant principal explained the way the school functions and why the process is working. In separate interviews, they shared similar interpretations. In August, during the first interview with the principal, he explained that it works because, “It is the group intelligence that rises to where it needs to be.” He continued:

I have told people that I have not had an original thought in thirty years, so I can't take credit for this. I read a lot of books, talk to a lot of great people and have had lots of great mentors. I try things and make mistakes. It is just that it is what I get from the teachers, the parents, and the kids that makes the difference. They are what make it work. They are the influences that form my beliefs around what works and what doesn't. You know I just never have been a fan of the hierarchical, militaristic model of leadership top down. There are some things that teachers don't want to make decisions on simply because it is too time consuming. So, I don't see myself having swung the pendulum all the way to the other side. It is not that every decision we have to make we have to have consensus on. I think what is important is just clarity on how decisions are made. And so when decisions impact a person, or a group, they need to have a voice and not somebody giving lip service, yeah, thank you for your voice. No, people clearly need to know. For example, when it comes to scheduling fire drills, I can just make that decision. Because we have to have a certain number of drills and no one really cares when. So I make that one. Those we call A decisions. Now B decisions, like the master schedule, require input and I am upfront with all that. And I say, we are probably not going to reach consensus on all that because it is clear that everybody has their own needs and wants. We're going to pull together to balance it out. Still, I do say give me your input. C decision is where I have one vote in the circle like everyone else. So if for example we are talking about dress code, I need to have a say too. That is where we do reach consensus. But we are very careful in how we define consensus in our agreements. It is that all voices are heard, and when the majority is evident to even those opposed, the most opposed agree to accept, not quit. And when the decision is made, everyone is on board and there is no more quacking. That is in our staff agreements. Then the D decision happens in all the team meetings. I have not been to many team meetings yet this year, but I am getting all the minutes. They're making decisions all the time and these are decisions they are making without me. It is empowerment. It is the way we work. And the only stipulation that I ask is if it is something new,

something that we have never done before, run it by me. There may be some district policy or some legal ramifications, some liability that we need to look at. So just in case we need some front-loading, because it is always a little easier to plan a little more on the front end than to pick up pieces on the back end. So that is my language and that is my story over and over again. That is how we make decisions. It is the decision matrix and it actually was our Site-Based-Decision-Making-Team that created the matrix. So it was the parents and teachers that created the matrix and decided which decisions would go where. We have revised it every year, just tweaking, you know. And I just facilitate. That was how we did it. It was the group intelligence that rose to where it needed to be. (Interview, August 28)

On September 12, during a staff meeting, the assistant principal led the staff through a group learning experience—the group intelligence rising to the where it needed to be, so to speak. This exemplified the process, the team learning which often takes more time and yet, is this school's way to create the knowledge to inform decisions. Part of the school vision is to create a safe place where all students can learn. This meeting was devoted to key questions of school safety and evacuation drills. Could every adult there be responsible for the physical safety of the students? The assistant principal began the meeting:

Okay, to look at this issue, I have invited two fire fighters from the city force. I asked them to come to be a part of what we are doing today. Now in the first part, in two minutes, I will ask you all to go to your fourth period classes and then in two minutes, I will be in the front office and will get on the all-call. I will announce, 'Staff, we are going to practice an evacuation.' Okay ready?

It took twenty-five minutes to complete the drill and to have all staff return to the meeting. As he resumed the meeting, the assistant principal said that they would process the drill: What went well? What needs to change? What plan do we put into place? What did teachers think of this? What did the firefighters think?

Okay, so what went well? Several teachers responded: Great trial run without worrying about kids. Great experience for new teachers so we know what we are doing and can make mistakes with colleagues and then be really prepared with kids. Great map with clear instructions. Good chance to have conversation on the way out and the way in about what need to do better to help each other and kids. Good chance to see how the accounting of each student would really go. Really helpful. Okay, what do we need to improve?

The discussion and analysis of the drill continued for another twenty-five minutes. Questions were raised around many issues: what if teachers have their students in another place during a drill, what if they don't have their emergency packets with them, details and problems that might arise to jeopardize the safety of students as well as the confidence of teachers to do their best work.

Bob, the assistant principal, shared his views of the meeting and his trust in this process. He sees himself as a teacher along with Jay to support teachers doing their best work. He realizes that cooperative learning, shared life experience, active engagement, open discussion which create knowledge and solutions, as well as a sense of community are all part of the vision. Creating a safe place for students and doing it through team learning are the way this school works. This was not a top-down plan delivered. Every staff member participated in developing the best plan for safety. The principals want this kind of authentic learning for both the teachers and students. The principals agreed that neither one of them could create a plan that would be as good as one developed by the whole group together. The theory behind the process is that diverse perspectives examining an issue from varied insights and experiences will result in more complete understanding. These are key pieces of the process

At the close of the staff meeting, the district representative and the firefighters agreed that it was a good use of time and effort. It afforded the opportunity for the whole school to create its safety plan. They recognized that this plan and decisions around it would affect the entire staff; the entire staff should come to consensus on the decision. They also said that they witnessed the way the group formed a better plan due to the sharing of a wide variety of questions and concerns. They shared with the staff that this



does not happen generally in schools. The firefighters stated that this was the first time they had ever seen an entire meeting given to the issue of evacuation and lockdown. They appreciated that it is difficult to give this much time, and that some groups of people might not see the value in this use of time. However, for this group it was time and effort spent in creating the what they want the school to be. It is part of their vision that this be a safe place, in every sense of the word. The staff agreements call for this, for members to give their time and energy to support everyone's learning and to create the vision they share. The staff also reacted positively when asked about the use of time and the process. (Observation, September 12)

In the months of observation, there were many instances of this kind of team learning. Another teacher explained it this way:

I think the one consistent thing over the years was the common vision and then, also how we make those critical decisions. The method for decision-making is very open with a strong sense of 'we are in this together.' That feeling is just as strong now. The school is just a different entity. The vision still drives it. It is just that the avenues for implementation are a little bit different. We have a leadership team and we meet, bounce ideas around, take them back to our teams for more conversations there. The consensus model has remained constant from year one. We have the ABCD matrix and everyone knows what A means, B means, C means, and D means. (Interview September 11)

One of the special educators explained in her interview that this process did not happen by chance. This was what they, as a staff, said they wanted, and it was why many of them came to this school. How they will treat one another and the way they will do business are written in their staff agreements. She explained:

We have staff agreements, that we review and rewrite at the beginning of every year. Many staff members have the agreements hanging in our classrooms. They are hanging in Jay's office. They are there to check yourself on a lot of things, especially when we talk to each other. It is a personal check for healthy communication. You need to step back and think, gosh do I have to be right on

this, or am I open to healthy communication. Sometimes it is easier to be isolated, to not deal with conflict or disagreements. That is not what we agreed to. We agreed to continue to communicate, to continue to work through the tough stuff and continue to celebrate the great things. You know, even in the first year, you wonder how do we do this all the time. People who have been here and continue to want to be here. We model and serve and in a lot of ways, we look for people who are willing to be open, to leave their egos at the door and those who want to be a part of a team instead of alone as a teacher. We learn so much from each other. Constantly learning! (Interview, September 7)

In interviews with parents, teachers, and staff, there were consistent references to the core beliefs, the operating principles, the traits of Character, the staff agreements, the decision matrix, the importance of relationships, the components of dialogue, and the six P's. The comments from staff and parents indicated that the effort to create a healthy environment and trust in the process was deliberate, and strong in the fourth year as in the first. The process became clearer and more deeply embedded over time. It was the way they treated each other, including students, with the mission of teaching and learning, first and foremost.

In the Parent and Student Handbook for 2007 – 2008, the Staff Agreements and Operating Principles appear as follows:

1. Effective and Healthy Relationships: We seek healthy and effective relationships through building trust with one another. When in dialogue we seek to learn, speak the truth, produce results, and strengthen relationships. When we have a concern, we speak directly with the person with whom we have a concern.
2. Collaboration: We make effective use of our time together as we constantly seek to improve teaching and learning.
3. Attitude toward Learning: We are committed to creating an environment that engages students in academic work that results in high level of achievement.
4. Data: We develop and implement curriculum, instruction, and assessment with the support of data.

5. Shared Leadership: We have arrived at consensus when all points of view have been heard, including the list of “dangers and opportunities” and “the will of the group” is evident even to those who are most opposed.

Early in September, during an observation a meeting of the Seventh Grade Red Team, there was evidence of these agreements. The chair of the counseling department attended the meeting with the hope of being a part of their “kid talk.” The team leader, a history teacher, explained that “kid talk” was the most important work of their meeting. The counselor was hoping to talk about with kids with 504’s, to share data and to work with the teachers to design a way to ensure needed dialogue. He chose to join the team meetings as the best way to do this. The counselor began by saying:

So to talk about a large number of kids as well as we possibly can, we want to put a protocol in place. I have copies of the kids on your team and information I want to share with you. You know this is all confidential and you need to know it all. I am really hoping these conversations will help.

The team leader agrees that creating this new process is important, he adds, “Okay, good, historically how this has played out here is that we look at the whole list of 504’s and what kids need. So what we need to know comes to our attention. Of course, now that we are larger, it calls for a higher degree of organizational structure to make sure this happens.”

Yeah, great, and as counselors, we want to be part of your conversations about kids, particularly when you are bringing up new problems you are concerned with. As a matter of fact, I just got this from Jay that he has it on his agenda to discuss how we will pass on information. For example, how does a sixth grade teacher pass on to you (this seventh grade team) information that you need to work with a student? We want to figure out how we are going to do this. We don’t want to start a new year, and then six or eight weeks in figure that we have an issue with this kid. It will be much better if you know ahead of time. And that is part of our charge, to set up a system for how we will do that and continue to do that.

The last half of the meeting was given to their “kid talk.” They entered into dialogue around two students they all had in class. It was interesting to watch the process in action. The teachers talked of one parent who was encouraging a 504 plan for her son.

The teachers and counselor thought that this might not be the best first course of action. They are not encouraging this action for kids, in general. As they said, “they do not want to create reasons for 504’s, as a simple solution, if the child does not need that.” When they are dealing with a child who might be borderline, they prefer to support the student to respond and achieve. The point here seemed to be that as a team they could do more, whatever is needed to help this student be successful, while supporting each other in challenging situations. (Observation, Sept 12)

From a parent’s point of view, trusting the process was essential. They could trust that they were valued members of the partnership. In an interview in September, one mother shared that in the beginning they knew very little about this new junior high school. They knew it would be Core Knowledge, and there would be a parent partnership. They met the new principal and from that point, it was a question of faith. They did have faith because there was lots of communication. From the beginning, the parents from the elementary schools shared their history and Jay got lots of feedback and input. This parent shared her story:

Well, there was the vision, what we wanted, and we all contributed in many ways. And in the process, there was lots of collaboration all the time. It was constantly communicating. I mean every day, they were communicating about something and I think that is why it has been so successful. It is always the expectation and it has been a great environment to work in. All the parents are invested, right from the beginning the parents coming on board. That initial group and their investment might be a little different from right now, and that is okay. You know in order for the school to grow, you have to have different perspectives and I think you would really want it. So it may not look just like the first year, but the basics are there, the vision and the communication. (Interview September 28)

In an interview with the chairperson of the English department, she explained in her view, the time to reflect was key to the process. Both she and Jay agreed that the time element in the process was essential. Also, after the first year, a key element to the

success of the process was sharing it every day, especially with new staff. She explained that from the beginning that was necessary to keep the vision and the momentum.

In the first year, we had time to reflect, and we had the time to think about who we were and what we were doing. Jay provided that time. It was in our schedule. And now I am not sure if you can get it if you were not in on it from the beginning of it. You know it is sort of like moving into someone else's house that they built. And it might be beautiful but you don't realize what went into it. And that doesn't mean at all that you are a shallow person, it just means that you weren't there to experience it. So those kinds of things that we talk about are how you can get the others coming in to experience, and then the feeling grows. And one way you can do that is to show it every day, and so what Jay has protected, we have become protectors of, too. At first, I was kind of uncomfortable with that role because I felt like; well I don't want to be in that role. I just want to be an equal and colleague, but then I realized that it is not a question of power, or some inner circle, it was more just being a messenger. And that this is the way we have to do this, to protect the vision. (Interview, September 19)

Interesting as a follow-up to the preceding interview, was an interview with one of the music teachers who joined the staff in the second year. He shared his experience with the participatory and dialogic process, and the responsibilities that he saw as a part of it. He explained that it did take some time to understand and trust.

Yes, there are processes that I trust, yes, the fist to five, voices will be heard, and okay, for example, there is some confusion about something, so let's list up the dangers and the opportunities, so that all together we can get an informed decision, and get consensus, and at times, there are those folks who significantly disagree. Okay then, the majority of the group is headed in this direction... Even to say, that sometimes at the beginning I felt that I couldn't dissent... because then I was just stepping out of the circle. That I was being that free radical who was getting everybody else in trouble. Or I was getting myself in trouble. But with time, I have become comfortable saying I can be a dissenting voice and offer my concerns with this decision or this situation or whatever. Yes, and I can trust the process that yes, I get a chance to express myself honestly. In the beginning, I did not fully understand. But the trust that Jay and I have, that my colleagues and I have... it has gotten better and it is as though everyone is on board. I have many great colleagues and I see them with the courage to say 'wait a minute; I need to understand better what we are really doing.' So I see them and I am allowed to voice my concerns, too. I am not allowed to sit there and say I want it my way or else. I still need to take the responsibility to hear the rest of the group and if they

are all going in one direction, I need to try to understand that and learn why. I need to be open. It is really interesting how it all works. For example, the other day in a staff meeting we were discussing an issue. I did have a concern, so I raised two fingers and my colleague directing the meeting asked me to share my concern. So I am able to express myself saying this or that. So, this is something other people have not thought of. It does not mean that we continue to revote until everyone agrees 100 percent, no, but what it does mean is that a concern is brought to the attention of the group and the group gets to say how we can address this concern and still make the best decision. And then I can say that yeah, I can understand where the rest of the group is going and still have my concerns worked in. (September 27)

This process with its own protocol, metaphors, and language was witnessed in large meetings, small meetings, parent meetings, and classes. The words were part of the culture and the strategies were accepted by the members. Teachers would get student reaction to activities with a 'fist to five' and parents would decide on their projects with lists of pros and cons. No one explained exactly how it worked but several participants said that they could count on it working. Tamara, the office manager, said of the process:

Well, for example in the interviews, interviewing new people for positions on staff. The process really does work. It is phenomenal. Everyone has a say, an idea, their input and at the end, it is amazing that everyone comes to the same place. By sharing ideas, things are sorted out and seen more clearly. And there is a trust that it is all going to work out. I have seen it from day one. I have seen it, and it works. And the other thing about the process is how we all feel together. We don't want to leave things to chance. We don't want to make assumptions. We talk things over; we are all on the same page. (Interview, September 9)

The established processes and the trust in the process were spoken of in all interviews and observed time and again whenever the staff and parents gathered. There were layers to the process and various levels of understanding it. There were also results that emerged as new themes in the fourth year. These new themes and developments will be discussed in the next section. Section Three of this chapter will present data in answer to research questions Number 2 and 3:

2. Where is this school now in the journey of change? How have the members of the community experienced the journey?
3. How is the school functioning? Have they created the culture they wanted?

### *SECTION THREE: RESEARCH QUESTIONS 2 AND 3*

Where is this school in the journey of change? How have the members experienced the journey?

How is the school functioning? Have they created the culture they wanted?

#### *WHERE IS THIS SCHOOL IN THE JOURNEY OF CHANGE?*

The journey is winding and complex. In the words of the principal, it is “cyclical and at times, ambiguous.” In order for change to succeed, it needs to move in the same current direction as the greater society or at least, in the direction of change the society is desiring (Benham-Tye, 2000). In addition, it calls for an awareness of the deeper structures of society that tend to pull organizations back to status quo, contributing to the failure of change. This awareness must be accompanied by the effort to work with the structures and obstacles in a way that allows for the flow of change within structures and around obstacles (Wheatley, 1994). Finally, the organization must endeavor to examine itself with an up close and honest scrutiny as it makes and sticks to tough decisions (Sizer, 1984).

This junior high school in its fourth year is experiencing success in its journey. The community has made a deliberate and steady effort to continue forward toward its

vision. The vision has always been to focus on the students, to do what is best for them, and to “educate every child every day.” According to staff and parents, they continue to do things differently and successfully aligning their actions to their mission and vision. In their words, the themes of their first year are strong, in some ways modified over time and more deeply embedded. These themes have developed into more complex constructs with a sense of history and levels of progress beyond expectations. In the first year, the members agreed that the visionary leadership was most important. Now in the fourth year, the leadership, still key, has grown increasingly more shared, and the process along with trusting the process have been identified as essential to progress. The process, or the way the school functions, is a most influential condition for success and for learning. “The way a school functions, insistently, teaches” (Sizer, 1999). The other themes have developed as major components of the process.

The school has more than tripled in size and population in the last four years. They have changed sites as well as configuration of grade levels. The process takes more time, more thoughtful structuring. The physical attributes of the vessel carrying them forward have changed, but the shared vision, the core beliefs have not. The shared vision is the power that keeps them in the positive direction in their journey (Fullan, 2001). The participants in the study described their understanding of the journey in their interviews. The principal offered this analogy:

We were like **A speedboat, then a houseboat, and then a barge**. When we were small, we were like a speedboat. We could zip around through the water, changing direction, learning everything really quickly and moving forward. Then we became a houseboat with more people on board and we went a little slower. Then in the third year, we were a barge, moving forward was even slower. But we have a strong sense of shared leadership here. Teacher and leadership teams are meeting all the time. We focus on strong communication. That is how we disseminate information and philosophies like this one ‘we are all in this together’



and that is probably the latest twist on collaboration. And it is designed to say not only 'hey, science teachers and English teachers or math teachers,' it is designed to say 'hey parents, hey staff, hey students, hey resource officer.' We are all in this for one reason, and that is the kids. So, we are all in this together. (Interview, August 28)

One of the music teachers explained how he views the journey. As a community, they are aware of the forces that would pull them back to the isolation of a more traditional setting. Sticking with the process deepens the understanding of it and at the same time assures its growth. With greater understanding comes a shift in thinking as well as self-awareness, what Peter Senge (1999) would call "personal mastery" and key to the process.

Collaboration has indeed changed because we have gotten so much bigger. So actually, one has to make a conscience effort to make sure we collaborate. It is still easy to become isolated or to get in an isolated way, in your department or your classroom, well that is because there is so much going on. And I think the biggest thing for me came in the second year, yeah, when I discovered that collaboration was at times just a relinquishment of one's own ego, saying to yourself, you know what? You are not going to have all the answers and you don't have to. And sometimes you need to seek out help; that is what it's all about. Whereas before, I would feel if I was having difficulty with a student, if I had to look somewhere else for ideas or help, then somehow I had failed as the teacher. Now it is okay, if I am working here and it is not quite working this student, I can say 'let's use all the other levels of communication that are at this school to help get to all kids. So that has helped me, and that has been a shift, we are saying we haven't tried everything yet, so let's use all the other means of support. This has changed for me over the years. (Interview, September 28)

According to this teacher and others, collaboration and the process of dialogue have been maintained and enhanced because they have deepened their understanding of the concepts, learning more about them together in conversation. They arrived at a new understanding of the process while being involved in the process itself. This, they said changed them and needed to be protected by them. Peter Senge's (1999) theory of team learning might offer some understanding of what was happening. Team learning will

bring people to level of understanding or to the creation of new knowledge which will change them as human beings. Many teachers spoke to that experience in their own journeys.

One of the science teachers explained that team learning was so important a part of this school's culture that even with the growth and the challenges it brings, structures were incorporated to support the ongoing collaborative learning. And he added that this was in line the changes desired by the school district. Both of these conditions have contributed to their success.

In Year One, I taught science and I did a lot of other things. I taught full time and assisted with the leadership and peer coaching as well. I enjoyed all these things, leadership and coaching, well sort of on the side. But now my job is really changing along with the school. And it is really a perfect blend for me. Now it is in the schedule and that gives me more time for coaching to do a better job with it. So it is another way of promoting leadership within to support our kids. Now we have a regular time to meet, during collab hour. We have a partnership with administration and agreements about how our time is used. The coaches work in the roles that they are the strongest. Teachers get to keep talking about teaching. Dealing with the district, it has come to show that we have a pretty neat model. (Interview, September 11)

The counselor, Anna, who has been on staff for four years agreed that the process had to change some to work within the system, but the original spirit and motivation have remained.

I think it has changed. It had to. In some sense, it has increased, in the sense that we have more staff and we have ways to involve everyone. But the spirit has not gone away. The process has grown over the four years. Now we have it pretty well down. And there are some things that are non-negotiable. Before when we were first starting, everything was negotiable. In the beginning, we were only seventh grade and that gave us lots of freedom. Then, as we added grade levels things had to be more set in place. For example, now we have ninth grade and that really drives our schedule of classes. There are certain things that just must be. (Interview, October 8)

One of the English teachers described the journey as a discovery process, discovery that continually requires trust.

Well, you have to have a goal. You are setting parameters. It is like teaching in experimentation, when you are teaching students through discovery. The discovery isn't defined. You are guiding students in learning, but always open to the fact that they may come up with something quite different. Sometimes it is better than you had in mind. Because that is the collective mind, and that we have always had. I always remember Jay telling the story of the people building the airplane. And I think this is so true for our journey. These people were building the airplane and they were working and when they were done, it looked good, and they felt good. And then, there is another airplane that is flying and the people are hanging on to it while it is flying. They are just hanging off the cables with their hammers and they are still working and yelling about what they are working on. That is where we are. We are flying and working and building. Now, that is trusting the process. Especially in the beginning, we were creating, creating, creating. We had a goal and a vision, a common vision. And we had our agreements. I think the big thing is that we hold to the agreements and Jay does that. To be part of this process, you have to agree to ways to work and those are the agreements. They don't change; we just get clearer on them. No gossip, positivity, basically you are saying, I am in this and I have to remove my ego in order to get answers, in order to solve problems. We are solution-oriented. (Interview, September 19)

The parents and staff agreed that there are many facets to the change, and their journey reflects the non-linear, and sometimes, scary adventure. The shared belief in 'positivity', and the idea that they can do just about anything if they are together, keeps them moving forward. Positivity will not assure an organization with no problems or challenges, but rather a place where when obstacles do present themselves they can be worked with in a way that shows respect for others and opportunity for creativity for themselves. This, they said, allows the journey to continue. They see much that has been well achieved and much more to come.

*HOW HAVE THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY EXPERIENCED THE JOURNEY?*

Participants shared their stories. Their stories, in turn, told the story of this organization. Because of the length of the stories, only excerpts are included. In the conclusion of the section, shorter quotations from other members' stories are, also, included.

*Laura's Story: the story of a teacher becoming.*

Laura is a young woman with long dark hair. She teaches Spanish and is currently the chair of the department. I met with Laura on October 2, at 3:00, after her full day of classes. She greeted me at the door with a warm hello in Spanish, a big smile and lots of energy. We met in her classroom on the second floor of the still new building. The classroom was bright and decorated with colorful posters of Spanish speaking countries, cultural regalia from foreign places, and more posters with the school's positive sayings written in both Spanish and English. We sat at student desks for almost an hour and talked. I asked her to tell me about her teaching career. She began her story:

Well, I taught for two and a half years at another junior high school. I did my student teaching there in the fall, and then got hired right away that year. So I taught there for two years, and I was just about to be tenured there when enrollments dropped and so because I was the newest one to the Spanish department, there were four of us because the numbers were so large, but then they no longer needed me. And I wasn't tenured then or what do you call it, I wasn't on continuing contract. So I needed to find a new place. And what was funny was that Anna was the office manager at my school, she had just gotten hired as the counselor here. And she knew my position and she said, Okay! There is this great principal I am going to work for, and this new school that is opening. And I was in the crazy position and I did not know anything about Core Knowledge. I am not a very outgoing person so it was really strange for me to think about having to call this principal, to have to call and sort of sell myself. But I did it. And I was so taken aback by his, uh, by him! Cause he called me back that day and he said, come see me, I want to talk to you. And there was nothing

over the phone, so I did. I went over and he and I had a conversation about Spanish and what the department would be here. You see, there was no program yet. So then, I went in for an interview and got hired! But the funny part was that I was already three months pregnant. I didn't know if this was something I should share in the interview or not. But, I did, when I was offered the job. I said, you know, I'm pregnant and due in November. And he said, So? I am not hiring you for a year. I am hiring you to see what kind of teacher you become. So that was so good for me to know, that he was not thinking short term, that he was thinking long term. So from that moment on, I have just always felt so supported. I was in awe and it was wonderful!

I had already taught three years when I came here. So my first year here was actually my fourth year teaching, and I got my continuing contract here. Actually, I started teaching here in September and I was seven months pregnant, and then my little girl decided to come six weeks early! (lots of laughter) So I was here, and I went into labor. Tamara, from the front office, helped me. I had my baby in October and did not come back to work until after Christmas. But things happen for a reason. I had already fallen in love with this school, and I decided to come back and to stay that spring, spring semester. Yeah, it is quite a history so I feel really connected. I don't know exactly how to say it. It has just been very family oriented and really special, a place to grow. I never feel like I am on my own, or alone in my room trying to figure out what I am doing. That just makes my job ten times easier. That's why, I think, I can do what I do. And doing pretty well, and I know I am getting better.

I asked what exactly helps her get better.

I think it is the working together, what I said about not feeling alone in this. I used to work with other Spanish teachers in the other building. One of those Spanish teachers is here, actually. We would work together but on our own time. It was nothing like it is here or how it works. In my mind, there are two ways, two ways that I kind of separate it. There is my department collaboration and I am the chair of that group. It is kind of different. In the past, we had dedicated one period a week to the department, but this year is a little different. Our department got bigger; our French and German teachers came. They are not full time, so we don't have a common planning hour with them. But we do meet as Spanish teachers and we do all of our planning together. So this was great, if kids had to change schedules, and the teachers were different, it was okay because what we were teaching was all connected and all the same. Now this year, it is great. Our numbers are just through the roof! So we actually added a section, and then we got more collaborative time written in the schedule. And there is a new Spanish teacher who is a first year teacher. So she and I meet regularly and it is great for us both. Because it has always been part of the master schedule that it has become

engrained in us. It is just how we work. And, I really think it is easier because I would be doing all that planning on my own. I could be there spinning my wheels and it would just be...well it goes much easier for me working with someone else.

I asked what kinds of things they do when they collaborate.

Well, one thing we do is ask a lot of questions. We are always asking questions, like how to get kids engaged, and how to be a better teacher. It is one of those things, too, where it is just the culture of the building. And this culture is strong. I was in a building where there was negative feeling. There I could easily go to another teacher and gossip about anything. So it was kind of the way things worked there, and it happened. Because I did work in a place like that, I have to be very conscious not to go back to that. Here we do it differently. We had to learn how to do it differently. We had to learn how to have the relationships because in other places we didn't have that. So now, when we talk, it is very refreshing because when we meet, we keep it positive. And now that we have a brand new teacher, we have asked her to watch that we ever slip and go back to a negative place that she call us on it, because that would be living outside our agreements, our staff agreements.

These agreements...it is the way we live here. And I end up taking it out of the work place and I take this way to live into my personal life. Like for example, one of the things is no gossip. If you have a problem with someone, take it to that person. And so, for me, it is really living it, and not just a school agreement. And I think that is why it is so real, and not something that just died off in year one. Especially too, I think, in the building we spend a lot of time talking about it. It is not like something you read one time and then it is over. We look at it all the time, and we question it all the time. Are we living up to it and are we role modeling it for the kids and each other?

I asked how she thought it affected the students.

Well, I think it filters down to them and affects them. Well, especially when they are in our classes watching us, and mostly in ELO (Extra Learning Opportunity), when I am getting to know my kids and we are looking at their grades. I can ask them if they are having problems and I ask them if they asked the teacher for help. Sometimes, they might say, oh this teacher just doesn't like me. So I can say you really need to talk to that teacher. I can teach the students to go to the person where they have the problem rather than being the mediator for that student. I know that takes courage for the student and they may not do it all the time. But that is part of this culture. And they see their teachers doing it, that we work together. We have the same consistent stuff between all of us.

The last question I asked was if there was any downside to working in this culture.

I've never worked as hard as I work here. I mean I have worked hard at other schools but here somehow it is different. It is different, it is here you are surrounded by passionate, hard-working teachers who are really, really good at what they do. And it is funny because I am a competitive person and here I don't feel competition toward my colleagues. It is more like, so and so is a great teacher, Pat is a great teacher. Bryan is a great teacher. And so I want to learn from them, what can I learn to help me better in my classes. It is not that I want to be better than, but I want to get better with. They have so much to teach me and I really want to learn.

In summary, Laura spoke of the new teacher's situation, part of the nature of the profession, that job security was an issue. The risk of losing her job was part of her journey in the beginning. At the new school, she felt supported by a principal who was interested in her long-term work and growth as a teacher. Working together with her colleagues both challenged her to do her best, and, also provided a sense of belonging and confidence. Colleagues and students both contributed to this teacher's effort to grow with the organization and to protect the journey of the school itself—not to allow change to fail in year one. And between the lines, one might surmise that the learning organization itself would not allow her to fail, either. (Field notes, October 2)

*Anna's Story: clarifying values and setting goals.*

Anna, a tall young woman with dark hair and complexion, welcomed me to the counseling office, just inside the main entrance to the school. We sat in Anna's separate office where she had her desk, and, also an open space to meet with students and parents. Anna began as the school counselor in the first year. Her position was full time for the first three years. Now, her job is different. This past year, she had a baby, and chose to

work part time. Her schedule now brings her to the school on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. We met on Wednesday, October 8 and talked for just over one hour. Anna began with her history in the school district. She had worked in different positions, and the year before this school opened, she was the office manager at another junior high school. She continued by sharing the career decisions and how she had made them.

Actually, I applied for four different positions and I was offered three. You know there is sort of a myth about working your way up to the high school – that if you get to high school, that is it. It is like working your way up a hierarchy. But the first thing I had to do was really to reflect and think about where I wanted to be. And the pull for me was the middle school, the 12 to 15 year old range. Then, what pulled me to this school, once I decided I wanted junior high; there were two junior highs to choose from. What pulled me here was, well, at that time there was only Jay and Tamara who was in the front office. And the funny part was I had worked with Tamara when I was an office manager. She is so amazing, and so, I said, yeah, cool, I could work with her. And this Jay guy! I did not know who he was, but I felt the vibes. And so I thought it would be cool to work with him. And I didn't know anything about Core Knowledge, so I got on the website and started researching and I thought, you know, this is really cool. What got me then was all those things combined and being a part of something from the ground level up. And that was what really intrigued me, to start something new and fresh. For me, being a new counselor, and knowing I would be the only counselor was a little nerve-racking. But that is really right up my alley. I love inventing new ways, and it was an exciting new challenge. I never have taught, but I think being an office manager gave me some really important experience. Because seeing the wide systems really helped because as office manager, you really have to know everything in the building. And you have to know district-wide. How contacts work, who calls you, what resources you can use. The amount of forms and the organization it takes to do that. It really was all that, building the counseling department and building the school from the very beginning, I used all that experience from being an office manager, everything that I learned there. So I did lack classroom management and classroom experience, but I had this building wide experience that most don't get. But that first year here, the teachers were all so welcoming that I could go into all the classes any time and I learned so much from them and I sort of learned some things from osmosis. (she laughs.) And here is a story about year one. I was a brand new counselor. I had been in the district previous to that, but I had no experience being a counselor. Since Jay had been a counselor for thirteen years, he had lots of experience and was able to guide me and mentor me. He was my consult on everything. I mean literally, we met every single morning to



talk about kids or, say, I have this going on, where do you think I should go with this? I mean literally anything every day. And that kind of collaboration has continued to shift and change and grow. Yeah, a very trusting relationship. And now he has stepped out of the counseling mentor role to where now I still get his support but I have grown and learned so much here, that I still get all the support I need and I can still say to him, Jay, I have this and what do you think? Even just two weeks ago, I had a conference coming up and I was nervous about this, but I felt I needed to be there to support the teacher. And I could not do it all alone. I could not support the teacher and the student, and facilitate the meeting. So I asked him to facilitate so I could be support to student and teacher. I asked him to help, so I could shift roles. So this was a shift from where he was training me. I think it was that Jay was always asking me to look and see what role I needed to play in each event, in each of my day-to-day duties. I mean visionary leader is Jay to a T. I wish I could just clone him and put him in, like, five different schools.

I asked how she thought the school would continue if Jay decided to leave.

I have thought about that, 'cause it makes me really...well, to the point where last year I said to him, if you ever leave, I'm gone. I'm not even staying around. Now, I don't know if that is true. It is just hard because he has done so much to systematize leadership and to express the vision. And it is the dynamics that he is able to move in and out of. It really takes someone who has gone through personal work, so they have a healthy self, and, someone who has high skills in communication. I know that I have some skills now that Joe taught me, and if he could teach others, then this could continue. He does not take anything personally, and he teaches us that, and that has had a huge impact. And to have high awareness, high radar, he calls it. Radar around healthy and unhealthy communication. And so if someone new came in here, they would have to have at least those two, then it would work. And it could continue, in a new way, obviously. It would be tough without Jay, but it would be possible. It would have to be someone with those important skills and awareness because we don't have anything like 'people buy-in' here. We don't have that buying-in; everyone is part owner. So if you want to be a part owner and creator of the vision, then that's great. So that is sort of a shift. And then, I have to say, I love it here. It is not really easy to put into words. It is hard work, even when it is hard work; it is never that I don't love it. The people here are phenomenal. It is never that I don't want to come to work.

Anna's story began with her effort to know her beliefs and goals. It was important to clarify where she wanted to work and what she wanted to do and become. With regard to her profession, she explained the need to understand the whole of a system, and then,

the fit for her in a particular setting. This school seemed like a good fit for many reasons. The unknowns were as exciting to her as the knowns—coming in on the ground floor to create something new. Anna acknowledged the support of colleagues who took her into their classrooms to share what experience she felt she was lacking. She acknowledged her work/ training with Jay as her mentor. Throughout her story, one hears the gratitude for the people and the process as well as independence and confidence that come with continual learning. (Field notes, October 8)

*Shaun's Story: through bumps and bruises to something really good.*

At 8:00 a.m. on September 27, I walked from the entrance of the school to the far wing on the first floor. This wing houses the music department, the gymnasium, and the cafeteria. It might be considered the louder wing of the building. I entered the music teachers' office and found Shaun in the middle of a conversation with a student. He was having some concerns about her recent work, and was inquiring and offering some suggestions. She left with a smile, and we had the remainder of first period for the interview. Shaun is a tall young man who had eleven years of teaching experience before he came to this school. He had taught vocal music, and had the voice and demeanor of one who would both project and present well on stage. We sat at one end of a row of built in desks in the office shared by three teachers. During the interview, I asked Shaun to tell me a little about what it means to be a staff member here.

For me there are two things. First of all, professional satisfaction that one gets, knowing that I am a part of something bigger. Knowing that I can effect change not only in my classroom but that really I can effect change in my school, and as far as in my district. So there is that professional pride and joy in the work we do here. I have been a teacher for eleven years, and I know that there is a certain balance that I try to keep in myself. I know that I could work and work, but I put

in nine or ten hours a day and then I have to drop it. And I still have my night performance and other obligations, meet with kids or go to another performance that a kid has. And it is all about, well, I know that the job and the school would allow me to put in fifteen or more hours every day. But for many reasons, I know I have to stop it at that point and say, okay I'm done for now. I want to be a good teacher for a lot more years. So then, also, in my mind, well, let me see if I can wrap my mind around this, to say it. There is an element of personal responsibility for being a part of what's going on, taking an active role in that kind of thing whether that is your department, or interacting with your team members, or even in conflict with fellow team members, or with the principal, or assistant principal or whoever. So, you have to take that active role. Jay says it very well with our classroom, and I take that to my whole professional life as well, that you practice what you preach, and silence is consent. If for example, I see a kid chewing gum in my classroom, which we don't allow in the music department, it causes very gooey instruments, if I see that, and I decide I just don't want to have to deal with that right now, and I decided to ignore it, then I have just consented to it. So, if I see or feel something and it is not sitting right with me, if I don't ask questions about where we are going or how we are thinking, then I am consenting to it. If I just sit there and grumble about it, then I have to see that I have consented. So now there is an element of saying, no, it is my responsibility to speak, and to try to understand what is going on. And, so yes, all that is very much a part of my job. And so I must participate and in participating I must recognize that my colleagues who have as valid experience as I have, and their reality is as credible and valid as mine, then we need to grow and continue to create better understanding of what we are doing. Well, that is a bit esoteric. Let me put it this way. Ironically, years ago on my second day here, it was an hellacious day. I can put it this way. I was there, and maybe it was a big mistake. My whole first year was by far my most challenging and hardest year teaching. I walked into the school and I was a fish out of water. And Jay and I butted heads, not in a conflictive way, not in a negative way, but there was fear and anxiety. I am sure for both of us. Our relationship was hard. Both Jay and I were able to express our frustrations to each other. And we were able to start developing that basic level of trust. And he sat down with me and the assistant principal. We sat down for two hours. While I was explaining my frustrations, and he was explaining his frustration and then, we were able to establish, after that two-hour session of real honesty, that okay this is where I am and this is where I am coming from. Well it took me a little longer to know that Jay does not hold grudges. I would not have known that, I had no idea what kind of person or principal he was. I just met Jay. I had known principals in the district that never forgot anything. There was a lot of fear and anxiety and Jay was able to end that. He explained that this situation was off to a difficult start but we resolved it, we discussed it, we worked on it, and it is in the past. It is finished and the relationship is repaired. And I didn't have to worry about it, as we were establishing the very basic level of trust. And so I can

say, I know I trust him. And over the course of that first year, although there were bumps and bruises occasionally, we have developed a level of trust that is there and stays there. And it is an ongoing process. Then the next year went a lot smoother and better in this new building, and now we have something really good. Now I look back at that transition and realize that it was probably difficult to deal with me in the beginning, with me and my anxieties about new place, new school, new grade level, and so on. And so there is more and more trust as time goes on.

Shaun is a successful teacher with years of experience. He explained what it means to be a teacher, both the sense of pride and responsibility. It is not easy and yet, it is important to maintain balance in his life, between his sense of responsibility to his profession and to himself. This experienced teacher shared the story of anxiety that can accompany the change process. The transition for him caused him to feel, what might be called, culture shock. It was through ongoing dialogue and continued effort to understand, to learn and to trust that the anxiety diminished allowing for something really good. The good continues as time goes on. (Field notes, September 27)

*Linda's Story: am I touching enough lives?*

Linda is a successful career teacher with fourteen years of experience. She and her husband have taught in several states, and in both junior and senior high schools. She has enjoyed new challenges and welcomed stimulating changes in her career and life. She lives in this state now with her husband and children. When she speaks about her work at this school, there is expression of emotion, dedication and a passion to do more, to learn more, to share more. We met in her classroom on September 27, in the morning, during her planning period. Her room had an interesting arrangement of desks in groups of four or five. Her desk was in the back of the room where she seldom sat. The subject taught is mathematics, and still, the room was decorated with a great variety of pictures and

quotations to interest and inspire her young students. The first part of our conversation focused on the history of her career and how she came to this school. In the excerpt which follows, however, Linda shares how her work here, both as teacher and peer coach, has brought to the surface questions about her work to come.

I asked Linda if being in this school has affected her teaching and attitude toward teaching.

Yes, well it is through the professional conversation. It is in the words. It is because of the changes I have gone through during the course of my career, and it is how people interact with each other. I am working very hard here, and I think the reward is that you actually feel... I think I can say it right, well...in a school district that I was in, in the past, I never felt I was treated like a true professional. What is professional? Well, I have two degrees, I have a bachelor's and a master's, and I am getting ready to get my administrative degree. And well, you know, I think everyone wants to be treated like what you have to offer is worthy. And now I absolutely feel like, well, I think I have some things, some tools to share. I go and walk through all these classes and I'm trying to pick up more tools, tools in my toolbox, you know what I mean. I'm trying to make a difference in our schools. But, then I think, am I touching enough lives? I ask myself every day. I have 160 kids in my classes, but then I start questioning, am I touching enough lives? Could I become an administrator that could touch more lives? I think Jay...he is like that. He has created this with the help of all these people who work together who started from ground zero. Collaboration. It is just not a top down place. Everyone has a voice. This is my second year here, and it has increased in that time. It has increased even with the growing size of the school. And we do it because we know it is best practice. Even though the staff keeps growing, we know it is the best way to learn, and we even feel that it is an opportunity. We have more people to add to our learning. I meet with the math department and I meet with ninth grade team because I teach all ninth grade. And I meet with the peers and peer coaches. I also asked to work with our department leader, so I could learn more. I want to begin my administrator certificate so I go the leadership team meetings too, sort of an understudy to our department leader.

I asked Linda to speak more about the peer coaching and how it works?

Well, it is the first year in a formal structure, and we haven't set it up completely yet. But, it is good here because people want this and they were in the decision to have it. It is funny, but in other cultures, people might feel like well, how did they get chosen to be a coach and I didn't. Jay asked if we wanted to do this and I just

wanted to jump on the opportunity. And everyone is just respectful of it. It's kind of like, we walk through and learn so much. We ask do you need anything, do you need resources, or is there something I can do for you or with you? And what is happening now is that I am getting emails from staff and they are asking, can you come and visit and give me suggestions on this or that? I just got an email from one teacher who asked me to come and give ideas because she is struggling with a student... (Linda pauses; her eyes fill with tears.) It is great and it is emotional because it is the work we do. And it is so funny because my best friend in Ohio, she is a teacher too, and she has said to me that is your calling, to go out and to talk to teachers. She has always said that, and now I have been kind of leaning toward doing that. So that is why I am trying to put myself in all these roles. So I can learn to do that better.

I mentioned that the demands of her workweek must be huge.

Well, yes. You know people think that I should be dropping. You know they say are you ready to drop yet? And I am not. I just really manage time well. And, well, I think maybe sometimes, I think because we all are such climbers and we keep climbing and climbing to a point where we get to stop and we just take care for a while and then we climb again. This is true for individuals and the group, too. It just depends. Sometimes, it depends on where you are. First year teachers need more support and someone to slow them down a bit. And they stay late and work hard and they've got that first year mentality and so much to learn. But I do sometimes think that we have to do it as a staff. I think we are going too fast sometimes. You know what I mean? Not only do we continue to fine-tune all the things we have in place, but we keep adding other things. And the other thing I want to emphasize here is that this is not Jay. We are not climbing because of Jay. We are climbing because we are climbers. Okay, and so, sometimes I think we need to say, Okay, let's stop along the way. Because what would happen if this school were to lose these great people. We have to try to keep people happy professionally and personally, if you don't want them to burn out. That's where my thoughts are now. I just want to make sure that everyone is healthy. That is one of the reasons I feel so blessed that I have been in four different schools, in different cultures and I have gone from one side of the country to the other. I have experienced different cultures and I can see we have to take care of each other. That is really where I have been reflecting lately, and I am thinking, how do we do that? Sometimes, I think that maybe we just need to go for a walk outside, a walk to think about all that we have done.

Linda shared, in her story, her devotion to the profession and the caring she feels for her colleagues. There is gratitude throughout for the opportunity for change, challenge, and growth. She has appreciated what she has felt during her tenure at this

school, being valued and truly feeling that you are valued have made a difference.

During this journey, new meanings have surfaced for Linda. Now she desires to continue her education and to broaden her influence. As this school expanded its peer coaching, giving Linda the opportunity to touch the lives of teachers as well as her students, she has recognized the possibility and has planned to take her journey to the next level. (Field notes, September 28)

The participants in the study shared many stories, their personal journeys which reflected, and in some way, connected to the journey of the organization, too many stories to include in this report. However, in conclusion of this section, the following thoughts and phrases from interviews may offer further insight into the connection between the growth of an organization and the growth of the individual.

I think I have become a better person because I work here. I have learned to say that my ego and what I want may not be so important. I came from a generation where you didn't talk about your feelings, especially not at work. And that was where I had to look inside in the last few years. I have to really say what I feel. (Interview, September 25)

And as my wife observed for me, people would ask her, how does Bob like the new school? She would say he has never worked harder in his career or loved it more. And I could tell for myself that this would be something different, from the start, I knew that, the most cutting edge part of my career. I knew I had to be here. It was almost like a calling, not sure how to put that in words. (Interview, September 7)

Well in the beginning, it was pretty shocking. I couldn't keep up. What transpired in the first year was really interesting. I mean you would get lots of new things to do and that was good but I really didn't understand the culture. And then I decided to do whatever it takes, and it is good. I love this place. (Interview, September 27)

It is the way we live here, and I end up taking it out of the work place and I take this way to live into my personal life. (Interview, October 2)

I have grown and learned so much here, and I love being part of something from the ground floor up. (Interview, October 8)

I have to say my whole first year was by far my hardest ever teaching. I was like a fish out of water. There was fear and anxiety and we were just beginning, just beginning to develop a level of trust. (Interview, September 28)

Well the interviewing committee was made up of parents, students, Jay and Brenda. It was just in talking to them that I knew. I could really hear what they were in the sound of their voices. (Interview, September 27)

I would not be the person I am if I didn't work here. Yes, that is true. I am who I am because I work here. I love the kids. I love what I do. I have made mistakes along, I have learned along the way. This is who I am because I work here. (Interview, September 19)

The responses varied to some degree, but there was a common theme.

Experiencing the journey of change of this organization had changed the participants, in positive ways, as human beings. The journey was not always easy, as several expressed, and others said that it was not easy to explain the journey. However, they agreed that it was good, and they wanted to be there.

#### *HAVE THEY CREATED THE CULTURE THEY WANTED? HOW IS THE SCHOOL FUNCTIONING NOW?*

In Year One, 2004, the dialogic process and trust in the process were clearly observed phenomena of the culture. The members spent hours collaborating with the purpose of creating a shared vision, a common language, operating principles, and expectations for behavior of all members. Almost everything about the new school needed to be discussed and developed. The school was functioning at full speed collaboration.



In the fourth year, dialogue and collaboration are still very strong constructs in the way this school is functioning. In interviews and observations, over the period of six months, it was possible to perceive new dimensions that had developed as the process was more fully understood and experienced: questioning, examining reality, and challenging the status quo. These pieces became more evident and more often used by members of the community.

There was evidence of developing the strategy of questioning and functioning as a system of inquiry. The archival data of year one offered examples of the principal leading with questions: What do kids need to learn? How do they learn best? How do we know if they have learned? What do we do if they have not learned? What do we believe is best for students? What do we do to create what is best? What behavior expectations do we have? What do we do if those expectations are not met? The strategy of questioning as a strategy to arrive at the most informed answers, incorporating multiple perspectives, was the strategy commonly used by the school's principal. In the fourth year, as the leadership grew more shared, the strategy of questioning was observed on a regular basis, used by other members of the community, and at every level of meeting and collaboration. The vision of the school remained constant with the students at center. The questions grew greater in number and complexity.

At the first professional development day before the opening of school, August 16, 2007, Jay again led the meeting with a question. This question, however, was of a different tone, a different level of investigation. That morning he asked staff members to sit in groups and talk together, and ask themselves: How do we get to know what lies within a child? The conversations were spirited, with thoughts and feelings. The staff

shared ideas from their personal lives, from their readings, from their classes. The answers ranged from “put yourself in their shoes” to “recognize that every child wants to succeed” to “love that child as your own” and on and on. There was no right answer, no wrong answer. The value was in the process of exploring. The staff was able to explore their thoughts and beliefs about students: who they are, what they need, and what a teacher must be in relation to that young person. This was the first meeting of the year. The question posed that morning opened an ongoing discussion and offered a hint of how this school would function.

Later that same morning, Jay gave a presentation entitled, “Who’s Got The Vision?” He asked the staff to reflect quietly, individually on what this school would be this year and would become in the future. This time, no collaboration, and no talking. He asked that each person think for herself or himself, then, draw a circle. “In that circle that is our school, write all the non-negotiables—what we want for our school and students.” They began their year with questioning, inquiry, and investigation. (Observation, August 16)

In an interview with one of the math teachers, she explained that this way of always asking questions was strange to her at first. She had been in school where she often felt that if she approached an administrator or colleagues with a question that it would be considered an interruption or annoyance. She learned here, in this school, that not to ask the question is the inappropriate behavior. Checking in, gaining confidence from others, and working things through together, all are part of the way they do business. (Interview, September 28)

Tamara in the front office explained that asking questions, talking things over, making sure we all understand and are on the same page, “That is how we do it. We don’t leave anything to chance. That is just how we are.” (Interview, September 25)

One teacher shared that she often spoke to herself with questions and the goal of improving her practice.

Well, yeah, what I think, the phrase that keeps going over in my mind is that we are all in this for kids and are they getting what they need? I guess when I think of my own teaching I question everyday: what am I doing? I am pretty hard on myself, but what I ask at the end of the day when kids leave my room, what was the purpose of today? What did they learn? How does it make it better for us all here? (Interview, October 2)

The students are in this world of questions as well, as one would hope. However, the questions for them are of a different sort, also. The questions do not only cover content and areas of study, but equally important to the vision of the school is to have students understand how they learn and why they learn. The goal is to have the students question what they learn and its value. During an observation of a math class, the teacher concluded the lesson with this series of questions in a closing activity.

“What did we learn today? How did you learn this? How did you like this?” Linda then called on the facilitator of each group to share what they learned. Then they gave a ‘fist to five’ response to the day’s work. Linda did a quick Lucky Lotto just for fun, and then said to all the students, “I will see you tomorrow, be safe, I love you.” (Observation, September 28)

The strategy of asking questions and considering possibilities added to the ease and engagement for students as well as teachers. Asking questions would stimulate interest, include their thinking, and encourage participation, particularly when the questions were open-ended and all responses were valued. Then, the engagement would take the community members to the level of evaluating their world and the way this

school was working. The process of dialogue and inquiry had become the way the students and teachers worked from day to day. And, there was a new dimension which became observable and revealing. The school was progressing from questioning in order to learn to the level of questioning in order to change and improve. The process of inquiry was developing into a process to challenge the status quo. The culture they were creating in Year Four revealed a deepening of the process initiated in Year One. In Year One, the process was witnessed and with it a trusting of the process was deepening. In Year Four, the process has reached another level, where everything that had been previously trusted was held to greater examination and scrutiny. The culture was growing not only their trust of a dialectic process of inquiry, but a conscious commitment to question traditional views previously accepted: from Trust the Process to Process the Trust. This was the new facet of the culture: to question and disrupt the status quo.

For teachers, often the questioning focused on how to improve their practice. In department meetings, members would examine the decisions they had made in the past and the ways of doing their work according to traditional thinking. And at that point they were asking, were these ways truly in line with their vision and beliefs? Examples follow of conversations where the examination of traditional ways led way to revision and renewal.

Pat, chairperson of the English department, shared the decision made by her and her colleagues to assign classes to teachers differently.

The department and I were looking at teaching roles. And it came up to who gets which class, which teacher gets which classes. So we had a chance to look at it and say, well, we could go with the traditional model that says the teacher who has been here the longest gets the best and most advanced classes. And you go from there. And then, what we asked was what is really best for kids? And we went with what we know is best for kids. And, so as a department, we said, let's

put the strongest teachers with the lowest kids. And I really have never seen that happen in any other school. And it was really good, and everyone was willing to do it. And, so it is still that you are teaching what you love, and it is also teaching where you can have the most and the best impact on kids. (Interview, September 19)

Bryan, of the science department, explained how his department changed their system of grading. As the grading system existed, they were not able to clarify if the students were really learning what the goals for learning included. They questioned the old way, and created an assessment tool that would really tell them what they needed to know about student achievement.

And so we said, you know what, historically you throw a grade up and the assignment is worth, say, 30 points. And what does that mean? What does that tell us about the learning? And you know what we are trying to get a measure of is students' abilities in different areas. So we came up with this, and this was a great team effort. For every assignment, we look at the concept idea. That is the foundational knowledge. Then, as we progressed, we wanted to get the kids to the higher order thinking skills. We got to the level of analysis, compare, and contrast, and we give a grade for that. And then we would pull it all together with the understanding of the process, and have a grade for that. So our grades were analyzed in three parts. These were the things we wanted kids to learn and we needed this to follow through to know what they did learn. Now we have spreadsheets and templates in place, and let me back up and say that this works really great in conversations with parents and students. (Interview, September 11)

Some of the questioning and changes made were not of monumental proportion. It seemed more a slight shift in thinking about things, a shift that would bring their reality more in line with their philosophy. This shift in thinking could have impressive results. One very interesting example was observed during a faculty meeting early in the fall. The question was what to do with students when they were not learning and not achieving at the appropriate level. The school had initiated a system of I's: Incompletes that would be recorded and reported until the work was accomplished and learning achieved. That system was accepted by the community, although, there was, from time to time, some

debate. However, the question for this day and this meeting was, “what do we do so that the student will learn?” Jay posed the question and teachers shared ideas. The theoretical situation concerned a student receiving a grade of forty percent. Teachers acknowledged that traditionally, the strategy would be to look at all the student was doing wrong, the sixty percent, which was lacking, to begin there to try to change the student and his work. As this discussion proceeded, however, the group began to examine their philosophy of positive support. They as a community had agreed not to work from a position of “shame and blame.” Their energy would come from what they called “positivity.” They concluded that the place to begin to help a student improve would be, logically and most appropriately, in the area of the forty percent he is doing right: to look at what the student has learned and why, where he has succeeded and how, to further understand the how and why, and to build on those. For the moment, leave the failings of the student out of the picture, and focus on the successes, an interesting and different approach from traditional correction and punishment, in order to improve. (Observation, September 19)

One final and powerful example follows. As the community continued to examine the status quo of schooling, they moved to an area that Gloria Ladson-Billings refers to as “disrupting and extending what it means to be normal” (2007, p.389). This example begins with the work of the leadership at the school and in the district, and then concludes with the effort on the part of the community to do things differently with new insight and courage.

During my last interview with Jay, December 3, we spent much of the hour discussing the challenges to doing what is best for the students, to asking the right

question, and to doing things differently. He shared a story of one student in special education whose needs were outside what was “normal” in a public school.

So when I think about why I do the things I do, I ask myself a couple of questions, what am I saying to myself? And there are other questions, let me give you a concrete example. There is this young boy here who’s got multi-categorical special ed. needs. And so he has one para, and he’s got huge needs. And so he kicks, he hits, and he bites. Very primal, very infantile. Right? Okay. I call a meeting with the district people, with lots of experts in behavior, legal people in special ed. and so on and so forth. And I said what do we do when he kicks? Because, now I have staff members with black and blue bruises. And I can’t support them having bruises. So, what do we do when he hits? And then, so the conversation went round and round, and so after fifteen minutes, I said yeah, but what do we do when he kicks, he hits, and he bites? And so it went round again and finally this happened for a third time, and then, someone asked, have you done everything in your environment to affect his behavior positively? And I thought, and I said no. No, and we can look at that a little bit more. So we took off our gloves and got in there, and we did some surgery on our environment. And so the first thing, I looked at was his para. Here we have a para-professional who is the least trained person in that department, the least developed person on the staff, from a knowledge standpoint. And he is with the most challenging kid in the school So what can we do. It is a \$9 an hour job, who can we get that is a great fit? We are not going to get some super person, some super knowledgeable person. You are going to get who you are going to get for \$9 an hour and so you’ve got to develop that person. So I go a little deeper with that person. And I say, tell me how do you do this, and tell me how do you do that? So now, we are having a conversation about how we are affecting the environment around this student. So then, we made about ten wholesale changes to his schedule. We put, Don, his para-professional on a professional development plan. We look at the books and we work in groups and the list goes on and on. My point is by asking that right question with the most challenging kid, it is the question we have to ask ourselves all the time. What have we done in our environment to affect the learning for every kid?

In this story, Jay explained that conventional wisdom might inform the leadership that this student just doesn’t fit—wrong placement—that he cannot be helped and is causing trouble for others. Asking the question, have we done everything in our environment to affect his learning, suggests that possibly the shortcoming is with the system and not with the student. The status quo of the educational system and of this

school's reality needs to be held up to close scrutiny and possible change. Jay explained that this is the way a school should function. The daily task is to ask the right question? Have we done everything? This is the work of school. This work, the challenge of questioning and disrupting the status quo, which can be unfair and at times exclusive, is perhaps summed up best in Jay's sentence, "We took off our gloves and we got in there and we did some surgery on our environment."

In that same interview, December 3, Jay described the culture they could create by doing all they can do.

Okay, so in terms of what we can control, if we can affect the environment so that it produces safety, learning, fun, sense of belonging, you know, desire to improve, that is our work. (Interview, December 3)

#### *HAVE THEY CREATED THE CULTURE THEY WANTED?*

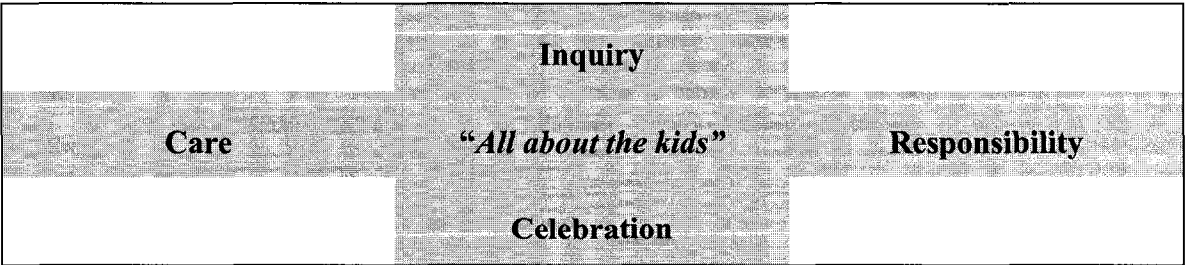
*What did they want? "Safety, learning, fun, sense of belonging, desire to improve."*

The Archival Data and the goals of Year One outlined the plan in which the community determined the pillars that would be the foundation of the new school: Core Knowledge Education, Character Education, and Parent Partnership. These were identified as the foundational constructs on which they would create a school. The guiding principles of the culture were established during many hours of collaboration and in a process that has continued over the four years. The shared vision of that first year included concepts such as dignity of each person, continual learning and improving, responsibility for the education of all, care and compassion, celebration, inclusion and re-inclusion, positivity and integrity, courage, and contribution to the community. By the end of the first year, the research team had witnessed that the junior high school was becoming what it wanted, a safe, fair, and nurturing place where all were known and



valued. Reports from parents, students, and teachers indicated successes to improve teaching and create community. Also, by the end of the first year, they had defined direction for the future. They would work toward diversity, service to others, greater student efficacy and leadership, and growth for all members. These efforts were visible in the culture of the fourth year as were cultural dimensions which were unforeseen, perhaps unexpected. The chart below is a summary of the dimensions of the culture observed.

**Table 5.2.     *Dimensions of the School Culture***



In the initial stage of this study, the member checking of themes from the archival data, the respondents evaluated those themes. The majority of their interviews included statements similar to this one from the chair of the science department:

Yes, we are clearly on the same page when it comes to describing what we have here. But wait a minute. I should mention that there is another theme, or maybe this one is embedded in all the others but it should be said. **It is all about the kids.** That is what we are always thinking. what is best for students and learners and young adults? What is best for kids? I have been in many conversations with many and one on one, and it always gets re-directed. Okay we say it always comes down to what is best for the kids. And that comes from every adult here. (Interview, September 11)

So the center of the culture is “the kids.” The four dimensions of the culture emerged from the data as a way to organize the way in which the people there were working and the kinds of behavior and expectations of behavior in their culture. Each

dimension is essential to the vision, “We will do what is best for kids.” Each dimension is essential to the mission, “Educate Every Child Every Day.” Each dimension offers a different piece of the story.

### *Inquiry.*

One expectation for all the members is continual learning in order to improve and renew oneself and the organization. There was ongoing incentive to ask the next question to become better teachers and to create a better school. Questioning, study, research, and action leading to growth were all expectations. That expectation surfaced when Jay said to the new teacher that he was interested not in the short term, but in the long term and the teacher, she would become. (Interview, October 2) And again, when Linda explained that she was going to return to school for her administrator’s degree because she would share what she had learned with others, “to touch other lives.” (Interview, October 2). We heard it when Bryan explained the new system to enhance and ensure peer coaching. (Interview, September 11). It echoed the collaborative decision that staff meetings would be used for professional development, and other tasks could be accomplished by other means. When they were together, they would collaborate to learn. All teachers were trained in the Core Knowledge Sequence. All teachers and principals participated in the writing and planning of yearlong curricula. In their first year, the entire staff traveled to the Core Knowledge Foundation Annual Meeting to study as well as to present to colleagues from around the country. In small groups and in large groups, the adults were asked to read current literature, to discuss and develop ideas that would assist them in continual improvement. It was a culture of learning for all, from the students, to the

parents, to the staff, to the principals. In the interviews, the staff would talk about all they gained from working in this environment. Many said it had changed them as individuals and made them better in some way. One of the math teachers said it this way:

Jay is a teacher. He has a gift. He loves teaching even though he is the principal. That has everything to do with what goes on here. It is so extraordinary. It is an internal intrinsic something that happens. I feel like everyone on the staff feels this way. It is something that happens to each of us inside of us. It is the shared goals, it is all about the kids, it is the learning, it is making connections.  
(Interview, September 28)

As observed over the months at the school, Jay, himself, was always learning, reading, and sharing what he was learning. He would bring his studies and his expertise to the community in a safe and challenging way. He called them to the next level, and they learned to do the same with their own students. The following is an excerpt from an observation (September 12). Jay was talking to his staff about the work of the School Improvement Plan. All teachers would work on this plan because it directly affects their teaching. Jay acknowledged that this work may be new for some and the analysis of data may be a change and challenge. He described that it is good work, fun, challenging but possible, and safe when they are together.

I was thinking we have to do our SIP. We have to use data and we have to look at CSAP data. We have to have people involved in the writing of those goals. And it all comes up so quickly. So what we did last year, and I know some of you are new this year, but last year we put up the data and other data and it showed us where we needed to go. And the result of that was very positive. And we felt good about the outcome, and we felt good that people got to work together. And we felt good that we **really pierced the veil of fear associated with data**. We accepted that data is your friend and we use it all the time to drive our instructional improvement. (Observation, September 12)

The culture of learning is the essence of school. Inquiry is a central piece. The desire to participate in inquiry and learning is enhanced in environments that are safe and

challenging, not threatening, built on respect and positive attitude. There are the other pieces of the school's culture, necessary pieces to achieve their mission. The discussions of those pieces follow.

### *Responsibility*

The Six P's are very clear about the responsible behavior that is expected of each community member. The Six P's are Polite, Prompt, Positive Mental Attitude, Participatory, Productive, and Prepared (Student Handbook, 2007). These are the words that the students see in classrooms and in halls. These are concepts they talk about often. The list is simple; the reality is not. It is better understood in the context of the culture. The students, teachers, and parents are also expected to conduct themselves with "character" which is expressed through attitudes and behaviors. Those are caring, respect, responsibility, and trustworthiness. The staff agreements are a third statement of accord concerning the way people will treat each other and contribute to the ongoing success and health of the organization. The dimension of responsibility is large. It involves the responsibility of each person to herself for the best learning possible, and the responsibility of each person to continually improve the organization and to lead it forward, and finally the responsibility of the whole organization to educate all students. Individual responsibility at this school was seen in large and small ways. Laura, in an interview in October, explained that being responsible for living the agreements and Six P's was part of everyday, from meetings to classes to extra-curricular events.

In staff meetings, well in other schools, you might see teachers writing notes about planning or something, or even correcting papers during the meeting. We just don't do that here. And, it is not that we have been told not to do that, it is just the way we are here. It is really part of the staff responsibility to themselves and

to each other. It is part of what our job is. We are to be involved and I think kids do so well here because they do see us participating.

Later in that conversation, Laura gave an example of staff members' responsibility for the learning of others.

When we did that fire drill during the staff meeting, in other schools, there might have been sarcasm about why do we have to do this? This is a waste of time. But here there is a difference. We want everyone to learn what they need to succeed and we all need to be on the same page, with the same systems and the same language. And we don't waste time here. We all know how important time is and we all have lots to do. (Interview, October 2)

Apparent in the culture, on individual and group levels, is a deep responsibility for healthy relationships. The belief which undergirds that responsibility is that students will be safe and learn better in a healthy environment. "It is all about relationships." That phrase was spoken hundreds of times by many members of this community. Healthy relationships are the essence of the healthy organization. To promote that environment, all members take responsibility to live by the agreements. The most often heard agreement from all groups was the agreement for "no gossip," that if there is a concern, "take it to the person." In the following excerpts, there are examples of students dealing with this responsibility as well as staff and parents.

Bev, one of the special education teachers is talking to two boys in her afternoon class. Earlier in the day, that morning, the two boys had gotten in a fight. One boy hit the other. Bev called them together to do some problem solving, face to face.

Bev: Bill, why did you feel you needed to hit Sam?

Bill: He was in my personal space.

Sam: I was singing and I told him he did a good job this morning and then he hit me.

Bev: Well, a couple of things have to happen when you hit someone. What has to happen? I need to call your parents. Hitting is never, never okay. You have to fill out a self-reflective essay. Now I need to go to the office and get these forms.

While I am gone, you both need to talk. You need to talk about how you can repair the relationship and deal with your feelings. I want to hear your plan when I come back.

There is another teacher in the room working with other students and overseeing the actions of the two boys. Bev is gone about 15 minutes. While she is gone, the boys discuss their issue.

Bill: Well, you can't come into my personal space.

Sam: How about a couple of days apart?

Bill: Okay, two feet of personal space and a couple of days apart. I will not hit.

Sam: Let's say, no touching, no patting, even as buddies.

Bev returns and asks the boys about their plan. She responds: You kids are awesome, fabulous, the most fabulous in the school, well except for all the other kids in this class. Now, you need to fill out the reflective essay.

Sam works on his alone. Bev asks another student, a small quiet young girl to help Bill. She reads the questions on the form to Bill, he answers, and she writes his answers. The questions give both boys an opportunity to reflect on the problem and a way to repair the relationship. It is a safe and loving place where problem solving is the focus and the students are responsible to speak with honesty and respect for the other.

(Observation, October 17)

There were many examples of this expectation responsibility to take an issue directly to the person involved. It would require courage. It was part of their agreements. Teachers asked students to speak directly with teachers rather than to talk about them. Parents shared with parents that if there was a concern, go to the teacher and talk. The counselor, Anna, saw this as part of her role to encourage parents and students to talk with staff members about concerns or any questions with the goal of building healthy

relationships. This was one of the powerful pieces of building the culture of learning they wanted.

Finally, the third aspect of responsibility was the sense of each person's responsibility to the whole of the organization, to move the organization forward toward its mission. The mission itself expressed the responsibility of the whole to each child. John Goodlad (1994) called this the stewardship of schools and identified it as a moral dimension for schooling in a democracy.

At the junior high school, there was evidence of this responsibility on a daily basis. Their work would be done in partnership and in collaboration. Partnerships existed within the school between parents and staff, between administrators and teachers, between individual teachers, and between and among departments. Partnerships existed outside of the school between community and school, and the larger district and the school. The work would focus on school improvement and it would be done in collaboration. In a conversation with the chair of the English department, she explained her understanding of the responsibility to the organization.

Well, there is another huge collaborative concept that has to do with I am not just responsible to my class or to the English department, but to the whole. So as I represent the English department, we don't place ourselves against the other departments. Now in other schools we have experienced exactly that, and not only that but there was an expectation for it. That I as department leader would always go in and ask about what we would get. Are you going to give us enough money? Are you going to this for our department? And I have to say that that is not the way we do things here. It is let's look at whatever social studies needs and English doesn't need, and let's work it out. And it is certainly not typical or traditional junior or senior high school. (Interview, September 9)

The special education teacher explained her view of this responsibility to the whole as she explained communicating with everyone.

Although we maintain confidentiality always about kids on IEP's, we need to trust in the professional responsibility. We send out minutes from our Learning Center meetings to the entire teaching staff. It is about communicating with everyone, so that all teachers can do their best work in meeting the needs of the students. In special education, the rule of thumb is "need to know" basis. Our feeling is that all staff working with that individual child need to know how to work with the academic, behavioral, and social needs. (Interview, September 6)

This responsibility to improve the organization and improve instruction for each child was observed time and again. Programs like peer coaching, team meetings, study groups, professional development workshops, and conferences are all part of the culture. The intent is to continue to grow and to change and to improve. Another example of responsibility in the organization to provide the best for individual students was shared by the counselor, Anna. She explained a change in the course offerings that took place during second semester and has grown over the four years with ongoing research and evaluation.

I love the story of our honors program, especially the honors English and the placement. You know, in Year One Pat was teaching English. And she was just starting to notice that there were some kids that, in the spirit of differentiation, needed the next level. You know you need to be equitable to those who need extra support but you need to be equitable to those who need more enrichment. And so we started to research all sorts of possibilities, IB, and AP and honors and we said, you know, let's start an honors program. It was Year One. Let's do a pilot and continue to study and learn with it. So we started an application process. So we had people apply. We had test scores, and parent input, and the kids all had to complete an application and write a letter about why they wanted this program. And any student could apply. That's right, any student. They just needed to want to do it. (Interview, October 8)

This was one example of the action research efforts accomplished in the direction of improving the school and fitting education to individual students' needs. There were less formal efforts on a daily basis: kid talk, ELO check-ins, department discussion, and brain storming all with the same goal, creating the best environment for students. The



environment of this school revealed another dimension to enhance learning, the dimension of a culture of care.

*Care.*

Nel Noddings (2007) defined ‘caring for someone’ as creating a safe place where a person would flourish, where that person would be challenged, cherished, and encouraged to grow to her or his potential. Caring for the members of this learning community had many facets to the definition: a sense of belonging to something bigger, being valued and protected, being included and re-included, and being recognized as a capable, talented member who would both contribute to and receive from the community.

In an interview with one of the special education teachers, she explained what that kind of care looked like for some of her students and how the teachers created that culture.

Bev continued, in that interview, to explain that much of the culture was created by the teachers modeling for the students.

You have to work at things you really, really want. We continue to work at inclusion and how we can build that acceptance with kids. We have difficulties but there are always successes. We could say this happens because there are terrific teachers here, there are! We could call it the benefits of inclusion. The truth is that kids want to be with their classmates; they don’t want to be different or left out. All kids want to be in the classes and they want to be successful. I think it is the “ah ha” moments, the “I get the assignment,” the “I am part of this group even though I struggle.” It is more like when you hear a student say it was fun, it was great, and they get it! It is so much better for kids to be in a regular classroom with support than in a resource room.

It is a daily occurrence that kids are working together. And that is true in the majority of our classes because it is not just a sit and get environment. It is interactive. Let’s learn this and let’s use those ninety minutes to get up and do something together. In your groups, decide on your roles, so we are teaching kids

about working together and about leadership. We are teaching kids about trusting each other, and teaching kids about becoming responsible members of a team. And there is the whole piece of confronting the issues. So two members of your team are not working, how are you going to solve this? So really, what we are doing as adults here, the way we work and model, we are transferring to the kids on a daily basis.

One of the success stories that Bev shared was of a young boy in special education who came to the school in year one. The boy had had problems in several settings and was not welcome at other schools. In that first year, Jay shared with the staff that they would welcome this boy. Bev remembered his words at the faculty meeting four years ago. Jay said that they wanted this student and they welcomed this student because he might be the one who would show them and teach them who they are. Bev told of the success the young boy experienced and what the others learned.

That student in particular will always be special to us. I visited him last week at the high school. He finished his three years here and he made great, great progress. He was happy, he was accepted, and without going into specifics, he had a very hard time academically. He worked at his level and other students accepted him. We did a lot of education in his classes about his disability. We really did work at this as a team.

Bev added in her interview that this feeling of belonging and being accepted was one that they worked for every student in the school.

And so it is our job, making sure those connections are happening. Every kid here is asked to identify an adult they would go to if, you know, they were struggling with something. And a lot of times early in the year, we have kiddos come down here to the learning center because it is a safe place. The learning center is the safe place for them. But then as the year goes on they may identify another adult. And that is great! You know because that means they are feeling a part of the school too. That this is not the only place that they can get support. They know they can get it anywhere in the school. (Interview, September 6)

In a learning community, the teachers as well as the students need to feel safe and supported. Many examples of the support for teachers were observed at this school. Jay continually checked on the needs of the staff. Often in meetings, he would stop and say,

“Well, wait a minute, how about if I stop and just ask you, how does that sound so far? What do you think? What are you feeling so far? Does it feel okay so far?” (Observation, September 12)

The staff would often receive articles or questionnaires to help improve their own practice. In preparation for a staff meeting, a flyer went out to the teachers asking the following questions: Please reflect on your instructional practice. What areas of your instructional practice would you like coaching/ feedback? (October 24.)

In staff meetings, and professional development time, teachers in the school would teach their colleagues.

This is what we are about. So out of that, are our peer coaches. And they could do a block on teaching on the block. They will teach on the block about teaching on the block using effective strategies for teaching on the block, get it? We have to see it and feel it and experience it. And we best get it when we become students first, or when we teach it ourselves. So I am sure they will do a great job, get people up, and excited. So that when we walk away, we feel like we have something. So that the focus for improvement is instruction, instruction, instruction. And of course, we know instruction is tied to relationships. (Observation, September 12)

Members of the community acknowledged that the principal had a great deal to do with the creation of a supportive culture. In interviews, it became clear that it was a part of the culture that was growing with all the members. In an interview with a parent who is now on staff at the school, she shared her understanding.

I wanted to work here because everyone does get along so well. And the leadership is good, and you are motivated to work and to talk to each other. And the leadership influences others in the building like here in the library. It is so warm and friendly and the media specialist, Alice, did that here. She created this environment and people just want to be here. (Interview, September 28)

In the parents’ focus group session, one parent explained that the feeling of safety and belonging was felt throughout the school among students.

My kids have a sense of safety that does not happen in all schools, unfortunately. But there is that here, and everyone here feels part of it. Even when kids from other schools call them nerds, they feel happy to be here and proud that they are known as sort of academic nerds, I guess, but they do good in sports and other things and they feel like they belong. So they see that being good at academics not as a negative. And they are safe in other ways. There are many aspects to feeling safe. I mean with the teachers and physically they feel safe. One of the things that was so interesting to me for my ninth grader. She said that when they were younger there were cliques and now as a ninth grader, everyone feels together and no more cliques, and I really credit that to the environment. So she says, now they are all together at lunch and really everybody really kind of gets along with everybody.

One of the earliest observations of the administrators working with new students at the school in August 2007 might be considered foreshadowing of this cultural dimension, which would surface so large throughout the semester. It was a morning scheduled for observations. One observation was unexpected.

Jay passed by where I was working and asked if I would like to join him and Bob, the assistant principal as they greeted the 100 sixth graders new to the school. The three of us went upstairs to the sixth grader section. The students were seated in long rows next to their four classrooms on the second floor. Their teachers were there on the floor with them. Jay began with introduction of staff and himself. He began talking to the audience of young, excited students. He said that he and his colleagues wanted to talk about the Six P's and why they were important at this school. Bob held up a chart showing the six important key words while Jay explained them briefly. Then the principal organized the group into twelve smaller groups and explained their task. They were to portray what these words meant and then share their understanding with the large group. They could sing, dance, draw, and write a poem or a cheer, or something creative to explain what each word meant. The group of youngsters got to work. The work involved singing and dancing and giggling. They did write poems and cheers and songs, and they joyfully, amidst laughter, shared them with the group. It was something of a celebration. When all groups had presented, Jay offered a few words of closure. He said, "Now, follow the Six P's. If not, you may hurt yourself. If you do hurt yourself, we will be there to help you get on track." The words came like a gentle wisdom from an adult who will care. (Field notes, August 21)

The sixth grade students may not have known what their principal meant exactly. In December, later that semester, other students were able to witness what “helping you get back on track” could look like and feel like.

In a meeting with parent volunteers in the morning of December 19, the principal announced that in the afternoon assembly for eighth and ninth graders, a student who had been expelled from the school last year would ask his classmates for permission to return to the school and also ask for their help. Last year this boy had been involved in an incident involving a gun at school. He had to leave the school and spend time in jail. In the fall, after serving his time, he asked if he could return. The principal worked with him and his parents. He established conditions and expectations for the young man. One condition was that he would address his classmates in an assembly to explain his story for himself. Parents described their understanding and feelings concerning this experience.

Parent #1: Well I wasn’t there at the assembly but my kids came home talking about it. My daughter said lots of people were crying and it was amazing. So I said that I would have been crying too. My eyes are filling now as I talk about it. That took so much courage for that young boy to stand up in front of hundreds of kids, to say he was sorry and to ask for their help. And you know what else it shows that if you screw up, it doesn’t mean you are done. And so all of our kids saw that too, that he made a big booboo and he paid the price and now, we can take him back.

Parent #2: That event really gave Jay the opportunity to teach something important, to talk about high expectations and consequences for actions. And about this student who wanted to come back to our school. That speaks highly of this place that he was willing to do whatever it takes to come back. And he actually had to get up in front of the school and apologize for his actions. He actually had to ask the students if he could be let back in.

Parent #3: And it was really set up well, too. The principal and assistant principal with the parole officer all standing behind this boy in support. And I think they did a good job of setting up expectations of this boy and limitations to keep safety for others in place. It was clear that he had screwed up, but he was allowed back and he had to know that he would be held to high standards. Then the parole

officer really made a good point and he made it strong that sticking to higher standards does not mean that if he drops a pencil in the hall and does not pick it up, it is all over for him, that they will immediately bust him for that. So that he does not have, a target painted on his back.

Parent #4: I think that all the kids there got a sense that we are really together. That we are all one, what happens to one of us affects all of us. I think that whole assembly was a way of saying, like “the prodigal son”. This is one of ours. Let’s take him in. Now we are going to work together, as a community, as a student body and you guys all have the responsibility to help this one come back to us. We are all one.

A culture of care has many essential pieces (Noddings, 2007). Many were observed at this school and discussed by members. Safety, protection, challenge, sense of value and belonging, inclusion, re-inclusion, and restorative justice. At the conclusion, of the assembly on December 19, there was celebration.

#### *Celebration.*

In August 2005, in a presentation entitled “Our Spirit,” the principal said this of the school’s culture:

None of us is as smart as all of us. We all have dreams and fears whichever is bigger we get to keep. Let’s treat each other with dignity and respect, not shame and blame. Honesty without kindness is cruel. All we can control is our attitude and our work ethic. It’s not what happens to us, but it is what we do with that. Have fun, fun, fun!

Later in that presentation, the principal defined “celebration” at the school: “We will enthusiastically honor all accomplishments and encourage further success.” (Staff Presentation: Our Spirit, 2005)

In December 2007, when asked what is important in creating a school, the principal said, “Safety, learning, fun, sense of belonging and desire to improve.” (Interview, December 3)

What did “fun” and “celebration” look like in this culture? During the six months of study, in 2007, each time the staff or any part of the staff was observed meeting, the meeting began with sharing and celebration. Regardless of who began the meeting, the question was the same or very similar: What’s new? What’s good?

And then our faculty meetings, when the whole staff gets together, it is such a celebration. There is always a lot of sharing and great things going on. We have every meeting with great things going on. Even that alone, it just renews you. Even if it is just a leadership meeting and there is sharing and celebrating and then you bring that back to your team. Like for example, there is this amazing thing going on in the music department. And for us, it is like, well, we could help with that. We could be part of that and so we jump right in. So then we take it to the next level, we take it to our kids and encourage them to think, ‘how can we get involved?’ (Interview, September 6)

The science department meeting begins at 7:50 am. Bryan points to the agenda on the board and then starts the meeting with his question: What’s new? What’s new in school or in life? Teachers share. Two young female teachers announce that they are excited and pleased with the outcome of the seventh grade science field trip. Another teacher asks questions about ECO week. Another shares that eighth grade students are brainstorming the science fair, very excited, and lots of questions. Her students have said that they want to begin projects earlier this year. (Observation, September 11)

At a staff meeting on September 19, Anna and the counseling department are leading. They will be facilitating the discussion on “Kid Talk.” Anna starts the meeting explaining that they have several activities looking at ways to enhance the work of “Kid Talk,” but first she asks, “Good things? Celebrations? What’s going on in your classrooms, in your life?” One of the new teachers on staff, a sixth grade teacher shares, “Well I don’t even know who to thank but all I know is on Thursday and Friday both the seventh and eighth grade student councils will come to our rooms for Spirit Day. They plan to decorate and bring cookies and other stuff for all the sixth grade.

Another response to Anna’s question comes from a teacher who wants to celebrate the success of a colleague. She tells a funny story. I have to tell this story about Laura, it is so great, and it is about how she is connecting to kids. I was in her classroom observing and she said to the kids, “I need everything to be so quiet that we can hear a pin drop.” Well the kids understood I want to hear a **pen** drop, so they all took out their pens and dropped them near their desks. Then

everyone in the classroom laughed. (Then everyone in the meeting laughed too.) (Observation, September 19)

At the meeting this afternoon, staff meeting, 3:30, September 12, the principal and assistant principal reviewed with the group the plan that the whole group had decided on for their upcoming Collaboration Day. Then Jay added a surprise to the plan. "Then, after the morning activities, you won't be bringing your lunch. We have arranged for lunch together. We set up an arrangement with The Steak House down the road, and they will be opening up early just for us, and we will all have lunch together." After Jay's announcement, there is lots of applause, whistles, and laughter. (Observation, September 12)

During the interview with the chair of the English department, she shared a story of the entire school traveling to conference to learn and to celebrate learning.

That was the trip to the Core Knowledge Conference in San Antonio. We actually closed school for three days and the parents supported it! And we all flew down to attend this conference. It was so great. It was wonderful. So, that was just one of those golden experiences. But those shared experiences, those celebratory experiences are really important to collaboration. People coming together. It familiarizes them with each other and if you do hit something that you disagree on, you have this positive experience backing you up. (Interview, September 28)

Both principals shared a project that they said was one of the most fun things they do. It is called the Positive Behavior Referral (PBR). Before a scheduled interview with the principal, the two principals were standing in the main office with several students. The students had been called to the office.

Jay welcomed the first student into the office. He received a PBR from one of the teachers in the hall when the teacher saw him pick up some garbage on the floor and throw it away. Because he did this when he did not have to, the teacher wanted to give him the award. The award is meant for doing the right thing when no one is looking. The student did not know why he was called to the office but a broad smile appeared on his face when Jay told him. And he continued to explain to the student that his name and photo would appear on the board outside the office for this commendation. And Jay said that he would call his mother to explain the actions of her son and the award he received. The student left the office, still with the broad smile, after receiving a high five from his principal. Jay called the next student, a tall young ninth grader. She had found a dollar in the school and returned it to the office. (Observation, August 28)

In the many conversations and interviews with participants, they described their environment as joyful, positive, fun, challenging, and safe. Many said that it was due to



their agreements and their solution-oriented attitude. This was not a culture free of problems, according to their comments. It was a culture where reframing problems and seeking solutions were deeply embedded within their thinking. They created the word “positivity” to name this piece of the culture. Celebrating that positivity was part of the day-to-day experience.

December 19<sup>th</sup> was the day of the assembly during which the ninth grade boy, involved in last year’s gun incident, spoke to his classmates. In front of 300 young people or more, with the support of adults standing behind him, he asked them all to forgive and let him come back. He admitted to a big mistake, that if the loaded gun had not been reported to the office, “really bad stuff could have happened.” He continued to say that he knew he would be on a “really short leash,” but that he had learned a lot and wanted to come back. His parole officer spoke for him, too. “This boy is asking for help. What you can do is allow him back. Allow him back into your home. He is growing up; give him a chance.” At this point in the assembly, many eyes had filled with tears, those of adults and students. The students applauded as if to say yes. When the applause subsided, one small young girl toward the center of the bleachers raised her hand and said to her classmate, “Paul, I would be proud to come down to give you a hug.” The principal gave her a nod, and permission to come down. Perhaps this young girl had learned that this would be a good time to celebrate.

A culture of Inquiry, Responsibility, Care and Celebration. The data speak for the community that they had created the culture they wanted. When asked in an interview if she thought the school could maintain such a positive culture, one teacher responded:

I think so. If you had asked me that two years ago, it would have been questionable in my mind because it was such a new school. Things were changing

and we were figuring things out. They had not become embedded yet. But now that we know what to expect and how to expect and how that feels, and how much success we've had, I think this way of doing things will stay. (Interview, October 2)

#### SECTION FOUR: RESEARCH QUESTIONS 4 AND 5

What are the challenges to the process of change?

Hoq does this school fit in the larger district?

#### WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES TO THE PROCESS OF CHANGE?

The challenges for this school are like those of most public schools. The school grows in size. Communication and collaboration become more difficult. Within the limitations of public education, funding is never sufficient. The demands of the profession are great, and teacher burnout and frustration are real. The media seem to neglect much of the good work of schools. Tradition pulls institutions back to the “good old ways” of doing things efficiently and easily. “Conventional wisdom” often deters educators from finding the best solution for students (Benham-Tye, 2000). Even when a group of people clearly wants to do things differently and their effort is deliberate, there can be a cultural blindness. Parents, students, and educators have been “marinated” in traditional thinking which continues to oppress some and exclude others (Dei & Kempf, 2000).

These conditions, which enter a school from the greater community, are as present for this school as for others.

*Increase in size.*

An English teacher said, “We did great things when we were small. Three years ago, we had a small staff. Now we have gotten bigger and it just takes more time

to bring people in. It takes more time to review that and remember, oh yeah, that is what we did two years ago. We created so many good things and you forget what you have done. It is like with lesson planning where you get a really good lesson and then you forget. (Interview, September 19)

#### *Relationships.*

Well, there are elements that play into the diminishment of change. There are other than the time commitment. There is complacency. The idea that, well, I have already collaborated with this person or I have known this person for years so I have already been there, done that. Relationships. Perhaps this person and that person have not gotten along well over time and now they just don't like each other very much. Or your relationship became deeper. And as is the case with any long-term relationship, it begins to change. Sometimes back to what feels comfortable rather than wanting to move forward (Interview, September 27)

#### *Complacency.*

I think one issue with the parents might be complacency. Not in the beginning when we really didn't know how things would go. But now, after three years and all is going so well, and Jay has done such a great job, parents may feel we just don't have to worry about it anymore. (Interview, October 18)

#### *Demands of the profession.*

Well, you know people think I should be dropping. You know people say, are you ready to drop? And I am not; I just really manage time well. (Interview, September 28)

I am passionate about my work, but right now, there is an imbalance. We all must take care of ourselves. (Interview, October 18)

Bryan is walking down the hall to check in on one of the new teachers in the department. Some frustrations and "hitting some walls" especially at this time year when there is so much new for new teachers to learn. Working at school until 9:30 at night, very tiring. Bryan helps with the computer grade book. (Observation, September 11)

#### *Resources.*

We did some research and looking at the master schedule, to get complete collaboration built in the day, we would need about twenty percent more staffing from the district. (Interview, September 7)

Staff members spoke of these conditions along with their efforts to meet the challenges. Collaboration appeared, in most responses, as the best way to meet and deal with obstacles:

And because of scheduling limitations, we asked which team really wanted common times. And it was the science department, English department, and world languages. They wanted time together in the schedule. The math department did not. They said, you know what, what we want is common planning with the teachers who teach the same subjects, so we will work that out on our own. (Interview, August 28)

We want to support teachers and be of help, you know, teachers working together. So we have this peer-coaching plan but we know to develop the district plan we need more staffing, but we don't get that. But staffing is something we can work. We have potential to add it. We had to use a half time staffing to initiate the coaching. And the whole consensus of the staff was to go with it. It meant maybe two to five more students in some classes, but everyone felt the benefits would outweigh the cost. (Interview, September 11)

When situations were difficult, the staff focused on solutions not impossibilities. They would rely on staff agreements of positive attitude and solutions.

In a counseling department meeting, they have hit an obstacle, shortage of time to test all the students for a new pilot program. The counselors don't think it is possible. They call Jay to the meeting. Anna says that this is not logistically possible to get all the students in the testing labs in three weeks. Jay sits down with teachers; they work on possible schedule changes. Jay says, "This testing is not a stress. How we react to it is the stress. We need to be positive. My goal is not to have the best scores in the world. It is to pilot this test and grow with it. It is a three to five year plan. It is something we grow with, something we learn from. We just need to fill out the schedule." The lab specialist adds, "I can do that." (Observation, October 10)

Parents also expressed the desire to be part of the solution.

Well that is really one of the big problems. There is so much paperwork and stuff outside the class that teachers get burned out before they can really do with the kids what they want to. That increases their disillusion and frustration. That is the goal and always has been the goal of the parent partnership. We want to do everything we can do and can take from the teachers.

The school, and the members there, took on the task of examining the traditional ways. Their vision continued to be “what is best for kids.” With that in mind, they were asked to re-create and renew their methods. In interviews, many participants said that they were asked to continually examine what they were doing and why.

Many of the participants mentioned that they were asked to look at things here. One teacher said that one of the biggest things about coming to a school like this is that you have to let go of how things were done at other schools. (Interview, September 6)

One way to break down the power of traditional thinking is to hold it up for examination (Benham-Tye, 2000). To keep the momentum of change strong, the staff would deal with the tougher questions. Staff meetings almost always offered questions for discussion around what this community really wanted the school to be. As these thoughts and answers were brought to the table, they became a defense against the pull back to the past. As the community matured, now in its fourth year, the questions grew more challenging, calling for deeper work. Many of the questions focused on what might be considered “dead weight” or those forces that contribute to “organizational inertia” (Benham-Tye, 2000). One of the English teachers explained how the staff established their protocol for “kid talk.” They discussed what that should look like and what the purpose would be.

Traditionally, it happens in the teachers’ lounge, but it is often negative, you know, oh I can’t stand that kid or you know what this kid is doing now? It is just kind of that venting that teachers do. And that is private time, and it is their right to vent. But what we have done in kid talk is we have a protocol. It is for example based on the six P’s, and so, we begin a quick check in. And what is this kid doing well? That is where we start. (Interview, September 19)

When the faculty discussion returns to the core beliefs that all kids are welcome and valued, and that this school will do whatever it takes for students' success, the observed result is an effort toward deeper work. The deeper work is a movement toward more conversation concerning what those core beliefs really mean. For example, conventional wisdom might say "one bad apple spoils the bunch," so if there is a problem child, he should not be allowed back. A core belief of this school is that all kids are welcome. Their core belief is in conflict with traditional wisdom. This school did welcome their student back. And, more wisdom might say that if a student is failing, let's look at what she is doing wrong and fix her. This school, however, looks from a different perspective, to look for what the student is doing well, and to start there to support that child. And the school looks at the environment or the system in order to change those in a way to enhance the child's success. The school has become, for itself, a process of scrutiny. Conventional wisdom and traditional beliefs that continue to support the status quo are questioned with the goal of seeing where and if they fit the vision of the school. "If we make this decision, what does it say about who we are?" (Observation, August 16)

In the last interview with the principal, using the list of phenomena named by Benham-Tye (2000) as the deep structures of schooling, Jay agreed that those phenomena exist and influence this school as they exist for every school.

Deep structure of schooling is under-girded by a number of interconnected phenomena that exert a conservative pull on efforts to change the way things are done in schools. They help to create an institutional inertia. They are:

1. The social context: conventional wisdom and the role of the media

2. The structural characteristics of the institution itself: a bureaucracy, a hierarchy
3. Fiscal realities: including the strong influence of the knowledge industry
4. Parent expectations and community assumptions
5. Demands of teaching and the nature of the profession (Benham-Tye, 2000, p.3)

Yeah, there are all of those forces, aren't there? So you know in my perfect world, I am a fan of William Glasser. And in that perfect world, in that quality world he talks about all of the forces, as external forces. So all these forces are external. So if we talk about the individual and the institution, we talk about the two together and we have to ask, do I do what I do because of stimulus around me, do I give in to that? Does it determine my behavior? Am I a victim to it? Or do I do something because I am responding to something inside me? I have wrestled with that for twenty years because I don't live in a perfect world. So it is moving from a place of victim to a place of personal power to reframe any of these things. You know what I say to those things, I say they are real. But, if I see them as forces that are affecting my behavior, then I am done. So you have to set the direction, and not everyone agrees. I mean look at the newspapers, look at the TV, there is a lot of negativity out there...So I recognize that those forces are at work. I recognize the negativities but I look at the organization as dynamic, like a human being. And so I have to keep it simple, any human being has to look inside, like myself, and ask, why do I do what I do? I am asking myself that all the time. Why do I do what I do? Why do I think what I think? Why do I say what I say? We are creatures of habit. We do what is habitual. And so I think things in my brain that never go away. That is what the research says that the brain never forgets. You might forget, but the brain never does, once you hear it, it is there somewhere. So then, we need to re-program ourselves and reframe the things we say to ourselves. And that starts with the self and this is hard work. Then you look at someone going through this change process, and all change, whether you want it or not, involves grief. Change always requires the grief process, whether it is wanted change or unwanted. (Interview, December 3)

#### *HOW DOES THIS SCHOOL FIT IN THE LARGER DISTRICT?*

Barbara Benham-Tye, 2000, makes an argument that isolated change will fail.

The "deep structures" of schooling are so well established that they will not be changed.

For change to “stick,” it must be going in the same general direction of the greater system, or at least in the direction of change that the society wants to go.

On December 3, before the interview with Jay began, I noticed a list on the board of the meeting room where the interview would take place. The list read Leadership: 1) setting direction, 2) developing people, and 3) redesigning the organization. I asked Joe about the list, and the interview began with his response.

It is the job. It is the work. Redesigning the organization is the work anyway. Not because it is some external mandate that came down or some initiative that we might have to re-shuffle for any variety of reasons—from fiscal management to unused space to over-crowded schools. The bottom line is that leadership requires that we redesign the organization. (Interview, December 3)

Jay explained that the work he and the staff are doing is part of what the district and leadership are about. The school is not working against the system; but, because they are going in the same direction, this creates positive conditions for the success of their change process. Other staff members expressed this connection with the school district. The assistant principal said that in many ways, in terms, of collaboration and change they are probably just a little ahead of the curve. (Interview, September 7)

A department chair said that with regard to the Peer Coaching plan, theirs was serving as an example and good model for the district. (Interview, September 11)

The office manager said that they are connected and supported by the district, that they do everything that happens in the rest of the district, only they do it better. She said that in a bit of a whisper during the interview. (Interview, September 25)

The team of parents during the focus group recognized that they were on the cutting edge of parent partnerships in the district and continuing to grow larger and more active. (Interview, February 13)

In an email interview, an English teacher responded in writing about the connection to the district.



I think this school (and Jay's work) is having a subtle influence on the other junior highs in the district especially as new principals come in and hear the ideas and the culture that have developed. I think what is different is the agreement that we have not to gossip, and the highly collaborative nature of the staff.

The school slogan "We are all in this together" seemed to reflect the general feeling and relationship with the district as well as within the school itself.

Jay, later in that last interview, explained that they were all heading toward the same goal, and "going with the flow" was a necessary way to see the challenges.

I mean sometimes I feel like I am doing a lot of work for the district, and I am the principal of a specific site. So it might begin to feel like I have two jobs. But, really, in working at the district level, in redesigning the organization, I am really a beneficiary. Because being on all those committees and doing work for the district, I actually get first-hand knowledge and how to implement here at this school. Anyway, I made peace with that this weekend. Leadership is redesigning the organization. It is the work. (Interview, December 3)

## SECTION FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Tables 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 are matrices of areas of description of the school culture and the process of change. Cultural themes, new dimensions of culture, and challenges to change emerged from the data analysis resulting in a description of these areas of the school.

Table 5.3 includes four cultural themes analyzed in the original study, and then reviewed by the participants of this study during the member checking stage of research. The last three themes (see Table 5.4) emerged during the data analysis of this study. Combined, the discussion of the seven themes offers an overall understanding of the past and the present of this dynamic organization.

**Table 5.3. Cultural Themes from Archival Data**

Themes	Where Observed?	Change over Time?	Contribution?
<p><b><u>Collaboration</u></b></p> <p>“It is just the way we do things here”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year One, incorporated in the daily schedule</li> <li>• A core principle of operation</li> <li>• On every level of personnel: student, parents, teachers, staff, principals, district</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased over time, along with shared leadership</li> <li>• Shared leadership in facilitation</li> <li>• More complex in scheduling</li> <li>• Takes more time, “pros” outweigh “cons”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diminished feeling of isolation</li> <li>• Feeling of being “in this together”</li> <li>• Deeper examination of issues</li> <li>• More informed understanding for decision making</li> <li>• Conducive to a culture of inclusion and responsibility to the whole</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Visionary Leadership</u></b></p> <p>“Principal as Protector of the Vision”</p> <p>“He is prepared, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and open to the group’s learning”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year One, leading the members in creating the vision—a co-visionary process.</li> <li>• Leading with questions—“If we make this decision, what does it say about who we are, what we want now, and in five years?”</li> <li>• Leader/Teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visionary leadership grown to greater shared leadership</li> <li>• Focus of vision: “all about the kids”</li> <li>• Members become protectors of vision</li> <li>• Leading with high expectations, at “demanding pace,” moving forward to vision</li> <li>• “No Cobwebs”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members feeling empowered in a positive culture</li> <li>• Motivated to do best work toward vision</li> <li>• Working with this principal “a moving and growing experience”</li> <li>• Contributing to work toward authenticity of members and school</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Agents of Change</u></b></p> <p>From isolation, to conversation, to transformation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before the school existed, parents initiated idea for CK junior high school</li> <li>• Year One, member statements of focus of work read: take personal responsibility and ask How can I? What can I?</li> <li>• Parents and Staff engaged in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over time, change implemented by staff members, departments, and parent partnership, in curriculum, scheduling, peer support, instruction, assessment, and extra-curricular work</li> <li>• Continuing participation and presentation in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased communication</li> <li>• More support for peers and colleagues</li> <li>• Empowered feeling of “being part of something bigger”</li> <li>• Engendered a different way of viewing work: Teachers do not say, “Just for certain students.” Parents do not say, “Just for my child.”</li> </ul>

	<p>conversations of purpose, mission, how to improve learning for all</p>	<p>educational conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing Parent Partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotes effort to look at the whole of the school</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Trust the Process</u></b></p> <p>Trust in the way people work together and treat each other</p> <p>A way that transcends the individuals there</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year One, staff and parents came together to discuss all aspects of new school. Asked to trust the dialogue in spite of ambiguity and unanswered questions</li> <li>• Established operating principles common, language, and core beliefs to guide their work</li> <li>• Dialogic process in classes and in decision making meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process is stronger more visible and embedded in culture</li> <li>• Still driven by same shared vision</li> <li>• Protected by: Staff agreements, Decision Matrix, Rules of Dialogue, Six P's, and School Character</li> <li>• Over time, it has developed a protocol, strategies, language and new dimensions—from “fist to five” to challenging of status quo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Germinated belief that “group intelligence will rise to where it needs to be”</li> <li>• Members feeling safe and valued as part of the process</li> <li>• Time to reflect, to increase understanding, and to “get on the same page”</li> <li>• Creating safe place to do “deeper work”</li> <li>• A move from trusting the process to processing what they trust</li> </ul>

**Table 5.4.     *New Themes - Year Four***

New Themes	The Journey of Change	Contribution to Culture
<p><b><u>“Speed Boat to House Boat to Barge”</u></b></p> <p>A learning community continues to grow</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continual forward movement toward shared vision</li> <li>• Making decisions more slowly, the “vessel” is bigger with more people</li> <li>• Instituting more opportunities for participation and communication</li> <li>• Awareness and effort to include and enculturate new members</li> <li>• Continuing in same direction as greater district, serving as model, on cutting edge</li> <li>• Knowing when to slow and stop for “refuel”</li> <li>• Meeting obstacles with positive attitude</li> <li>• Accepting that everything takes more time</li> <li>• Honoring accomplishments along the way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiencing ongoing success in doing things differently and better</li> <li>• Deeper understanding essence of organization and sense of history</li> <li>• Stronger sense of shared leadership</li> <li>• More systems of collaboration, therefore collaborative spirit greater, teachers, parents, and leadership meetings every day</li> <li>• The journey of change is a journey of discovery and possibility. They see “much more to come”</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Each Person’s Journey</u></b></p> <p>Professional and personal growth for individuals—meeting members where they are</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laura’s story: A new teacher hired for the teacher she will become</li> <li>• Anna’s story: A teacher setting goals for career interests and improving her practice</li> <li>• Shaun’s story: Meeting challenges and transitions with optimism and honesty. Courage to take on tasks and responsibility to the greater organization</li> <li>• Linda’s story: A successful career teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirmation for new teachers, ongoing support for professional development and growth</li> <li>• Support for continued success working with a mentor</li> <li>• Sense of accomplishment, facing concerns, and creating solutions. Professional satisfaction for being part of something greater</li> <li>• Awareness of necessity for balance</li> <li>• Joy of working with</li> </ul>

	wanting to continue her training, share her experience, expertise, and passion	colleagues as peer coach. Learning leadership skills with others on staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support to follow passion for learning</li> </ul>
<b><u>Trust the Process to Process the Trust</u></b>  Dialogue, Discussion & Discovery to Challenging Status Quo & Creating New World View	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member checking phase validated the dialogic process of Year One as the way the school was functioning</li> <li>• Hours of collaboration.</li> <li>• Policies discussed and established together</li> <li>• Year Four: new dimension</li> <li>• Questioning tradition</li> <li>• Examining reality and environment</li> <li>• Challenging status quo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coming together in dialogue catalyzed a system of inquiry and improved strategies of questioning</li> <li>• Hours of conversation fostered deeper questions, deeper work</li> <li>• Questioning traditional ways and holding reality up to scrutiny engendered the possibility to change reality and “do surgery on the environment”</li> <li>• Challenging status quo afforded all members the opportunity to participate in new and different ways of being together</li> </ul>

Table 5.5 offers a summary of the culture that the community created over the period of four years. These cultural dimensions emerged from the analysis of both interviews and observation from August 2007 to February 2008.

**Table 5.5.     *The School Culture – Four Years Later: Dimensions of the Culture and Focus of the work – “What is best for Kids?”***

Cultural Dimension	What that looked like...
<b><u>Culture of Inquiry</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing professional growth and research at individual, department, and school level</li> <li>• Including as many perspectives as possible in dialogue</li> <li>• Attending workshops and classes, reading current</li> </ul>

	<p>literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff meetings devoted to professional development</li> <li>• Peer coaching times embedded in day</li> <li>• Travel to conferences to present and learn</li> <li>• Participating in pilot programs at department, school, and district level</li> <li>• Team learning, “piercing the veil of fear of data”</li> <li>• Engaging students in critical thinking and endeavor to understand the process of learning</li> <li>• Continual effort to realize the vision: “Do what is best for kids”</li> </ul>
<b><u>Culture of Responsibility</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff, parents, and student are expected to commit to the school’s agreements</li> <li>• Six P’s: polite, prompt, positive mental attitude, participatory, productive, and prepared</li> <li>• Traits of character: caring, respect, responsibility, and trustworthiness</li> <li>• Staff agreements: Integrity, positivity, no gossip, “go directly to the person,” and create and maintain healthy relationships</li> <li>• Each person to improve her/himself continually. Each person to improve the organization</li> <li>• The organization’s commitment to creating a safe place where all are welcome—a place where they all are responsible for the education of each child</li> </ul>
<b><u>Culture of Care</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facets of this dimension included: being valued, safe, and protected, feeling of trust and belonging, being included and re-included, repairing damaged relationships, helping people to “get back on track,” challenging all to their best, supporting each other’s success, being recognized as smart and capable of contributing to and receiving from the community</li> <li>• Being known</li> <li>• “Good bye, see you tomorrow, I love you”</li> </ul>
<b><u>Culture of Celebration</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have fun, fun, fun!</li> <li>• “We will enthusiastically honor all accomplishments and encourage further success.”</li> <li>• Lots of laughter in classes, meetings, and events</li> <li>• Sharing what is new and good in school and life. “Even that, just renews you!”</li> <li>• Surprises, applause, and appreciation</li> <li>• Shared experiences outside of school</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive Behavior Referrals, and Special Tuesdays</li> <li>• Celebrating compassion, re-inclusion and restorative justice</li> <li>• “What affects one of us, affects all of us”</li> </ul>
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Table 5.6 lists the challenges facing the school and the ways in which the community member sought solutions to challenges.

**Table 5.6.     *Process of Change – Challenges and Solutions***

Challenges/Obstacles	Solutions/Creativity
School grows in size: collaboration and communication become more difficult.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extending shared leadership, incorporating more opportunities for small groups sessions, and keeping collaborative time in daily schedule</li> <li>• Use of technology to increase communication with community</li> </ul>
Fiscal limitations. Need for more staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting as community to brainstorm best use of staffing available, keeping the vision of what’s best for kids in the central focus</li> </ul>
Nature of the profession, demanding time and energy, professional burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer coaching and support for all</li> <li>• Focus on healthy relationships and environment</li> <li>• Collaborating to help each other</li> <li>• Parents volunteers to ease some of teacher tasks</li> <li>• Reframing problems and creating solutions together</li> </ul>
Conventional “wisdom” pulls organization back to traditional ways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Being willing to examine what we are doing and why?”</li> <li>• “Letting go of the old ways of doing things”</li> <li>• Holding decisions in light of vision and mission</li> <li>• Being creative, accepting responsibility, and looking within for solutions</li> <li>• Being willing to make tough decisions and stick to them</li> </ul>

Over the period of four years, the new school continued its journey of change and its work to do the business of schooling differently. The way the school was functioning in the first year was the seed of what it would become over time. The vision of doing

what is best for students was the source of energy that maintained their momentum.

During the journey, the process of team learning led to discovery, and the process of working together created their sense of history. Each member experienced the journey on an individual level. Their stories revealed change and growth personally and professionally.

This was not an organization without problems or challenges. However, their agreements on how to do business and how to meet obstacles resulted in a team endeavor to continue toward the vision. Their agreements engendered in them a positive response to creativity and possibility. It is a community of learners who are working very hard, and are energized as members work toward a common goal. They have accomplished much and, in their words, they see “much more to come.”



## CHAPTER SIX: INTERPRETATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Six includes four sections. Section One presents multiple interpretations of data gathered at the study site. The summaries represent possible interpretations from perspectives of experts in various areas of study.

Section Two is a statement of interpretation from the researcher and her understanding of the culture studied. Also, this section is an attempt at “coming clean” concerning assumptions made prior to the study and the new insight at which she arrived concluding the study.

Section Three offers recommendations for continuing work based on new knowledge of the process of change at the study site. The intention of this section is to create ways to share the information and improve the process of change in schools.

Section Four poses questions and possibilities for future research at the study site and in other sites.

### *SECTION ONE: MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS OF A CULTURE*

#### *THE RASHOMAN EFFECT*

The Rashoman Effect can be modified and utilized as a technique for teaching or for narrative explication of data (Wolcott, 1994). The data collected at the study site were viewed and made sense of through multiple lenses. The purpose was to synthesize data

in terms of insights of various scholars in different disciplines. Those various disciplines include anthropology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, educational reform, organizational theory, and leadership theory. A recognized scholar was selected from each discipline. The responses for each scholar are the musings of the researcher surmising what he or she might say of the culture in light of the particular theoretical frame.

This strategy was selected as a way to incorporate many voices in an effort to describe the realities suggested by the data. It recognizes the existence of multiple realities or multiple interpretations of one reality. This is an appropriate approach in qualitative ethnographic research. Also, this technique aligns closely with the democratic and collaborative spirit of the junior high school studied. Because the culture of the junior high school was found to be rich and dynamic, it is hoped that this technique will offer a more complete and deeper understanding of its multi-facets.

*Making sense of the culture through the lens of anthropology.*

Joseph Campbell's expertise incorporated cultural traditions, myths, and rituals. He defined human culture as an integrated system of learned patterns of behavior that are shared by members of a society (1972). Looking at the culture/society of the junior high school, it revealed itself as a living, growing organization of individuals engaged in a process rich in tradition and ritual. Campbell (1972) explained the presence and purpose of ritual.

The function of ritual, as I understand it, is to give form to human life, not in the way of a mere surface arrangement, but in depth. In ancient times, every social occasion was ritually structured and the sense of depth was rendered through the maintenance of a religious tone. Today, on the other hand, the religious tone is

reserved for exceptional, very special, sacred occasions. And yet even in the patterns of our secular life, ritual survives. It can be recognized, for example, not only in the decorum of courts and regulations of military life, but also in the manners of people sitting down at table together (p. 42).

During observations of the people sitting down together at the junior high school, traditions and rituals were witnessed. Examples follow.

Ritual of Inclusion:

- Applause and welcome of each new member to the community
- A student, rejected at other schools for problematic history, accepted at this school with expressed anticipation of his contribution
- The placement of the special education classrooms in the opening foyer of the school, not downstairs or toward the back of the school
- Collaboration of teachers and students to support and include all students, “they are all our kids”
- Physical display and discussion of school slogan: “We are all in this together”

Ritual of Celebration:

- All meetings at all levels open and close with the sharing of news, good news of what is happening to members professionally and personally
- Cheering for each other in all endeavors and celebrating each other’s successes
- Positive referrals celebrating “doing the right thing when no one is looking”
- Telephone Tuesdays, phone calls home to share what is going well

### Ritual of Communication and Consensus

- “Fist to Five” symbol of agreement or of questioning
- List of “Pros and Cons” “Circle Up” for agree or not agree
- Small Group Dialogue, Large Group Sharing

### Ritual of Restorative Justice, Restoring Relationships

- Students in classrooms creating solutions together to unacceptable interaction as well as planning the repair of relationships
- Students Reflective Essay, focusing on one’s part in a problem and initiating positive resolution
- Student asking students for forgiveness and permission to return

### Traditions of Conduct and Behavior

- Staff Agreements, “leaving one’s ego at the door”
- Characteristics of Meaningful Dialogue
- Six P’s
- Decision Making Matrix
- Character of Compassion and Care

Campbell continued to say that the more elaborate the structure of rituals, the more developed is the life form. Over the period of four years at the junior high, there was obvious development in the complexity of ritual and the deepening of tradition. The continued respect and growing understanding of how the school would function and how the members there would treat each other expanded the structure of ritual and tradition. What was observed at the junior high school was quite different than the conventional system of rules and consequences seen in most schools. At the study site, it was a system

of agreements and traditions of how they would behave and learn together to achieve their vision. Campbell further pointed out that all that is known about evolution and history of life indicates that the idea that strength is rendered by breaking tradition is false. It is in the building of cultural tradition that societies grow strong.

One of the strongest traditions in this community is that of “leaving one’s ego at the door.” If Campbell were to observe that tradition, he might share this response, in an effort to approve the direction and growth of this still new school:

The moment the life process stops, it starts drying up; the whole sense of myth is finding the courage to follow the process. If you’re too fixed in your own conviction, you may get stuck. That’s what hell is: the place of people who could not yield their ego system to allow the grace of transpersonal power to move them (Maher & Briggs, 1998, p.66).

Finally, it is not difficult to imagine that Campbell would note the reaction of one mother after the assembly of students where the young man with a gun was taken again into the fold. The mother said, “It was as though we were living the Prodigal Son.” Campbell taught that the ritual is the reenactment of the myth. When you participate in the ritual, you participate in the myth. Experiencing myths counts when they not only affect your mind, but when they touch your heart. When this occurs, there is transformation.

*Making sense of the culture through the lens of philosophy.*

Specifically, philosophy includes five fields of study. They are logic, esthetics, ethics, politics, and metaphysics. Politics investigates the ideal social organization, which might offer insight to the meaning of the data gathered in the school organization. However, Will Durant, known as the “gentle philosopher,” warned that if each area is

dealt with separately, philosophy loses its joy and beauty (1926). Philosophy takes on the tasks of dealing with problems not yet handled by the scientific method, questions of good and evil, joy and sadness, and meaning and meaninglessness.

Philosophy seems to stand still, perplexed; but only because she leaves the fruits of victory to her daughters the sciences, and herself passes on, divinely discontent, to the uncertain and unexplored

The philosopher is not content to describe the fact; he wishes to ascertain its relation to experience in general and thereby to get at its meaning and worth. (Durant, 1926, p.2).

Because this junior high school is full of uncharted dimensions and the people there are creating something together that did not exist before, Durant's notion of meaningful existence in a world of ambiguities offers a viable approach to understanding this culture.

In an effort to understand life and its meaning, Durant contacted over 100 men and women in the arts, sciences, politics, and religion asking for dialogue on the subject. These discussions and their analyses were the basis for On the Meaning of Life, 1932. There were common themes running throughout. From those themes, Durant developed his understanding of a worthwhile life. For a person to enjoy a meaningful existence, the following six directions must exist.

1. Rich and meaningful relationships
2. Espousing causes greater than one self
3. Altruism
4. Spirituality
5. Personal growth
6. Creativity

Using this framework, it is possible to organize data gathered during this study and to identify conditions surrounding the successes of this school's existence.

The creation of "rich and meaningful relationships" was a focus of energy from the very first. The principal admitted to his faculty that when he was hired, he was excited to begin work, but that it was much better when the office manager was hired because "then there were two." The foundation of working together with integrity and courage was established even before the hiring of the principal, as one of the foundational pillars that the parents established. The voices of many were heard in the data affirming that because of supportive relationships, they found their work not only doable, but meaningful. They acknowledged that the health of the organization depends on the health of relationships.

"Espousing a cause greater than one self" was heard in the interviews time and again. The staff and parents stated that there was a deep feeling that touched them because they were part of something greater. The focus of their work was always the students. Their mission was to "Educate Every Child Every Day," and their energy was to continue to create better ways to value every child. Many felt that it was easy to put their own interests and egos aside as they grew and protected their shared vision.

"Altruism" may be defined as the ability to respond to and consider the needs of others. This would suggest a capacity for compassion and forgiveness, an understanding that "what happens to one of us affects all of us." These were the words of one parent as she observed the moving experience of the young people accepting a classmate who had hurt them. This was also observed in classrooms where students with certain abilities support others as needed. It was witnessed in parent meetings when parents would

volunteer to help new teachers with demands of the profession, and not just the teachers of their own children. The culture of care for each other and the community was strong.

Durant's "spirituality" implies an appreciation of the mystery of an experience, a journey where there must be a leap of faith and trust beyond what one knows. Many of the stories of the staff members as they shared the process of being hired and working at the school projected a sense of wonder. They said this was exactly where they were supposed to be—where they needed to be at this time in their lives. They said what they felt was difficult to put into words. They knew they were working very hard for what they believed, and none wanted to leave this school. One staff member recalled that they could do anything as long as they were together, and said that Jay was like "a shepherd."

"Continual personal growth" was a goal for all members of the community. One teacher acknowledged that this was a community of learners, that they continued climbing professionally and personally because they are "climbers." Men and women on the staff said that working there had changed them as human beings. They had become better human beings with greater honesty. What they learned at this school had changed all facets of their lives. They were who they were because they worked there.

"Creativity," the expression of one's talents, passion, and self is one way human beings participate in life. For this staff, many explained that the challenge of being part of creating a new school, from philosophy to reality, was one reason for being there. They enjoyed being given permission to "go for it, develop this program." They took active parts in creating new ways of thinking about things and of doing things. Their role as "agents of change" catalyzed the spirit of creativity.



Will Durant outlined these aspects as necessary for a meaningful life. He was talking about individuals' lives. Applying these to the study site extends the theory to living organizations that would offer worth and value to the members. Educational research tells us that burnout for teachers is frequently accompanied by a sense of meaninglessness and lack of efficacy in their work. A sense of authentic contribution and meaning in one's work in a community enhance the opportunity for joy in life.

*Making sense of the culture through the lens of psychology.*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Carl Jung took his first position as Assistant Physician at the Burgholzli Psychiatric Clinic in Zurich, Switzerland. There in 1902, he completed his doctoral dissertation, "On the Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena" (Campbell, 1971). In this, the first of his major writings, Jung developed five themes, which remained strong, and recurred more fully developed over the many years of his work. Of those five, two are particularly apropos and helpful in organizing and understanding the conditions existing in the junior high. Conditions surrounding the functioning of the brain and the ways students learn are key pieces of a school culture.

The two themes concern the functioning and potential of the unconscious mind. Jung explained that the unconscious is not only the "carrier of memories lost to consciousness but also that it is an intuiting agent of receptivity, far exceeding that of the conscious mind (1971, p.xii)." In a later writing, Jung agreed with the French psychiatrist, Alfred Binet, who presented data showing that "the unconscious sensibility of an hysterical patient is at certain moments fifty times more acute than that of a

‘normal’ person.” It would not be a recommendation to foster hysteria in junior high students, and yet, these data including Jung’s analysis of the brain functioning are particularly poignant in understanding the need for multiple strategies of instruction, for inclusive and celebratory environments, and for greater variety of intellectual and emotional stimuli of the affective domain. It further requires an expanding of what are considered normal and “correct” forms of learning and education. It is possible to make the connection between this theory of the potential of the unconscious and the nurturing pedagogy observed at the junior high school, not only with the students, but also in honoring the diversity and individual development of the adults. In staff meetings, members were asked to listen to music, to role-play situations, to reflect on issues of feeling and emotion, to return to their own past experiences to clarify their beliefs around teaching and learning, and to express freely their intuitions, concerns, joys, and celebrations. For students, they were given many opportunities for learning to care and to act compassionately, to work cooperatively, to think critically, to explore their feelings and imaginations, and to take risks in learning. One of the most delightful moments in non-traditional instruction was at the very beginning of the school year on the first day for sixth graders in the new building. They were to begin their pursuit in understanding and appreciating the “Six P’s.” They were asked to read and discuss together all the P’s, and then, to offer their creative interpretation through song or dance or cheer or poetry or drama or drawing or all of the above. The lesson culminated in laughter and applause, and perhaps even a little freeing of expression and mind.

Twenty years later, in a volume entitled “The Psychology of Individuation,” Jung wrote extensively of what today would suggest “differentiated instruction.” The one

theme of this study is psychological types, their relevance in learning. Jung named four types, which he called Functions of Consciousness: Sensation and Intuition, for gathering facts of the world and Feeling and Thinking, for judging and evaluating the world. Characteristically, according to Jung, the modern western culture has developed Sensation and Thinking and generally disregarded Feeling and Intuition. The individuals who tend to prefer Feeling and Intuition have, themselves, been diminished or disregarded (Campbell, 1971, p.xxvi).

Jung's work is important to the discussion of differentiated instruction that was witnessed at the junior high school. Furthermore, it renders support for the ongoing argument that traditional standardized testing, requiring all students to work and be evaluated in the same mode, is unfair and oppressive. That kind of testing completely dismisses the value of other ways of knowing and creating knowledge. It contradicts the promise of equal access to knowledge, and negates the notion of dignity of each person. With this kind of testing not only are data and results skewed, but the misleading interpretation of what schools are doing initiates decisions that sort, separate, and punish individuals with different learning styles. Jung stated, "The finite will never be able to grasp the infinite." His notion of the "collective unconscious" supports the theory that there exist infinite possibilities of human learning as well as human experience. If an institution determines how students will learn, it limits how students will learn, and thereby, limits what they experience and become. Although the site studied is mandated to administer the state standardized test, the teachers have stated that the testing process and preparation remain at the periphery of their vision. The effort of the adult community

is to continually improve their practice to reach each individual and honor the differences.

*Making sense of the culture through the lens of sociology.*

Paulo Freire is recognized as a respected advocate of educational and social change. Much of his work put into question the traditional thinking of the Eurocentric social organization. Freire provided a rationale for alternative forms of “progressive social and political thought” (McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p.3). In Freire’s most famous book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1971), the pedagogy of which he spoke is not the pedagogy we understand today as strategies of teaching. It is not a methodology of teaching, nor is it a simple technique to encourage dialogue. Teaching and learning and dialogue are all part of the pedagogy but its essence is much greater. The pedagogy in Freire’s thinking is a life giving experience and process which occur in relationship with other people. For Freire, dialogue is an epistemological relationship. It is a way of knowing the world as well as creating knowledge. It is a process where the locus of learning is transferred back and forth in partnership among human beings. The locus of learning is transferred, as is the locus of power. There is a clear shift in power. The experience becomes one of humility and mutual benefit as the participants acknowledge, “I learn from you. You learn from me.” (Aronowitz, 1993).

Pedagogy of the Oppressed was a world-historical event for counter-hegemonic theorists and activists in search of new ways of linking social theory to narratives of human freedom (McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p.xiii).

The type of praxis in reality of this pedagogy requires people to participate actively in shaping the societies or cultures in which they live, and where they and others

are affected in day-to-day existence. People work together in relationships devoid of hierarchical control and free of patriarchal convention. Freire's genius is expressed in a pedagogy of hope and possibility where ordinary people can act on their world to transform their world by the way they think, act, and love.

Freire's expression of hope and his call for change resonate with the work of this new school. There is a spirit of "positivity," an effort to re-think old ways, and a desire to create a place safe and welcoming to all children.

In the first year of the junior high school, many teachers interviewed stated that if their principal left, they, also, would leave. "This school would not be the same without Jay." In the fourth year, the teachers interviewed were sure that the school could continue in success, and that the members of the culture would progress in their learning and teaching. There had been a transfer of power, or as those members described the experience, "they were empowered during the time they worked there." They participated and worked hard and "loved being there." The principal frequently stated "the students were his best teachers," and if he had energy and wisdom to share, it came to him from his colleagues and students.

All members of the school community committed themselves to "staff agreements" which call them to participation and a new level of honesty. They acknowledged, "silence is agreement." If there is a concern, it must be stated, and it is their role to come out of isolation to responsible contribution. They will create their world in collaboration.

One memorable moment of Freirian thinking was shared during a staff meeting when Jay announced to the staff that they would welcome a certain young man to their

school in the first year. Jay explained this boy, who had a long and problematic history in the school district, might be one student who would teach them more about who they really are—a powerful example of participatory education. The work of the junior high was the journey to authenticity for the organization and the individuals there. It demanded a pedagogy of mutual participation and dialogue—a social reform effort similar in many ways to that of Freire.

Another to mention in this field of sociology is Ellen Langer. Her theory of “mindfulness” (1997) offers meaning to the work at the junior high as well as connection to Freire’s theory of praxis and dialogue. Being “mindful” is the human way of deep learning and creating while attending to life-- its changes and its contexts. A “mindful person” is looking and questioning, changing, and participating in an ongoing process. She is not limited to commitment to conventional thinking or in Langer’s words, “pre-existing categories” of life. Rather she is involved in the life created by her own thoughts. Mindfulness is defined as an act of turning one’s attention and the attention of others to a view quite different from the previously and traditionally accepted truth. Essential components of “mindfulness” (p.62) are:

- Creation of new categories
- Openness to new information
- Awareness of more than one perspective

The connection to Freirian thinking is clear; in dialogue, human beings open themselves to new possibilities and other perspectives while creating new knowledge and transforming their worlds. For Freire, dialogue is the epistemological relationship, as

stated above; for Langer, “mindfulness” is the epistemological process. Both are life giving and joyful. Both are the teaching and learning process that free humanity from the blindness of conventional thinking which Langer calls “entrapment by category” (p.10). Both present a challenge to education to end mindless passing of students through the halls of public schools where rather than acting with enthusiasm as subjects in the process (Langer, 1997), they are seen as passive objects on whom the process is performed (Freire, 1971).

One consistent and happy consequence of the thinking of both of these writers which aligns with the culture of the new school was and is the recognition of celebration and joy in living, working, and learning together. Langer insisted that gratification need not be delayed; that it is, in fact, the essence of mindful learning. And Freire affirmed that participation in transforming one’s world is life giving and joyful. One beautiful example for the children at the junior high school occurred the day of the assembly when they transformed a public school gymnasium into the safe place to bring one lost student back into the fold (Observation, Dec. 13). That was a moment of profound change, deep joy, and celebration. The points of view of both Freire and Langer, which may seem radical to some, were experienced in the dimensions of culture of the junior high school. These scholars share their understanding of the way this view can work in reality and the lasting changes it can effect in humanity.

*Making sense of the culture through the lens of educational reform.*

John Goodlad and his colleagues at the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER) and the Institute for Educational Inquiry (IEI) in Seattle, Washington

have spent decades in the educational research and collaborative efforts to improve our nation's schools. The principal focus of their work has been the serious endeavor to render the vital connections between democracy, schooling, and educational renewal strong and unquestionable to all people.

They are interconnected in ways that, taken together, form a magnificent tapestry of human freedoms and dignity. Their sum is indeed far greater than the parts. Once we sacrifice any one thread, the entire fabric begins to unravel. Democracy is every bit as fragile as schooling is (Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley, Goodlad, 2002, p.78).

In the direction of this goal, the educational leaders in Seattle would agree with Linda Darling-Hammond's contention that schools must not only function for democracy but as democracy (1997).

The story of this renewal initiative has become the Agenda for Education in a Democracy (2002). It came to fruition out of years of extensive research and study of the essential constructs: education, schooling, democracy, and cultural change. The authors of the Agenda presented it as a process, "a work in progress." It is neither a "static plan" nor an educational fad to be imposed on schools. There are certain foundational beliefs that guide the process of change and renewal. They include collaborative leadership, empowerment of participants, critical inquiry, and reflective practice. The goals derived from this work include educating creative and thoughtful citizens prepared to participate in a social and political democracy; guaranteeing equal access to education to all children; and creating just environments where equity and excellence are valued, first and foremost. This, then, grew to be the mission of the Agenda and incorporated four moral dimensions. The Agenda and its four-part mission serve as a framework to understand the conditions surrounding the ongoing change at the study site of this research.



### The Four-Part Mission

1. Enculturating the young into a social and political democracy
2. Providing equal access to knowledge for all children and youths
3. Practicing pedagogical nurturing
4. Ensuring responsible stewardship of schools

The data collected at the junior high offered many supporting examples of the school pursuing this mission.

In small groups, in pairs, and in large group settings, the students were called on to active roles in creating just and compassionate solutions to challenges. They were called to an active role in assessing their own behavior in repairing relationships and in creating a safe inclusive environment for all. From the individual student encouraged to take the concern she had directly to the teacher, to the two young boys involved in fighting, to the commitment of all students to live by the Six P's, observations validated that these young people had responsibilities as well as rights in their democratic setting. The teachers are role models in a culture that demands courage and honesty. The teachers demonstrated dialogue among themselves as a means to better understanding, and subsequently, engaged students in dialogue as a fundamental tool of learning and democracy. Participation is necessary in democracy and is central to the expectations of behavior of all members. As a member of the community, the experience itself teaches that "silence is consent," and as a responsible member, one must contribute to the effort for understanding and truth, for positive environment, and forward growth of the community. Living this responsibility, as the students and teachers were expected to do, was enculturation into a social and democratic democracy.

Providing equal access to education is the foundation of the belief at this school that “they will do whatever it takes” to support and realize success in learning for every child. Contrary to other situations in other schools, the staff and parents at the junior high accept their commitment to every child’s education. If there are problems, the solutions will be found through teamwork calling together all resources possible. If there is a concern, the first step is “kid talk,” a sharing of ideas among the educators and parents. The purpose of “kid talk” is to learn what is working for the student and build from there. The adherence to “no blame, no shame” creates an atmosphere of positive response and acceptance that it is the system’s responsibility to meet the needs of the students. If there is a problem, “perhaps it calls for doing some surgery on the environment” in order for a particular student to flourish. It is not the student’s responsibility to adjust to the adults, as is seen in so many schools. Rather, it is the school’s responsibility to connect with each child, and to guarantee access to knowledge for each child. This switch in perspective gives each child dignity and value as a contributing member in a democratic setting; and, it changes everything.

The culture of the junior high school has been described in part as a “culture of care.” Care and nurture reflect similar attributes of meaning. Nel Noddings (2007) defined caring for students as creating a place where students will flourish, be safe and included, as well as challenged. Nurturing pedagogy implies all these and more. It involves supporting the students in a way that allows the teacher to see the possibilities, the talents, and gifts of each child. It requires a pedagogy that incorporates varied teaching methods and learning styles. It respects the diversity of children in terms of what they love to do, and what is exciting to them. It is a pedagogy that calls children to

participation in their education in terms of curriculum, process, and assessment.

Nurturing pedagogy touches children in a way that allows them to see who they really are and can be. The teachers at the junior high school devoted all staff and department meetings as well as ongoing inquiry to improving their practice—a practice intent on reaching children. Questions were posed from the first staff meeting throughout the year: How do we see what is inside a child? What does participatory education look like and sound like? What do active, motivated children do? Questions were posed to students about their own learning. Not only what did you learn, but how did you learn and how did it feel? These experiences in the affective realm give more depth to the meaning of nurturing in the reality of the school.

Finally, the stewardship of schools and the understanding that schools are centers of pedagogy are part four of the mission. It was witnessed at the junior high on a daily basis. The work of the adults there was not isolated and not simply a concern for one's own students. It was ongoing inquiry and continual effort to learn and to improve not only their classes for their students, but the school as a whole for all students. The teachers and parents have taken active roles in creating change in their school and the larger district. Teachers at the school shared their feelings of joy in being part of the greater change as well as a sense of empowerment and accomplishment that they can effect change. The principal and staff accepted the responsibility that the work of the individual is the work and the renewal of the entire organization. The possibilities for success for this school increased as it continued to work together with the greater organization.

There is much more to the work of the Agenda for Education in a Democracy. Still, the work of this school could be viewed through the lens of a center of pedagogy endeavoring to deliver on the promises of the Agenda.

*Making sense of the culture through the lens of organizational theory.*

Peter Senge is the director of the Center for Organizational Learning at MIT's Sloan School of Management. In the 1990's, he with his colleagues and friends and experts in the field of change and organizational theory, posed questions and developed a theory to look differently at the way organizations would function and how they might develop into healthy systems of creativity and growth. Some of those questions were: With the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution, our society increased its specialization, and why, then, did it continue to the point of isolation and separation where we as a people did not only see ourselves apart from nature, but with the power to rule over nature? How has our ego evolved to the point where we see our personal happiness somehow separate from the happiness of those around us? Why have we continued to separate physical health from mental health and from spiritual health? How do we move forward now with a government fragmented into special interest groups that fight to maintain the status quo? Will we continue with the growing loss of appreciation of the interconnectedness of life? (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith, 1994).

During his years of work at the Center, Senge learned of and participated in many stories of change. Throughout these experiences, he was able to observe and synthesize principles and methods for creating healthy organization. He called them 'learning organizations.' His theory of Five Disciplines of a Learning Organization presents those

principles in a usable framework. Underlying principles of this framework support the method of inquiry and questions, as well as an effort to see life and organization differently.

The framework and building blocks that distinguish the “learning organization” from the traditional organization are the “Five Disciplines.” Senge considered the traditional organization to be authoritarian and controlling. The “Five Disciplines” offer the path to a freeing, inclusive, and collaborative organization where learning is ongoing and the people there are engaged in the continuing process of creating what they really want.

Most large American secondary schools, although they are intended to be learning organizations, would not align with the five disciplines of Senge’s learning organization. There are, however, data from the research site that would make sense and meaning in the light of this framework. It is a paradigm shift, which echoes the different worldview that the community of the junior high school is attempting to establish.

*Senge’s five disciplines.*

1. “Systems thinking” is a way to see patterns of inter-relationships and patterns of processes of growth. It is a shift in thinking about an organization germinating the idea that the way to move forward is to support all parts and make that move as a whole. Senge referred to nature; plants and forests cannot flourish if the parts are in constant competition. According to Senge, traditional organizations see themselves in “snapshots” or pieces living their own stories seeking individual

successes. The traditional school or school district would see itself in departments often working one against the other in competition.

At the junior high school, there were many stories of doing things differently in an effort to live their slogan, “We are all in this together:”, from the department chair who explained that it was a new experience for her to attend meetings not with the intention of “getting all she could for her department,” rather to look at the needs of all departments for the good of the whole to the extra support of experienced teachers to serve as peer coaches to improve practice of newer colleagues, to the time given in staff meetings to create authentic learning experiences in order to build confidence and promote success for members, and to the reframing of work at the district level so that this school works as a principle part of the whole to improve the organization. The data revealed a powerful shift from competition to cooperation, a shift “from learning to be better than, to learning to be better with.” This thinking permeates the building and touches the children.

2. “Personal Mastery” is the ongoing quest for authenticity in one’s work and life. Senge explained this discipline as the continual clarifying and deepening of personal vision, of knowing oneself, and pursuing in life what one truly wants. Various ways open up to people to connect with their own truths. One that Senge described is meditation. This technique was observed in meetings at the school. On many occasions, during professional development activities, the facilitator would instruct the

group to consider a question or concept individually and silently. “For this activity, no talking, no dialogue, no collaboration. I want you to look inside and find what is there.” After the time for silent consideration, the group would reunite and dialogue.

This discipline, which centers on individual growth, asks for focusing of energy, a sense of self-examination, and a desire for development of mind and body. It necessitates patience and an appreciation of reality—a sort of reality check in the present time. It is an individual vision for the future situated in present time. This, Senge concluded, causes “creative tension.” This tension, and with it a need for balance, resonated clearly as teachers spoke of their desires to learn more, to be better, to work harder, to create the school they really want, and yet the need to take care of themselves and each other. “I want to be a good teacher for a long time, not a great teacher for a few years.” Personal Mastery is an ongoing process; it is an understanding of the current reality, acknowledging that there is always more to learn, with a personal vision of the future and all that is truly wanted.

3. “Mental Models” support Benham-Tye’s “conventional wisdom” (2000). These are assumptions, beliefs, and even images that are deep within our learned thinking acquired through family and culture. Mental models are constructs existing on an individual level and organizational level. They impact not only the way we see the world but, as importantly, the way we act on it. The work of a growing person and a learning organization is to

uncover those models, to deconstruct those models with the courage to look within, and to reconstruct our thinking in the light of what we truly believe. This is rigorous work: deep work. The work was witnessed at the junior high school with evidence of the leader's awareness of when to move forward and when to pull back. The kind of dialogue that the members of the junior high school wanted required this kind of work. People were asked to leave the old ways of doing things outside the school; they were asked to share openly their thinking in a way that would allow change and movement. The kind of dialogue they proposed contained within it a hope for new knowledge and changing of one's own views. A question frequently posed to the group was, "If we make this decision, what does it say about who we are?" There was ongoing questioning of beliefs and actions, and how they aligned in reality.

4 & 5. "Shared Vision" and "Team Learning" The last two disciplines can be described together briefly with regard to the junior high school. "Shared Vision" produced the energy with which they continued their journey. Senge explains that "shared vision" is the skill of discovering and clarifying the "pictures" of the future.

The shared vision at the school was to create a place that was good for all their kids. The focus remained consistent, what is best for kids? They entered into dialogue constantly renewing what that would mean and look like in reality. The dialogue, with shared vision at the center, led them to a place they called a "mystery" and "even spiritual." Sometimes they said



they did not know how it happened, and still, they said they could count on it happening. The principal described it as “letting the group intelligence rise to where it needed to be.” Peter Senge called it “Team Learning.” It was an experience of authentic thinking together allowing them to learn and “do together what none of them could do alone.”

Senge’s Five Disciplines run counter to the models in traditional hierarchical, bureaucratic organizations. Leadership in Senge’s Learning Organization looks and feels different than the traditional. The principal at the study site admitted to being a “learn-as-you-go kind of guy.” The success of a Learning Organization may be contingent on that kind of leadership.

*Making sense of the culture through the lens of leadership theory.*

Margaret Wheatley, in *Leadership and the New Science* (1994), was searching for a simpler way to lead organizations. She began with questions:

Why do so many organizations feel dead? Why does change itself, that event we all are supposed to be managing keep drowning us? And why have our expectations for success diminished to the point that often the best hope is for staying power and patience to endure disruptive forces? (p. 1)

Wheatley turned to nature and science to seek answers to these human questions. She contended that with a shift in the way a leader views the forces that “disrupt” and the obstacles that emerge unexpectedly, there could be greater possibility of creating life-giving organizations rather than those that feel “dead.” She began to consider her theory while flying thousands of feet above the earth on a commuter plane going from Boston to Salt Lake City. The view from that distance enabled her to see the world below as a whole composed of connections and inter-relationships, a system of life engaged in

change. From 37,000 feet, she was given a larger perspective, one that would change her thinking of organizations and leadership.

Various concepts of Wheatley's theory offer still another possibility to frame and understand what was observed at the junior high school.

In this new science, the inter-relationship among parts of an organism, not parts working in isolation, is what provides energy for a living creature to construct conditions necessary to re-create itself. The focus is on relationships, and not things, for successful change. In relationships, members share and receive information, which is power. They work to create knowledge and conditions for renewal and life. There is a constant transfer of power and flux of dynamic processes. It is never finished, never a done-deal, never a final answer. These dynamics of working together in a creative process were often observed at the junior high school. The staff and parents found themselves in continual inquiry asking questions: "Where is this school?" and "Where does it hope to go?" There was continual conversation in meetings among parents of how they would grow their partnership. There was continual conversation among staff concerning how they would re-create the structure as it grew in size in order to include all participants and improve their work. The structures changed and grew. Power was transferred in the process of learning. Roles of student and teacher and leader and follower were exchanged and shared. The mission and vision, however, were constant. Wheatley shared this insight that she gained while watching a mountain stream.

I am attracted to the diversity I see, to these swirling combinations of mud, silt, grass, water, rocks. This stream has an impressive ability to adapt, to shift the configurations, to let the power balance move, to create new structures. But driving this adaptability, making it all happen, I think, is the water's need to flow. Water answers to gravity, to downhill, to the call of the ocean. The forms change, but the mission remains clear (p.16).

From Year One to Year Four, there was growth and adaptation in the system of this young school. It had to create new extensions to incorporate the energy of all members. The leadership/power was distributed to more members and shared on more levels. The environment had to be worked and re-worked to guarantee that each student would flourish. Like Margaret Wheatley's stream, the physical configuration had to be modified and adapted, but the vision remained central and the focus on the students remained strong.

Wheatley reflected on quantum physics as it affects the living world (1994). Leaders do not create environment as traditionally thought. Leaders working in collaborations with members of an organization acting on their world together bring forth what is already there in both the members and the organization. This is an interesting turning upside of traditional thinking. A quantum world develops as a result of the action of the observer-participant on that world. Quantum theory says that the action on the world will "evoke the potential which is already there" (p.36). The principal and teachers accepted that they were responsible to act on their world, to "do surgery on their environment," to bring forth the place where each child would flourish. In the quantum world, particles are viewed as "bundles of potentiality." Perhaps that is what the teachers see in their students. The principal wanted to see the "teacher she would become." Many of the teachers at this school stated they had changed, metamorphosed, in ways that affected their entire lives, in ways that were "deep and difficult to describe." They said they were working hard at this school, and "they loved it." There was an energy and sense of renewal when they came together to meet and to work.

In a world creating itself, challenges must be met with belief in and hope for solutions. In order to “flow,” a stream must create new ways with the rocks and mud, the hills and the valleys. In order to grow, an organization must work creatively in the greater organization. At the junior high school, the members there coined their own word for this spirit, “positivity.” The school had certainly met the obstacles that challenge new institutions in larger districts. One of those is to do things as they always have been done. One of the tenets presented by Wheatley is that one cannot solve problems from the same “consciousness” with which they were created. Organization must leave the old ways at the door, must question the traditional and work together to create new paths. This was witnessed in the work of staff and parents, and was equally strong in the role of the principal. When faced with demands from the larger district, the principal was able to transform the demand from something possibly negative to an opportunity to receive new information, to participate in cutting edge creativity, and to grow the institution in the same direction as the larger district. This kind of re-framing for the good of the whole resulted in the leader’s “making peace” with challenges, and “making peace” with the world. Wheatley expressed the same experience in these words:

I became aware that I was wondering in a realm that created new visions of freedom and possibility; giving me new ways to think about my work. I couldn’t always draw immediate corollaries between science and my dilemmas, but I noticed a new serenity in response to the questions that surround me (p.2).

Both the human work force at the school and the forces of nature as described by Margaret Wheatley accept the responsibility of finding life and sources of creativity within the whole of their organism. There is no looking outside of the organization for either answers or places to cast blame. The work is done from within. At the school, the phenomenon of a living thing renewing itself is named and understood in phrases like “no

shame no blame,” “positivity,” “solution-oriented,” and “we are all in this together.” That kind of thinking which also included the agreement that in dialogue and collaboration they would find answers, recycle their energy, and renew their life. This was their way of doing business, and in this way, they generated motivation, a powerful motivation from within. The living organism creates its source of life. It is a circle of creativity. For Wheatley, the spiral that appears in art all over the world depicts life as an on-going dance of chaos and order (p.85). This is perhaps the most appropriate image of the new science and a way to see new leadership and organizational structure.

With the hope of gaining deeper understanding of the culture studied and making sense of the data collected, the interpretations of scholars, a selected few, in varied fields were briefly introduced. The culture of the new school was found to be rich and challenging to comprehend. The process of change was found to be complex and elusive. An easier task would have been to study and attempt to explain one aspect of the culture, perhaps shared leadership, or collaboration or the role of teachers. This plan, although, more easily executed, would contradict and dismiss one of the key findings of the study, the essence of the power of the whole. This essence was brought to light in the discussion of “systems thinking” (Senge, 1994), of “nature’s inter-relatedness and connection” (Wheatley, 1994), of the “collective unconscious” (Jung, 1971), the “four part mission of the Agenda” (Goodlad, 2004) . Wheatley explained this phenomenon as she wrote of Newtonian organizations in a Quantum Age.

In a machine, every piece knows its place. Likewise, in Newtonian organizations, we’ve drawn boundaries everywhere. We’ve created roles and accountabilities, drawing lines of authority and limits to responsibilities. We have even drawn boundaries around the flow of experience, thus shaping the way we think about the world. For example, we are conditioned to think of reality in terms of variables. We study these variables for their allegedly dependent and independent

properties, treating them as separate and well bounded, even when we try to account for more of their interactions with multiple regression analyses. In business, information is portrayed in charts that chunk up the world. We have even come to think of power—an elusive, energetic force if ever there was one—as a measurable resource, defined by “our piece of the pie” (1994, p.28).

A limitation of the analysis to consider is that the presentations of the selected scholars were in the briefest summation. The thinking and theories of each of the writers are far more involved and deserving of greater consideration. Each, in its fullest explication, would offer a most interesting and revealing story. There are, of course, many more scholars’ theories to apply, so many more lenses through which to view, as many interpretations perhaps as individuals who share the experience. As we accept the ever changing character of human beings and evolving character of the world (Freire, 1970), it is unnecessary and truly counterproductive to seek one interpretation as the correct and final truth. Therein lie the beauty of this community and the mystery of the world.

## *SECTION TWO: THE RESEARCHER’S STANCE*

Information is power. Sharing information and creating knowledge are parts of an ongoing process that never ends, but seeks renewal and life. The process offers the transfer of power so all members of an organization will contribute as well as receive; all members will teach as well as learn. Answers may vary and reality may change according to life experience and perspective. There is flexibility of roles and mutual benefit in creating something that was not there before. This description of a healthy organization

(Wheatley, 1994) can well apply to a healthy family system. This was not the description of my family system, however.

Growing up Catholic, in the 50's and 60's in the suburbs of New York City, in an oppressive family system, I had no power, no sense of participation in the system or in my life. I learned a great deal—crystal clear and unquestionable. For a young girl in those years, whether the lessons were heard or intuited, they were lasting and limiting. Angeles Arrien (2005) explained that the information received in our childhood fills for each individual his or her “crucible” of life. The crucible is slowly filled by others: parents, family, society, friends, teachers, and preachers. Arrien believes that we spend much of our adult life emptying that crucible of lies and limitations in order to create a crucible of truth for ourselves. It is a lifelong journey, according Arrien, one that is not easy but a most joyful adventure which is the meaning of life. Much of what I learned in childhood was based on stereotypical, traditional thinking. Words from many adults were given to me with the best of intentions. Nevertheless, most of them I had to empty from the crucible.

My parents would say, “Yes, Elizabeth you should go to college and get your degree, even your teaching license so you will have that to fall back on if you don't get married. Well, your brother will go to the private college upstate. You will go to the state teachers' college nearby. That will be good enough. A woman's place is to take care of the home and everyone there, and certainly keep the marriage and family in order. Men have so many other things to consider. And, please, don't upset them after work.”

I watched my mother and her sisters at large Italian family dinners serve everyone at the table, standing and serving, making sure all were content and pleased. They were

the last to be seated and the first up to clean. The men retired to another room to play pinochle and enjoy a glass or two of bourbon. The sisters stayed in the kitchen first to enjoy some time to themselves, then to tend to the “women’s chores.”

When I was even younger, I remember a priest proclaiming to everyone in church, time after time, that only Catholics will go to heaven. This I questioned immediately. I thought of my wonderful grandfather in New England, a good man but a protestant! I continued to question so many “truths” that were told or shown to me by the adults whom I was to trust.

Later in life, when I married, just after graduating from that “little” college, I was very excited to think ahead to my first teaching position. To this excitement, my then husband responded, “well sure, unless you can find something more lucrative.” In the years, that followed, I enjoyed teaching although my husband continued to question my profession, reciting society’s take on it. “Those who can, do, and those who can’t, teach.”

These were the limiting stereotypes and conventional thinking that took power away from a young woman. These were the forces that sorted and separated human beings, some marked for the best that life could offer, and others marked for subservience.

- Women should be pretty and pleasing to men, and above all, marry well
- Men have important work to do while women are there to assist
- Some races and religions are clearly above others that are not as worthy or valid
- Teaching is okay if you cannot do anything else



Obviously, like many others, I struggled with these realities. The feelings were uncomfortable and began to grow from within. The power to change grew also. Strength came to me through school, through teaching and learning, through my own solitude, through dialogue with others, and discovery of other ways of thinking. Being with adolescents in the classes I taught as they worked to learn Spanish and French was mutually rewarding and much more than a job for me. I found more of myself as I gave more to others. I was inspired to create new principles for life, guidelines that would offer me a place to work, to contribute, and to be valued. Through teaching, I learned much more than I taught. Therein lies the beautiful paradox of our profession. Life itself is a beautiful paradox; all that leads to struggle may be precisely the creative catalyst for new life. The disappointments of childhood and even of an early marriage, took me to levels of searching that would not have occurred, had life been easier. From suffering and discomfort grew passion and determination. Now I speak with much greater conviction of the truths and knowledge that I have created and placed in my crucible. I love being a teacher. It is a partnership and a life-giving process that transcends simply earning a living. Rather this process is what it means to be human. This was life's gift to me. I love being a woman, feeling and thinking the way women do, and sharing with other women all the joys and possibilities in our lives. I love being a student of education at this time in history. I feel passionate about our direction and the work we all can do for and with so many youth in this world. The journey of separating from old myths and deeply embedded traditions is not easy. Sometimes the separation from a past of oppression and limitation can be painful, even frightening. Still I wish this for my children and all

children. It is this journey that gives passion to pursue important work, the work toward social justice in our world.

My own inner journey was the point of departure toward the passion for and dedication to this study. It clearly affected my perspective and stance as a researcher. There is much work to do on this journey for justice. Still I believe that there is much good work being done. I find myself able to identify the good work and to begin there to move forward. It is the work of renewal, and not that of rejection or total reform of schools. I find myself fitting with greater integrity in the research role that appreciates what is happening and that recognizes the educators who are so deeply involved in their work for the good of all. I believe we must go into schools to clarify the underlying deep structures that sustain the status quo and continue to create places that hurt our children, albeit unintentionally. We can change schools so all children are nurtured as we work positively in partnership with the good people there. Through this experience and my life experience, I see myself aligning with work that may be called appreciative ethnography. There is good work being done and more to do. The story of the junior high in the study is one telling of that good work.

#### *THE RESEARCHER'S INTERPRETATION*

The research design for this study was a modified version of Phil Carspecken's five-stage model for Critical Ethnography in Educational Research (1996). The purpose of the study was to gain understanding of the process of change and the conditions surrounding repeated failure in the history of school reform. As a qualitative researcher, I intended to use observations and interviews in the natural setting to uncover and analyze

the forces detrimental to change and reform in schooling. Most school reforms fail, particularly those created in the direction of greater equity and social justice (Ladson-Bilings, 2006). In the American system, many schools remain unjust and inequitable for a large portion of the students (Darling-Hammond, 2002). It was my hope to get up close and personal with the forces that diminish efforts toward the democratic ideal of our nation's schools. In this regard, my research orientation aligned with that of the critical ethnographer (Carpsecken, 1996, p.7): "that research be employed in cultural and social criticism; that certain groups in any society are privileged over others; that the oppression which characterizes societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their status as natural or inevitable; that oppression has many faces; that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, part of the oppression." I entered the junior high school with a plan to work in collaboration with the members there to reveal and deconstruct underlying forces that strengthen the status quo and the oppression it imposes. It was my intention to question with the participants the reality that would deter their progress toward fairness to and inclusion of all students. What I discovered in dialogue with the participants and observation of what they had created was something really quite different. It was a new insight and a deeper understanding that I had not foreseen. I found a school community holding itself up to scrutiny, something close to Ted Sizer's recommendation (1984).

In 1984, Theodore Sizer wrote a book about the American high school and a composite character, both fictional and real, a good person and popular teacher. In this story, "Horace's Compromise," one hears the struggles and the disappointments for both teachers and students. One witnesses the traditional routines that tend to alienate students

and guarantee mediocre work. In this telling of American education, the public tends to agree that teaching is difficult and change is messy, so there is really no need to re-design. Many know better, and that is a dilemma for Horace and some of his colleagues (p.viii):

It is not that the schools are all bad or ungenerous or aren't trying to serve their students. It is just that with a dose of honest self-scrutiny and a willingness to make and stick to some hard decisions, these schools could be so much better.

In year one, they had established core beliefs, created a vision and then, a language to define and support that vision. They agreed on operating principles that would lead to a process. The process would transcend and be greater than the sum of its parts. They made hard decisions and, in year four, they were continuing to “stick to those hard decisions” to examine and evaluate their reality as it reflected what they said they truly wanted and what they were becoming. In a sense, they were doing their own critical analysis; they were creating their own critical ethnography. The commitment of the community to ask what they wanted to become, what they were and what changes they needed, created conditions that fostered the spirit of inquiry and the success of change. The conditions they created and the successes they experienced were discussed in Chapter Five.

Theirs is great work: the kind of work healthy organizations must undertake and the kind of work that may lead public schools away from mediocrity to excellence for all students. This new insight lends support to the notion that the researcher's own subjectivity and her experience of “coming clean” work as tools in the dialogic process between ideas and data (Banning, 1997). The dialogue between the researcher's ideas and the ideas emerging from the data is the process by which the new insight and the unique

perspective are created. In qualitative work, the interchange of ideas and the action of reflexivity is, in itself, a tool of analysis. The recognition of this different role of the research's subjectivity moves it beyond the traditional understanding (Banning, 1997). It is this recognition of subjectivity in the process and engagement in the dialogue that underscores the depth and power of qualitative study.

### *SECTION THREE: RECOMMENDATIONS*

#### *WHAT CAN BE DONE WITH WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED?*

##### *Recommendation 1: Share the story with teachers.*

Whether it would happen in a district wide professional development venue or in smaller groups of educators interested in studying and making change, the story should be told. The sharing of the story of this new school, in dialogue with other schools, offers the possibility of formulating further questions and direction for renewal. However, what occurred at the junior high school cannot be implemented as a recipe for improvement or a model to be imposed on other institutions. Unfortunately, that path has led to much of the failure of school improvement, the fads that have faded, and the bandwagons gone by the wayside. This story can serve better as a metaphor for the journeys other schools will enjoy, each unique and active in its own process. In the words of Margaret Wheatley, (1994, p.7) "nothing really transfers." It is the creative process that gives meaning.

There are no recipes or formulae, no checklists or advice that describe reality. There is only what we create through our engagement with others and with events. Nothing really transfers; everything is always new and different and unique to each of us.

*Recommendation 2: Share the story with students.*

Students want to grapple with the real world. They are capable of doing much more than they are asked in school. They actually do much more outside of school (Sizer, 1999). If students are to learn democracy, they need to create and live it. Sizer believes “If adolescence is anything, it is about winning and losing” (1984, p44). If we want our children to learn the ideals of cooperation, compassion, and justice, they must create and participate in those in school. If we want to change and improve our schools, the children need to participate in the change as well. The story of this school is one of cooperation, passion, inclusion, and much more. The telling of this story to students while allowing them to enter into it will teach those ideals.

Students need to be involved with adults who care deeply for their well-being. They need to see adults struggling, just as they themselves do, to enact difficult changes. They need to see how inquiry processes can improve their lives. They need to feel the power and grace of equity and justice (Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley, Goodlad, 2004, p.127).

*Recommendation 3: Enhance pre-service training for teachers: the school as a “Center of Pedagogy.”*

Sharing the story of the school with future teachers and involving future teachers in the conversation are dimensions of stewardship with which we must be concerned. A partnership between schools of education and public schools brings the process of growth and change to pre-service teachers. It will be their professional obligation to create change and improve schools. Engagement in the process and praxis during their learning stages is essential to the improvement of schools. When we bring pre-service teachers into the school, they bring the new question, the new insight, and the new perspective. It

is an exchange of knowledge as well as fresh curiosity that breathes life into the institution.

In 1970, John Goodlad said:

Nothing short of a simultaneous reconstruction of pre-service teacher education, in-service teacher education, and schooling itself will suffice if the educational change process is to be adequate (Goodlad, et.al. 2004, p.10).

This new school now completing its fourth year may find the timing right to consider a partnership with the university. The partnership would bring to reality the inclusion of other perspectives in their work, those of the pre-service teacher, and university faculty.

#### *SECTION FOUR: FUTURE RESEARCH AND STUDY*

The story of the journey of this school over a period of four years has germinated a number of questions and possibilities for future study. It was, in fact, difficult to terminate the data gathering as unanswered issues remained. It would be worthwhile to continue the research approach, an ongoing ethnographic study, to observe, describe, and learn from a school that is truly doing things differently. The data have shown that they are succeeding in many ways. However, questions remain. Where will they be in two or three or five years? Will they have discovered other pieces of the puzzle? Will there be a change in leadership and what influence with that effect? Will the faculty continue to support one another so they can continue with demands that are the nature of the profession? What place will this school enjoy in the larger district and the greater effort toward improving schools? Worth repeating, at this point, is what John Goodlad (1984)

told us that in order to improve our schools we must know what is going on inside them. Ongoing research and dialogue with the educators, and sharing of theory and practice are the paths to improving schools. This work must continue.

In a more specific direction, during the time spent in observation at the junior high school there were events that were particularly memorable and moving. These were experiences that one might describe as touching the “Soul of Education” (Kessler, 2000). I, a high school teacher of thirty years, had not witnessed moments of such expression and human regard as I did in this junior high school. There is more to learn from the students and teachers of the impact and influence of those moments. A return to the school, a year or two later, taking the time to ask about such events with the members still there could reveal another facet of the story. One method of research that would be possible is the writing of “vignettes” by the people who were there. The vignette, much like the impressionist painting, works with the color, the light, the sound, the feelings, and the movement of everyday life in the setting of nature (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Like an impressionist painting, it is only one telling of a story or a description of a slice of life shared from one perspective. As we put a collection of vignettes together, we may weave a fabric of understanding the depth, the richness, and the complexity of the human experience. If we want to know what we are teaching our children and what they are learning, we need to ask them.

With that thought in mind, another focus of research becomes obvious in its absence. This study was limited to work with adults in the community. To enhance the view and gain full impression, a study with the students at the center is needed. It is essential to know, in their words and their works, what life and learning are at the junior



high school. This ethnographic project would incorporate similar strategies, observations, and interviews. Also, to know the experience of the young person, shadowing her or him in the daily schedule would be essential. The mission of the junior high school, to Educate Every Child Every Day, includes academic achievement for all students as well as a focus on preparing students to participate in the culture with character and dignity. What does this mean and what does it look like? How do we know what they are really learning? And how do we share this with all students? If we are consistent with the philosophy of participatory education, we need to include their voices.

Recent literature suggests the growing appreciation and awareness to consider spiritual growth for children, for silence and solitude, for connection and compassion, and for joy and creativity (Kesler, 2000). Rachael Kesler's work, "The Seven Gateways to the Soul of Education" offers a framework for future research into this new question.

The final recommendation calls for continuing critical work in the form of another ethnographic study with the focus on the question of privilege in the community of this school. Good work was being done by the adults in the community of this school for the children there. The study allowed observing and understanding the work of initiating and sustaining positive change and the movement toward a democratic and inclusive reality. Still, in the direction of critical research, one would be remiss to conclude the study at that point. Every accomplishment and each step forward in the effort toward school reform and the work toward a more just society reveal new questions as well as the need for further research. This junior high school population is one of privilege. It is primarily middle class and upper middle class white students. The adults in the community have agreed that greater diversity is a goal for the school and that democracy thrives in greater

diversity. However, the demographics have not changed or developed toward that goal.

The questions to be examined concern the privilege of this particular school, the ongoing inequity in the schools of this district and the resulting consequences which contribute to the growing achievement gap and continuing oppression in our nation's schools.

## EPILOGUE

### “The Speed Boat” “The House Boat” “The Barge”

The voyage began four short years ago. The time passed quickly. The unknowns and the spirit of adventure turned this trip into a journey. The brave members who were on board for those first years felt some bruises of rough travel, the joy of smooth sailing and peaceful sense of moving forward together to the goal they viewed on the horizon. Some limited visibility, at times, with possible storms and dark waters ahead, that sort of uncertainty may cause fear and the desire to go back where the old ways are known and familiar. Even with the ambiguity of change and the accompanying grief for what is left behind, the participants discovered new terrain, new knowledge about their work and themselves. The passion to move forward to achieve their vision sparked a kind of energy rising from the collaborative human spirit, allowing the journey to begin.

Their visionary leader recognized that the success of the voyage depended on the successful voyage of each traveler. He served the group not only with a firm grip on the direction, but with gentle regard for the welfare of each person. In the beginning, the team was small, twenty members on a new and fast boat, excited, curious, taking a leap of faith, and exhilarated by possibility. In year one, the members came on with diversity of background, expertise, and great hope for all that they would create together. They knew they would create something that did not exist before, and for that, there was excitement. So much of the new school was different from any other. The team grappled

with all pieces of the puzzle. They created words for their voyage and ways for all voices to be heard. They embarked with new language, metaphors, and rituals. They were able to maneuver through uncharted waters with speed and agility which brought them success and celebration.

In Year Two, the community grew; the family grew. They needed a larger home, a houseboat. The new members were welcomed, and it became a priority that year to bring all members up to speed. From the very first conversations, the applications to join the team, the new members could hear that this culture was different, that this leadership was different, and that they would be asked to participate at a level greater perhaps than they had previously known. Their participation would influence not only their work, but the work of the whole. Their responsibility lay not only to themselves, but to the good progress of all toward their vision. All members shared stewardship for the safe and rewarding journey of each other member, new and old, regardless of position or title. With more souls on board, more hands on deck, more directions from which to see the goal, more questions, and more promise, the houseboat needed to move more slowly. It was a safety measure really, so that none would be lost in the new open waters. The structure had changed; the speed had changed; there were some new obstacles around which creative routes were mapped. The mission and the vision remained. And the journey continued.

Year Three, the adventurers find themselves no longer on their safe and warm houseboat, but now aboard a barge. The barge is several times the size of the houseboat with many more along for the journey. It is open to the unpredictability of nature as well as other people from the greater surroundings. Their journey continues forward devoted

still to their vision on the horizon, albeit now with greater weight and heavier burdens. The travel is slower this year, more to do, more structures in place, more systems to manage, still more travelers to include, and more cargo to lift. What forces and burdens caused the metamorphosis? And what does it mean to success or failure? It is not possible to know all the cargo aboard, for barges carry every sort of thing from garbage to flowers. It is not possible to know whether some of it is helpful to those determined to progress. Some of the cargo now belongs to others, to those perhaps not aboard but who will make use of the barge to move forward their own belongings and treasures. Some of the cargo may be “dead weight,” old stuff, not really of positive contribution, but that which has always been carried along and so must stay. It is not possible to know if the forces pulling back will arrest the determination of the devoted crew. In the beginning, the members acknowledged they “would be going against the grain.” The experience has grown to forces both above and below them. The undertow, the deep forces lying just below the surface, may have their impact. The winds and the storms which appear suddenly may slow their efforts at times. All of those on the barge, working together to find the new route, to maintain speed and spark new energies, recognize the presence of the forces without. There is an awareness that diminishes any naïve dreaming of easy sailing. They accept this challenge as they welcome opportunity for creative new paths. They affirm their success depends on their forces within.

In Year Four, growth continues in the spirit of camaraderie, the sense of tradition, a deepening of allegiance to one another, and the expectation for success. Most have stayed for the entire journey, more want to come aboard, ever cognizant of the demands and dangers. There is no way to foresee the next years or the ending of this story. It may

eventuate that leaders of the team will be needed in other places or that team members themselves will travel on. What is known at this moment is that the journey continues and the direction is constant. In this fourth year, the barge is functioning, as it wanted to, as it needed to. It is in many ways different and many ways the same, on its way to authenticity and completion. It is continuing toward the goal in the distance while still deeply caring for all travelers within this space and time. The forces around it and under it are there, but in its existence, it has created meaning, purpose, and essence. The struggles and the celebrations of this journey are poignant reminders of human capability and possibility.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**  
**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY**

## TITLE OF STUDY

A Critical Ethnography: The Process of Change at a Core Knowledge Junior High School

## PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Dr. James Banning  
School Of Education  
1051 Education Bldg., Colorado State University  
970-491-7153

## CO-PRINCIPAL INVERSTIGATOR

Elizabeth Urban  
School of Education  
970-219-9894

## WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the process of change in a public school. Research tells us that change efforts diminish and often fail in the third, fourth and fifth years. You are a member of the adult community working at [REDACTED] Junior High School during its fourth year. You and your school offer a unique opportunity to observe the culture of a school involved in change. Furthermore, your school offers the possibility of understanding the efforts of the people working to do things differently, and more in line with their beliefs and goals. What you have learned in the past years and/or what you experience in this fourth year may help to deepen the understanding of school improvement as well as the process of change.

## WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The research will be conducted by a team from the School of Education at Colorado State University and the Center for Research and Development at Poudre School District. Dr. James Banning, principal investigator, will oversee the study. Elizabeth Urban as co-investigator will conduct the research as a project for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose is to further the understanding of the process of change in public schools, the challenges, the successes, and the obstacles to continued success. Through observations and interviews, it will be possible to study and describe:

1. the story of a new school as experienced and told by the members.
2. the struggle and reward for individuals involved as well as for the community as a whole.
3. the journey of change from its inception through the first four years.

It is hoped that this study will add to the body of knowledge concerning growth, change, and improvement in schools.

**Page 1 of 4; Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_**

## WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The study, including observations and interviews, will take place in your school, [REDACTED] Core Knowledge Junior High School, [REDACTED]. The study will begin in August 2007, and continue through the fall semester.

## WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

If you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked:

- to permit the researcher to observe you during the school day. These observations may include your work in classes, in meetings, and in extra-curricular events. The observations will be audio taped with your permission. Observations will typically be one hour in length. Times and locations will be agreed upon in advance.
- to participate in interviews concerning your work at school. The interviews will be scheduled at your convenience and will take place on site. One initial interview is anticipated with the possibility of a follow up session to check for accuracy and understanding. The interviews will be thirty minutes to one hour in length, and will also be audio taped. A sample of interview protocol which suggests topics and questions is included with this letter.

## ARE THERE ANY REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

To our knowledge, there are no reasons why you should not participate. All adult members of the [REDACTED] JH community are eligible to participate.

## WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

A possibility of risk to you may be the concern of talking about sensitive personal experiences with regard to being a member of the school community. We believe that risk of any harm is very small.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

## ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You may experience no direct benefits from this study, however, it is hoped that the experience will enhance your understanding of your work at this school. Knowledge gained from this research may be used in the school and in the school district to improve efforts of change and enhance the possibility of continuing success.

*Page 2 of 4; Participant's initials* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date* \_\_\_\_\_

## DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

## WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE?

No cost for participating.

## WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?

We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

## CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

You may, of course, terminate your participation voluntarily at any time. If you fail to keep commitments for observations and interviews, you may be removed from the study.

## WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no payment for your time or effort in participating. It is hoped that it will be beneficial to you and enjoyable.

## WHEN HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH?

It is highly unlikely that you will be injured during observations or interviews. However, you should know that Colorado Government Immunity Act determines and limits Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of the study. Claims against the University must be made within 180 days of the injury.

*Page 3 of 4; Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_*

## WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Dr. James Banning, at 970-491-7153. If you have questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research contact Janell Meldrem, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

## WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

The final report of the 2004 study which took place during [REDACTED] opening year is available for you to read.

We greatly appreciate your time and interest in this study and hope you will join us in the work.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 4 pages.

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Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study.                      Date

---

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study.

---

Name of person providing information to participant.                      Date

---

Signature of research staff.

*Page 4 of 4; Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_*



## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

The interviews will be one on one and may last from thirty minutes to one hour. As a participant, you will be asked to answer questions about yourself in your role as a member in the school community and your experience there. Each interview will include questions which are derived from the findings of the archival data (the themes analyzed in the 2004 study). These themes will serve as topics for the interview. Possible questions are listed below. (Not all questions will be asked in every interview. However, the same topics will be addressed.)

### Theme #1: Collaboration

1. Can you describe a typical collaborative circle meeting?
2. Yesterday I observed your collaborative circle meeting. Can you tell me from your perspective what happened as if I had not been there?
3. In the school handbook from 2004, it reads: “We are here together to do what none of us can do alone.” How do you perceive that mission in the reality of this school?
4. In your opinion, has collaboration increased or decreased? Can you offer example or story of how it has affected your work?

### Theme #2: Visionary Leadership

1. There is much agreement in education today about the connection between success in school improvement and leadership in school. Can you remember a time when the principal here had a direct influence on your work and your students’ success? Has this influence increased or decreased over the time you have been here? How? Why?
2. In the original study, it was found that there was a different kind of leadership here—a kind of leadership that allowed for the community to see and develop its own identity. The task of developing the mission and

vision was shared by the principal and the members. How do you perceive the ongoing task of creating vision and achieving mission?

3. In your opinion, has the community created the reality they desired? What role has leadership played in that work?

#### Theme #3: Staff and Parents as Agents of Change

1. What does it mean to be a staff member/parent here?
2. In your work, what can you do to improve education for students here?
3. Doing things differently and encouraging change were part of the original motivation. Have you seen yourself as an agent of this effort? In what ways have you been able to contribute, to make a difference?

#### Theme #4: Trust in the Process

1. “The way a school functions insistently teaches.” (Ted Sizer, 1999.) Can you describe the way [REDACTED] functions from day to day? Examples of process and interaction? What does that teach the people who live and work here?
2. Is there a consistent process to accomplish tasks that is different than other places you have worked? Can you explain it? Has the process strengthened or diminished since the beginning?

#### Ongoing Change and Fitting in the Larger System

1. What are the successes and challenges you have experienced in this effort to create change and improve education?
2. Are there obstacles which rise from traditional structures?
3. How does this school now fit in the larger school system, in the larger community?

Additional comments or thoughts?

Possible

follow-up

interview?

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### **Interview Guidelines for All Research Participants**

The format of the qualitative interview to be used in this study is derived from Stage Three of Carspecken's critical ethnography mode. Stage Three produces dialogical data generated through interviews and group discussions. The protocol described in this appendix is modified but based on the Carspecken model. The purpose of this step in the research is to accomplish the task of member checking and to give voice to the participants. "A central purpose of Stage Three is to democratize the research process. Stage Three gives participants a voice in the research process and a chance to challenge material produced by the researcher (Carspecken, 1996, p. 155)."

The interview will be semi-structured to allow maximum flexibility, to create a safe environment, and to encourage the participants to use their own words, feelings, vocabulary, and metaphors. The purpose is to allow for the meaning of data to be co-created by researcher and participants.

### **The Qualitative Interview**

Each interview will include questions, which are derived from the findings of the archival data (analyzed in the original study). Each of the themes from that study will serve as a topic domain for the interview. The following are potential questions for staff, faculty, and parents.

1. Can you describe a typical collaborative teachers /parents' meeting? From your perspective, what actually happens there?
2. Yesterday, I attended a collaborative meeting in your subject area. You were there also. Can you tell me what happened as if I had not been there?
3. Can you relate a story of a particularly memorable experience for you in collaborative effort here?
4. How is collaboration different here than in other schools or situations you have known?
5. Has collaboration as a part of the school culture affected you personally and professionally? In what way? Has it affected your classes, your students?
6. What have you gained? What have you contributed to the effort and to the school?

Interpersonal Process Recall (modified from Carspecken, 1996, p.163)

Using data from the original study, ask participants to react to documents and statements they created during the first year of the school's existence. For example, from the school handbook created by the faculty in 2004, "Most importantly, we are here together to do what none of us can do alone." How has that mission become a reality in this school? Using the researcher's original report, ask participants to evaluate the findings.

Topic Domain II    VISIONARY LEADERSHIP    Lead-off and follow-up questions.

1.     There is much agreement in education today about the connection between success in schools, success for teachers and students, and the leadership in the school. Can you remember and share a time when the principal here had direct influence on you and/or on your students?
2.     What is your relationship with your principal or leadership team?
3.     Do you feel pressured at times to perform in a certain way? How?
4.     What do you think would happen if you questioned plans presented by the leadership team?
5.     Does the leadership team enhance collaboration among staff? Does it empower staff and students?

Interpersonal Process Recall

From the archival data, “The principal frequently asked the question, ‘If we make this decision, what does it say about who we are?’ This leader, with a vision of what could be, continually asked the community to search for answers so the organization as a whole could arrive at its most authentic reality.”

In the original study, it was stated that there was a different kind of leadership being exhibited here. A kind of leadership that allowed for the learning community to develop a true sense of identity—the task of developing a vision and a mission was shared by principal and community members. The task was defined as seeing together what this school could become. Has that task of creating a vision in a shared manner

remained strong? Why or why not? In what way has it helped (or not) to develop the kind of school the people truly wanted? Are you still on the path to the shared vision?

### Topic Domain III STAFF AND PARENTS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

#### Lead-off question and follow-up questions

1. Can you describe the role you play in creating a school where real learning will take place for all students and adults in this community?
2. In what arenas do you have the opportunity to participate in conversations that will determine the direction and progress of your school?
3. In a typical day, can you question what happens in your school and find new ways to improve learning for all?
4. In what ways do you connect with the mission, Educate every child every day?
5. In what ways do you connect with parents, and they with teachers in an effort to empower all members?

#### Interpersonal Process Recall

##### School Handbook, 2004

- Positivity...as we get our school up and running
- Grow the vision together
- Honor operating principles and values
- Align with and consult the Core Knowledge foundation
- Establish safe and healthy relationship and culture

- Focus on learning, collaboration, celebration, and culture
- Take personal responsibility. Demonstrate Kinard Character
- Ask, How can I? What can I? How can we? What can we?

These statements were written by the faculty in 2004. Do they still connect with your work on a daily basis? Can you share examples, stories?



## APPENDIX C

### PROPOSAL FOR A CORE KNOWLEDGE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

## APPENDIX C

### PROPOSAL FOR A CORE KNOWLEDGE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

A Proposal for a Core Knowledge Junior High School and a sustaining Senior High School within the Poudre School District

Submitted by the parents of  
Core Knowledge Elementary School

The following is a proposal for a Core Knowledge Junior High School and sustaining Senior High School to be established in the [REDACTED] School District. This proposal will define the underlying principles that form a the basis for requesting the addition of a Core Knowledge Junior High and sustaining Senior High School to the [REDACTED] School District.

In implementing a Core Knowledge Junior High School and sustaining Senior High School, our overall goal is to extend the founding principles of [REDACTED] Core Knowledge Elementary School of the secondary school level. [REDACTED] Core Knowledge Elementary School was founded on and continues to be based on educational excellence in knowledge, skills, and character.

#### Background

The philosophy of [REDACTED] Core Knowledge Elementary School is grounded in a mission to provide excellence and fairness in education for elementary chook children. Excellence in education means raising academic standards and achieving success for all students. Fairness in education means providing equal opportunity to learn for all students. This mission is accomplished by teaching a common foundation of knowledge based on the Core Knowledge Sequence and learning skills that tenable student success.

The success of this mission has greatly depended on site-based management built on full partnership of parents, teacher, and students and regular assessments of individual student, class, and overall school progress. The success of a Core Knowledge Junior High School and Senior High School will depend on these same principles. It is our expectation to apply these same principles to the secondary school level.

#### Why a Core Knowledge Junior High School and Senior High School?

Because of the success of [REDACTED] Core Knowledge Elementary School, the parents of [REDACTED] are searching for an educational module they can support at the secondary level. Parents of Core Knowledge Elementary School want a secondary educational model that will provide an attractive, non-charter program to accommodate students from Core Knowledge elementary schools . this model, like the one used at [REDACTED], will offer a

“complete program” that incorporates curriculum; strong parent, teacher, and student partnerships; and character education.

The limited capacity of the District’s one non-charter Core Knowledge program at [REDACTED] Junior High School will not accommodate all students from the Core Knowledge elementary schools. Enrollment projections estimate that [REDACTED] will graduate approximately 170 students by the end of the 2003-2004 school year. With the addition of [REDACTED] Elementary School as a fourth Core Knowledge school, that number will continue to grow. An additional 25 students could be added to this number if [REDACTED] School is included. The 7<sup>th</sup> grade Core Knowledge capacity at [REDACTED] Junior High School currently allows for 110 students.

### School of Choice

We believe the Core Knowledge Junior High School and sustaining Senior High School should be characterized as a School of Choice. This means that parents have options and have selected this school because of its educational philosophy and mission. Given a choice, and choosing the Core Knowledge Junior High School and sustaining Senior High School, we believe parents and students will play a stronger role in the school. The same can be said about the teaching and administrative staff. When they choose the kind of educational philosophy they prefer, the time, energy, and resources they offer can be ownership and individual commitment that is essential for achieving excellence in education. Conversely, those who don’t choose to attend will detract from this program. The school should occupy an in tire site or segment of a site as opposed to being a track in an existing school.

### Focus Area

Listed below are the focus areas contained in this proposal. These are essential to the success of a Core Knowledge Junior High School and sustaining Senior High School. These focus areas are what would define this school. Each focus area is based on the educational approach exemplified in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Core Knowledge Sequence and continued throughout the [REDACTED] School District’s Five Cores of Learning curriculum in grades 9 through 12. Character education taught throughout the curriculum, standards of behavior, the roles of parents, teachers, and students, and academic standards are also addressed.

### Focus Areas of Core Knowledge Jr./Sr. High School

<b>School Management</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hiring</li><li>• Decision Making</li><li>• Policies/Charter/Covenant</li><li>• Enrollment Priority</li><li>• Size of School(s)</li></ul>	<b>Parent/Teacher/Student Roles</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parent/Teacher/Student Partnerships</li><li>• Level of Participation</li></ul>
<b>Curriculum</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Core Knowledge Sequence (7<sup>th</sup> &amp; 8<sup>th</sup> grades)</li><li>• Poudre School District Curriculum (9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades)</li></ul>	<b>Character Education</b>  <b>Academic Standards</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assessment</li><li>• Grading Policy</li><li>• Learning Environment</li></ul> <b>Communication</b> <b>Diversity/Inclusiveness</b>

### School Management

#### *Hiring*

The school principal and a hiring committee consisting of an equal number of teachers and parents shall hire school staff. The hiring committee shall not exceed 10 members. The school principal has responsibility for final selection. The [REDACTED] School District Board of Education and Superintendent shall have the hiring responsibility for the school principal with input from parents and teachers.

#### *Decision Making*

All individuals who are affected by a decision should have input into the process of making that decision. Therefore, a Site Based Management system shall be established in which the school becomes the primary decision-making and management authority using a model that represents the school community. Through a governing council of a Teacher Advisory Board and a Parent Advisory Board of equal voice, school policy decisions will be discussed and made. Parents and Teachers will have an equal voice in the decisions that affect the school by selecting representatives and influencing decisions made by that elected body.

#### *Policies/Charter/Covenant*

Soon after the creation of the school, materials will be drafted to address school policies, and day-to-day decision-making. This could take the form of a school charter and/or covenant.

### *Enrollment Priority*

At the 7<sup>th</sup> grade level, priority for enrollment will be given to students graduating from the Core Knowledge elementary schools within [REDACTED] School District. Enrollment of graduating students from [REDACTED] elementary schools will be guaranteed in subsequent grade levels as long as they continue to attend this school. Enrollment of spot not filled by graduating Core Knowledge elementary students would be filled on a first-come, first-served basis within the guidelines of the [REDACTED] School District. Enrollment priority for the initial 8<sup>th</sup> grade class of students will be given to students currently enrolled in the Core Knowledge program at [REDACTED] Junior High School. Subsequent priority for 8<sup>th</sup> grade will be given to the graduating classes as mentioned above.

### *Size of the School*

Enrollment of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade will not exceed 225 students. Enrollment of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade will not exceed 225 students. Enrollment of grades 9 through 12 would not exceed 350 students for each grade level. (1,400 students in grades 9 through 12)

## Curriculum

### *Core Knowledge Sequence (Grades 7 & 8) – (see attached courses)*

The curriculum for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students will be based on the Core Knowledge Sequence. This Sequence teaches concepts, knowledge, and skills presented by Dr. E.D. Hirsch, Jr. the content of this curriculum will meet or exceed all state and district model content standards. The assessment of students will also meet or exceed state and district standards.

### *Curriculum (Grades 9-12)*

The curriculum for grades 9-12 will model the Five Cores of Learning adopted by the [REDACTED] School District Board of Education. This curriculum will utilize the course requirements and recommendations stated in the district's Curriculum Guide for Secondary Students.

In addition to this general comprehensive curriculum, the parents and faculty will have the opportunity to install an alternate high school level curriculum that meets the goals of the school.

The extracurricular activities such as sports teams, clubs, etc... offered at existing [REDACTED] School District Junior and Senior high schools will be available at all levels (Grades 7-12) for both boys and girls.

## Parent/Teacher/Student Roles

### *Partnership and Level of Participation*

We believe the family provides the most influential and effective context for life-long learning. While relying on the training and expertise of professionals the fundamental significance of the parent-child relationship in the educational process must be maintained and fostered. Above all we recognize that parents are a child's first and most important teachers. Within a Core Knowledge Junior High and sustaining Senior High School, parents shall be in full partnership with the staff in all aspects of the school ensuring the most effective education possible for their children. This partnership includes the responsibility to support the school staff and provide good examples of behavior and work habits for children, Parents will be expected to model the character education developed by the school and respect the professional boundaries established by the staff.

From our experience, parental involvement in the classroom at the elementary school level is very high. At the 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade level, there tends to be less opportunity for parental involvement in the actual classroom, nevertheless many other opportunities for volunteering will exist and all parents will be encouraged to volunteer at sometime during the school year. A high level of parental involvement will be available to teachers within limits established by the site base management group. Parents will be available to teachers as classroom volunteers and will be utilized as much as is reasonably possible. At all times, parents must be welcome in the classroom and parental presence in the school will be encouraged, within the standards established by the SBMC.

Teachers are at the center of every successful school. All teachers will be expected to accept the responsibility for teaching the entire curriculum in a way that meshes with the school's philosophy towards values and character education. Teachers will be expected to live up to the highest standards of professionalism and model the character educator developed by the school.

All students are capable of learning to accept responsibility for their own education. The philosophy and practices of this school will hold students accountable for their actions and learning. School policies regarding grading, discipline, and instruction will promote self-discipline, hard work, cooperation, and decision-making in which students accept the natural consequences of their actions.

## Character Education

Acting in a respectful and responsible way is crucial to high academic achievement. Incorporating character education at all levels will teach students the values necessary to be successful in school and well beyond. The character traits and qualities chosen to be modeled by this school shall be proactively taught by staff and incorporated in classroom instruction and all school related activities. Staff will teach, reinforce, and support these

character qualities through the content of the Core Knowledge Sequence and Poudre School District curriculum. All adults in the school community are expected to model these character qualities, and to hold students accountable for exhibiting these qualities.

Our experience is that the teaching of the Core Knowledge curriculum allows little time for additional programs, regardless of their intentions. External programs will be reviewed as needed before ever being considered for inclusion or incorporation into the curriculum. This school will not sue programs, presentations, surveys, curricula, or other practices that undermine the character traits and qualities modeled. Specific approaches or pull-out programs such as values clarification, situational ethics, peer mediation, or group mediation techniques will not be used at this school. These needs will be addressed through the support given by sensitive, caring teachers; staff members; and parent partners.

The expectation is that students will be motivated and serious and at ease with their duties, peers, and teachers. Good behavior will be learned at home and reinforced through character education. Exceptions will receive individual attention as needed instead of being addressed through school wide programs.

### Academic Standards

#### *Assessment*

Regular assessment of students serves multiple functions. It provides feedback to students and parents revealing strengths and weaknesses; it shows the district and community how the school is performing; and it furnishes data for closing the loop on school improvements, allowing for the adjustment of curriculum and presentation to achieve the desired results. Routine assessments will consist of state standards testing ( ) and nationally normalized testing such as the district levels tests, ACT, or SAT.

#### *Grading Policy*

Grades will serve as a means of shorthand communication of student performance to students and parents. Grades will be based on the acquisition of skills and knowledge rather than behaviors and attitudes. Detailed rubrics will be used so the goals of any given assignment are clear to students, parents, and teachers alike. The rubrics will, as much as is feasible, be applied uniformly from student-to-student, teacher-to-teacher, and class-to-class. Letter grades will be assigned based on fixed percentages of successfully meeting expectations. Grades reflecting effort and advancement, if used, will be separated from grades reflecting the degree of meeting grade level or course expectations.

#### *Learning Environment*

It is the goal of the proposed Core Knowledge Junior High and Senior High School to have a suspension rate of 1% or less of the total student population. Discipline will be handled in accordance with the district Code of Conduct & Discipline. The school will strive to create an environment that is structured and safe.

### Communication

The intent of this school is to provide an educational environment that serves the needs of the school community and provides parents an opportunity for involvement in the structure and operation of the school. Open and timely communication is key to providing parents the opportunity for involvement. Consistent avenues for communication will be established (i.e. monthly and/or quarterly newsletters, e-mail lists, web site postings with home pages for classrooms) to disseminate up to date information to parents and teachers.

### Diversity/Inclusiveness

As a public school of choice within the [REDACTED] School District, the Core Knowledge Junior High School and sustaining Senior High School will be open to all students (based on the enrollment priority listed below) who wish to enroll and want to meet the challenges provided by the curriculum and parent/teacher/student roles listed above. Fairness means the same rigorous standards and high expectations will apply to all students. All students, staff, and parents will respect individual differences, which don't detract from the school's goals.



APPENDIX D

SCHOOL DOCUMENTS MENTIONED IN REPORT

## The [REDACTED] Community


Our fundamental purpose at [REDACTED] is learning for all. As a new school, we are in the pre-initiation/initiation phase of development in virtually every aspect of our school. As we grow [REDACTED] into a school of demonstration, we are guided by our commitment to **positive** beliefs, values, and norms.

Throughout the past year, the [REDACTED] community has engaged in committee work researching best practices, and we've had many discussions about the kind of school we hope to become. This has challenged us to open our hearts and minds to the diversity of thought and experience in our community. The result of our work will be revealed throughout this handbook's policies, and through our daily processes, procedures, and practices.

**Most importantly we are here together to do what none of us can do alone.** We exist as a school for a variety of reasons, but first and foremost, as [REDACTED] School District's mission states, to...Educate...Every Child Every Day. At [REDACTED], *our touchstone...we care and challenge with character, is followed by our motto...with [REDACTED] character.*

**OUR MISSION: Educate...Every...Child Every Day.**

## **First Year Focus**


1. Positivity...as we get our school up and running
2. Grow  vision
3. Honor our operating principles and values
4. Align and consult with the core Knowledge Foundation
5. Establish safe and healthy relationships and school culture
6. Focus on learning, collaboration, celebration and persistence
7. Take personal responsibility...
  - a. How can I?
  - b. What can I?
  - c. What can we?
  - d. How can we?

# *Working Agreements*

*For*

 *School District*

## *Operating Principles*

The leaders of  School District will focus on helping all students learn in an environment based on these principles.

### Operating with Integrity

We commit to being persons of our word whose actions are aligned with the language we use. Out of this foundational principle will come an atmosphere where we respectfully honor the truth that each of us brings to any endeavor.

- ◆ *Means doing what is ethically and morally right.*
- ◆ *Means doing what we have said we will do, making our walk match our talk.*
- ◆ *Means what we say and do in different situations and with different audiences is consistent rather than contradictory.*
- ◆ *Means speaking up to give input before the decision is made, and after the decision is made, supporting the decision rather than attempting to sabotage the decision or denigrate our colleagues.*
- ◆ *Promotes trust and builds credibility.*

### ***We commit to:***

- ◆ *Being persons whose actions match our words.*
- ◆ *Building an atmosphere where we can share honestly and compassionately without fear of retribution.*
- ◆ *Speaking truthfully in order to build understanding and benefit all concerned.*
- ◆ *Holding each other accountable to our commitments.*
- ◆ *Going directly to the individual for an explanation when a breach of integrity appears to have occurred.*
- ◆ *Acknowledging errors in our judgment when we've "blown it," and seeking restitution with those we've harmed.*
- ◆ *Supporting our colleagues as they make the tough decisions necessary to follow the principle of integrity.*

## Committed to Continuous Quality Learning

Every member of our school community, in everything we do, will focus on increasing student and staff learning and growth. We will continuously define our goals and expectations and supportively help one another be accountable so that we can be good stewards of education at all levels.

### ***What do we commit to in order to make this happen?***

- ◆ *Commit to broaden our perspectives to include all levels of issues: pre-k to post secondary*
- ◆ *Commit to create conversations between all levels*
- ◆ *Commit to a system that allocates resources equitably*
- ◆ *Commit to acting on needs (re: student achievement) in an appropriate way*
- ◆ *Commit to staff development-time and dollars*
- ◆ *Accountability to the process, plan and to each other – support for the system and process*
- ◆ *Commit to best practices based on sound research and positive outcomes*
- ◆ *Commit to kids first*
- ◆ *Commit to making hard decisions*
- ◆ *Commit to linking pre-k-to post secondary action plans*
- ◆ *Invest*

### **Trust through Openness**

We will presume the good intentions of others and honor speaking the truth from our hearts and minds so that we can create a culture of openness for honest input and creative ideas.

- ◆ *Build trust thru openness/Trust cannot be mandated*
- ◆ *Focus on issues not people – discussing our thinking regarding concerns and concepts openly and communicating both intentions and process;*
- ◆ *Go to the source for information in order to deal with concerns, questions or conflicts to prevent misunderstandings and reduce rumors;*
- ◆ *Invest time and energy to become informed on issues and to regularly communicate our opinions and ideas in an enriched decision-making process;*
- ◆ *Hear and respect the expertise of our colleagues and value their views and their right to disagree.*
- ◆ *Are visible and accessible to staff and colleagues.*
- ◆ *Demonstrate a willingness to respectfully hold ourselves and each other accountable.*
- ◆ *Steady, consistent, provide opportunity to speak*
- ◆ *Need feedback loops/Requires concept of forgiveness*

## **Courageous Action**

Ethics and integrity will guide our actions even when the serious issues must be faced. With courageous actions, we will rise above mediocrity, chaos, or isolation. We will support one another's courageous actions in an environment that embraces thoughtful risk-taking.

### ***Courageous Action requires of us that we:***

- ◆ *Engage in ethical behavior and conversations in which questions and issues can be raised and addressed at any time, professionally and respectfully*
- ◆ *Balance actions with consideration for other's convictions and feelings*
- ◆ *Speak our own truth*
- ◆ *Hold ourselves and others responsible to the operating principles*

## **Inclusive of all Stakeholders**

We value all voices. Our collective wisdom is greater than individual wisdom. People do their best work when they feel valued and connected and we are all made stronger by each of our successes. We will promote a climate that values diverse thinking, mutual respect and working as a team for the betterment of the whole organization.

- ◆ *Promote a climate that values diverse thinking, dissenting voices, different approaches, and mutual respect for opinions.*
- ◆ *Seek out and listen to voices of all stakeholders, including the unheard and underrepresented.*
- ◆ *Make a commitment to and accept responsibility for successful communication: to participate in a timely, appropriate, and direct fashion.*
- ◆ *Develop a trustworthy process and strategies to foster inclusive, two-way communication which contains:*
  - *small group discussion;*
  - *multiple methods for input and dialogue instead of "sit and get" format;*
  - *formal and informal input; a follow-through mechanism;*
  - *method to determine when to inform and when to solicit input, as defined in the decision-making matrix;*
  - *time to allow collection of representative constituent input*
- ◆ *Commitments: I will speak up when asked and then support the final decision; if I am a representative on a committee, I will seek input openly and share all opinions; I will go through my representative; I will conduct building and department meetings inclusively; I will read and respond to e-mail communication.*

### *Joyful in our Work*

We strive to cultivate the human spirit and to care about staff and student feelings. We dedicate ourselves to provide inspiration and support for each other, to be non-judgmental, and to be genuine. Enjoying our work, taking the time to laugh, and having fun are important to us and will provide continual rejuvenation. Joyfulness promotes personal and organizational health and generates more opportunities for success.

- ◆ *We will exhibit a positive, joyful human spirit.*
- ◆ *We will celebrate our victories and successes along the way while providing genuine support for each other.*
- ◆ *We will be unselfish with the sharing of our resources and successes for the good of our students and the district.*
- ◆ *We will maintain positive attitudes that promote personal and organizational health.*

## ██████████---A School of Character

██████████ is a school community of character, a place where core values such as good judgment, best effort, respect, kindness, honesty, service and citizenship are modeled, upheld, celebrated, and practiced in every part of the school's life—from the example of adults, to the relationship among peers, the handling of discipline, the content of the curriculum, the rigor of academic standards, the conduct of extracurricular activities, and the involvement of parents.

All of us want our children to be successful, but we know in our bones that success without character doesn't count for much. As novelist Walker Percy once said, "Some people get all A's, but flunk life."

In his famous speech, "I Have a Dream," Martin Luther King said he dreamed of the day when all Americans "...will be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

### **What is the Content of Character? ██████████ Character?**

Content of character is expressed through our beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes. As we grow our vision and community, let us begin with those attributes that foster strong and healthy relationships and a culture hospitable to learning:

**Caring:** To show compassionate, considerate, helpful, and understanding of others.

**Respect:** to show regard for self, others, property, and the environment.

**Responsibility:** To be answerable, to be accountable for one's actions.

**Trustworthiness:** To be worthy of trust and confidence, to be reliable and honest.

*Be careful of your thoughts,  
for our thoughts become your words.  
Be careful of your words,  
for your words become your deeds.  
Be careful of your deeds,  
for your deeds become your habits.  
Be careful of your habits,  
for your habits become your character.  
Be careful of your character,  
for your character becomes your destiny.*



## **How will [REDACTED] become a school of character?**

- ❖ The behaviors, attitudes, and relationships among the adults will model the kind of behaviors, relationships, and attitudes we want from and with our students.
- ❖ We will tie character education to school improvement.
- ❖ We will make character part of our school culture, emphasizing character in all curricular and co-curricular programs.
- ❖ We will train staff, students, and parents in the Raising Responsibility System.
- ❖ We will use the Core Knowledge Sequence topics to integrate character education and service learning.
- ❖ We will provide multiple opportunities for student leadership.
- ❖ We will remain committed to our parent partnership.
- ❖ We will promote healthy parent-teacher-student relationships so that no child at [REDACTED] is anonymous.

### **[REDACTED] Attending Skills**

1. Be in the moment
2. Eye Contact
3. Appropriate feedback
4. Appropriate body language
5. Ask questions for clarification

# To Care and to Challenge with Character

## Operating Principles –

Openness	Hard Work
Restlessness	Integrity
Courage	Perseverance
Respect	Resiliency
Curiosity	Humor
Fun	Inspiration
Positive Attitude	Responsibility
Trust	Humility
Faith	Citizenship
Cooperation	Risk
Celebrating	Partnership Community
Tradition	Owning your Actions
Ritual	Personal Responsibility
Quality	Forgiveness, Compassion
Stewardship	Appreciation
Empathy	Strength
Collaboration	Attitude
Communication	Focus on Learning
Results Orientation	Continuous Learning
Shared Knowledge	Collective Intelligence
Communication	Not accepting where you are...avoid complacency

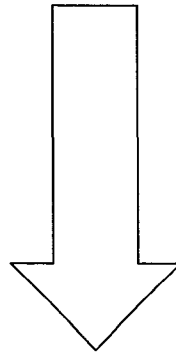
## **NORMS (2007)**

1. Staff Agreements
2. Discipline
  - 6 P's
  - Tardy
  - Dress
3. Parent Communication
  - 1st/3rd Tuesday of each month update Pinnacle
  - Web pages update
  - Incompletes once/month
  - 24 hours response to voice mail/email
  - Parent/Teacher conference
4. Staff Communication
  - Staff memo
  - Email
5. Posting lesson topics and goals on walls of classroom
6. Staff meetings are used for professional development
7. Team Meetings
  - Department
  - a. Grade level
- 8. INSTRUCTIONAL NORMS?????**

## ABCD Decision-Making Model

New Decisions at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] decides whether the decision is  
A, B, C, or D



5%

**A-----B**

95%

**C-----D**

### Examples:

- A. Fire alarms
- B. Master Schedule, Budget
- C. Behavior Plan, Academic Plan
- D. Units, Lessons, Assessments, Classroom Management

# CONSENSUS

We have arrived at consensus when:

1. All points of view have been heard
2. The will of the group is evident even to those who most oppose it
  - The pros outweigh the cons

## Fist to Five

5. Fully support it and willing to design an action plan to make it happen
4. Support it and open to participating in dialogue on implementation
3. Not strong feelings either way, will go along with the majority
2. I don't agree, but I won't take steps to block it
1. Strongly disagree, can't live with it

FIST: My strong disagreement will lead me to block this

# AGREEMENTS/COMMITMENTS

**We, the Staff, agree to and are committed to:**

1. **The impeccability of our word:** We will not gossip. We will vent directly to the person that we have a concern with. We will treat each other with dignity and respect.
2. **Collaboration:** We will make full use of team time. We will work together to solve problems and improve learning opportunities.
3. **Attitude toward student learning:** We will never give up on any student (no excuses). All kids can learn, and we will work to help all students achieve high standards of learning.
4. **Positivity:** We choose to be positive in our communications and relationships (vs. negative and cynical).
5. **Data:** We drive our instruction, curriculum, and assessment with the support of data (vs. the averaging of opinions).

## **Definition of Commitment:**

*"The choice to be accountable with expectation of return, other than the fruits of our own labor. The reward of our own virtue."*

Peter Block

## The [REDACTED] School

***“We believe all kids can learn...and we will work to help all students achieve high standards of learning.”***

**We believe that all students can and must learn at relatively high levels of achievement. We are confident that students can master challenging academic material with our support and help. We establish standards all students are expected to achieve, and we continue to work with them until they have done so.**

# STUDENT RESPONSE WORKSHEET

████████ JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Referred by \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the specific behavior/situation that resulted in this incident or referral (include what happened before the incident and how you responded when you interacted with the staff member):

What level was your behavior? What were you thinking when you acted this way?

What part of the ████████ expectations did your behavior violate and how? Circle one or more and explain.

Polite	Positive	Productive	Attending Skills
Prompt	Participatory	Prepared	

What would be logical consequences for your actions?

What do you see as possible alternatives if you should encounter a similar situation in the future? How will you choose to act differently?



# The Bully

The Kaiser Foundation study in 2001 shows 86% of youth between ages 12 and 15 report that they get teased or bullied at school. Students who are “different in some way” are twice as likely to be targeted. 23% of students, yet 71% of teachers report that adults intervened often or always.

- Bullies come in all shapes and sizes
- Bullies can be identified by how they act
- Bullies learn from movies, games, kids they hang with, the school they attend, and their culture

*“Bullying is a conscious, willful, and deliberate activity intended to harm or frighten through the threat of future aggression.”*

- Imbalance of power
- Intent to harm
- Purposeful
- When it is allowed to continue without intervention, can cause emotional harm

Physical – less than 30%

Verbal – more than 70%

Relational- most powerful/damaging in middle years

## The Makeup of a Bully

There are many reasons why some kids might use their abilities and talents to bully other people. Here are some.

1. The confident bully
2. The social bully
3. The smooth bully
4. The hyperactive bully
5. The bullied bully
6. The bunch of bullies
7. The gang of bullies

Bullies have these traits in common.

1. Like to dominate other people
2. Like to use others to get what they want
3. Find it hard to see a situation from another person's point of view
4. Are concerned only with their own wants
5. Tend to hurt other kids when adults are not around
6. View weaker siblings or peers as targets
7. Use blame and untruths when confronted
8. Refuse to accept responsibility for their actions
9. Lack ability to look ahead/think about consequences
10. Crave attention

*Teasing is different from taunting*

*Reporting is not ratting*

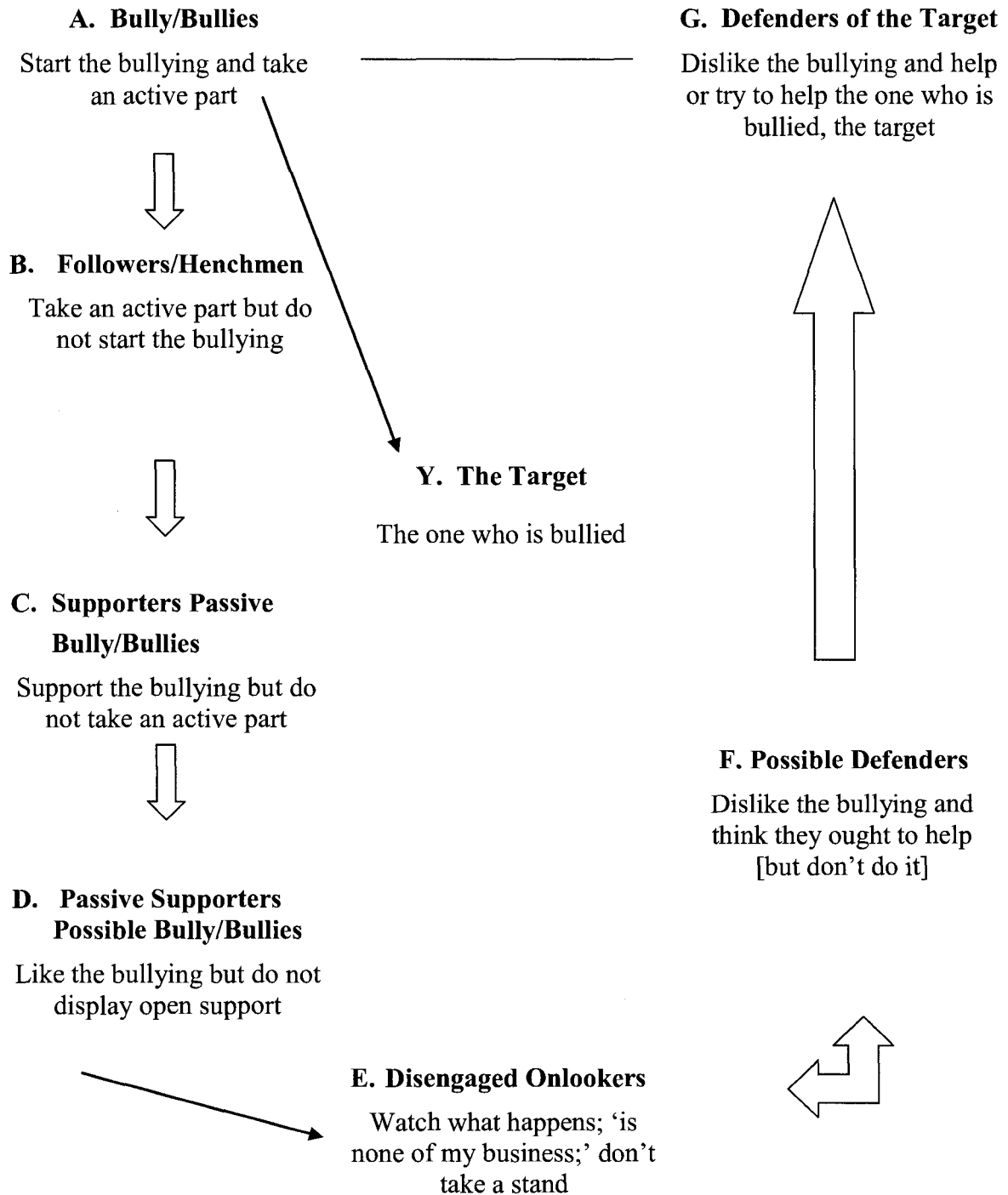
## The Bullied

- The kid who's new
- The youngest, smaller, more insecure
- The one who's most sensitive
- The person who is not as confident
- The kid who is not as confident
- The kid who does things just to please others
- Someone whose behavior is annoying
- The student who prefers to be alone
- The shy one
- The show off
- Too rich or too poor
- A different race, religion, or background
- The very bright student
- The student with learning difficulties

- The large, tall, or overweight student
- Physical attributes- large ears, skinny legs, pimples
- Physical or mental disabilities – 2-3 times more likely
- Hyperactive student who acts before thinking
- Just in the wrong place at the wrong time

## Prepare for the Bullying Quiz

1. Can you define what bullying is? Bullying is unfair and one sided. It is when someone continues to hurt, threaten, frighten, or leave another person out on purpose. Bullying can cause deep emotional harm.
2. Can you list at least three characteristics/common traits of a bully?
3. Teasing is different from taunting. Reporting is not ratting.
4. Most bullying is verbal (70%). Only 30% is physical
5. Relational bullying is most powerful/damaging in teenage years.
6. Can you list at least three reasons why someone might become the target of a bully?
7. When you stand up to a bully...
  - a. Use your personal power- not mouse or monster power
  - b. Look right at the person
  - c. Use their name if you know it
  - d. In a confident, respectful voice tell them how you feel and that you want them to stop
  - e. Repeat once if necessary. Walk away when that feels OK
  - f. Do not try to get back at the bully or use revenge
  - g. Report to an adult
8. Can you describe different kinds of bystanders?
  - a. Followers
  - b. Supporters
  - c. Disengaged onlookers
  - d. Possible defenders
  - e. Defenders of the target
9. Do you know the 6 P's?



**An Adaptation of the Bullying Circle**

**By**

**Dan Olweus, PhD**