

STUDY OF COLLECTIVE EFFICACY IN AWARD WINNING SCHOOLS IN ILLINOIS
SERVING RACIALLY DIVERSE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the collective teacher efficacy in selected elementary schools, specifically exploring the extent to which those schools demonstrate collective efficacy, the nature of collective efficacy in those schools, and the underlying belief systems and tacit assumptions that may inform that efficacy. The first phase of a mixed methods design was used to determine the level of collective efficacy present in eight diverse elementary schools. Through a series of interviews in the second and third phases of the study, I investigated the nature of collective efficacy in those schools and the possibility that underlying belief systems such as deficit thinking may inform beliefs at the school level. My respondents came from eight elementary schools in three northern Illinois school districts serving increasingly diverse student populations.

Results from phase 1 of the study provided a range of collective teacher efficacy (CTE) scores for the participating sites and revealed no significant variance in the CTE scores of the eight schools. In phase 2 of the study, interviews were conducted with six building administrators in four selected schools to explore the nature of collective efficacy in their schools and to examine the underlying belief systems from the vantage point of school leaders. In phase 3 of the study, teachers from two schools facing different school-based challenges but with similar collective efficacy scores and similar demographic data were interviewed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of collective efficacy and underlying belief systems in those two schools.

As supported in previous research, collective teacher efficacy did correlate with student achievement despite varying levels of socioeconomic status. The eight school sites participating in phase 1 of the study demonstrated levels of collective teacher efficacy that correlated with

socioeconomic status. Despite slight differences in the CTE scores, with all schools scoring in the average range, no significant variance between the scores were found. Given the complexity of increasingly diverse school populations and the limitations of academic achievement data as an independent variable, quantitative analysis alone was not adequate to examine the construct of collective efficacy in these schools, given their common selection criteria.

The qualitative findings of this study revealed that belief systems grounded in deficit thinking coexisted with average levels of collective teacher efficacy. That collective teacher efficacy can coexist with deficit thinking is problematic for school improvement efforts based on collective efficacy theory. The utility of collective efficacy as a framework for school improvement is questionable for school leaders working to realize a socially just education and to understand the issues confronting schools serving diverse populations. A deeper interrogation and a measurement of deficit thinking needs to be conducted to better articulate the relationship between collective efficacy and deficit thinking in elementary schools serving increasing diverse student populations.

This work is dedicated to my loving partner, Laura A. Walker, who believed for me as I confronted my own self-inefficacy. Without her love and understanding, this work would have remained incomplete. For that I am profoundly grateful

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. . . my words are the garment of what I shall never be
Like the tucked sleeve of a one-armed boy

-W.S. Merwin, *When You Go Away*

For most of my life, words, whether spoken or written, have taken care of me. They have nourished me and comforted me. They have hidden my inadequacies. Words have sheltered me, given me a sense of confidence and helped me understand the world. For whatever reason, words abandoned me during this process. It was not until I wrestled with every word, every phrase, and every sentence that I realized I had been an unknowing participant in my own study. This study was a deeply personal examination of my own limited efficacy and deficit thinking.

The love and support of my closest friends and family slowly dismantled my own deficit thinking, giving me permission to realize success. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Carolyn Shields, my friend and dissertation adviser. More than anyone, Carolyn believed for me. Her brilliance as a scholar, her calm strength as a mentor and her commitment to social justice renewed my faith in human agency and in people. Through our many conversations and her mere presence in my life, Carolyn has made me a better scholar and a better person.

So many times, my friends and family believed for me. Nearly every day for the past decade, Christine Trickey has inspired me with her generous spirit and loving kindness. When I was uncertain, she reminded me that I was capable and helped me understand my apprehensions. So much of who I am is the result of my friendship with Chris. Since our undergraduate days at the university, Sarah Holmes has believed in me. Throughout this process, her voice was the one reminding me to be gentle with myself when my own pointed criticism threatened to derail my efforts. I must also thank my brother, Richard J. Bieneman. His continued love and presence in

my life keeps me grounded and gives me hope. I will always be grateful for the man he has become despite our childhood beginnings.

Finally, I am grateful to the teachers and administrators who participated in this study. Public educators are now faced with increasingly complex and challenging daily realities within their schools. Only when their voices are included in educational research can we begin to build their capacity and will to address social justice issues central to democratic education. The willingness of so many educators to give of their time, share their ideas and tell their stories made this research possible. I have been blessed by their generosity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| GLOSSARY OF TERMS | viii |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS..... | xi |
| CHAPTER 1 EDUCATIONAL PROMISES UNFULFILLED..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW | 15 |
| CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY | 41 |
| CHAPTER 4 PHASE 1 RESULTS | 68 |
| CHAPTER 5 THE ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE..... | 79 |
| CHAPTER 6 THE CLASSROOM NARRATIVE..... | 120 |
| CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS..... | 148 |
| REFERENCES | 160 |
| APPENDIX A SURVEY INSTRUMENT | 170 |
| APPENDIX B INTERVIEW QUESTIONS | 171 |

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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| Adequate Yearly Progress | The measure by which schools, districts and states are held accountable for student achievement as required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. (edweek.org, February, 2012) |
| Affective state | One of four sources of collective efficacy that is reliant on psychological response and emotional reactions. Basically, how a person feels about their individual capacity impacts efficacy (Bandura, 1994). |
| Collective efficacy | “Collective efficacy is defined as a group’s shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments” (Bandura, 1997). |
| Deficit model thinking | “Deficit thinking is a person-centered explanation of school failure among individuals as linked to group membership. “ Group membership usually includes the combination of racial/ethnic minority status and economic disadvantage (Valencia, 1997). |
| Human agency | The belief that individuals are agents proactively engaged in their own development and can make things happen by their actions. (Pajares, 2002) |
| Illinois honor roll | The Illinois State Board of Education established a system of recognition for schools across the state based on continued academic progress as measured by the Illinois Standards of Achievement Test (ISAT). There are three levels of recognition: Spotlight Schools, Academic Excellent and Academic Improvement. (www.isbe.state.il.us/honor_roll/) |
| Low income | To be designated low income, students aged 3 to 17 must meet one of the following criteria: live in a family receiving public aid, live in an institution for neglected or delinquent children, live in foster care or be eligible for free or reduced lunch. (www.isbe.net/ayp) |
| Mastery experience | One of four sources of efficacy, also known as enactive attainment. Mastery experience is perceived to be the most important of the four sources. |
| Safe harbor | A method for making AYP even if subgroups do not meet performance targets. Schools are required to reduce the percentage of students not meeting state standards by at least 10% for each subgroup that did not meet performance targets (www.isbe.net/ayp/). |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Self efficacy | A person’s judgment of his/her capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1977). |
| Socioeconomic status | A measure of social standing for either an individual or a group of individuals. Income, education and occupation are frequently used measures (www.apa.org). Low socioeconomic status is associated with poverty and is identified as a risk factor for student achievement. |
| Social Learning Theory | This is a model for explaining how human behavior is learned. The theory asserts that most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling. That is, by observing other humans we form an idea of how new behaviors are performed. This information is coded and serves as a guide for action (Bandura, 1977). |
| Social persuasion | One of four sources of efficacy that relies on either positive persuasion in the form of encouragement or negative persuasion in the form of discouragement. Bandura (1994) argued that individuals can be persuaded to belief that they have the capability to succeed even if they experience self-doubt. |
| Social Cognitive Theory | Social cognitive theory posits that factors such as economic conditions, socioeconomic status, and educational and familial structures do not affect human behavior directly. Instead, they affect it to the degree that they influence people’s aspirations, self-efficacy beliefs, personal standards, emotional states, and other self-regulatory influences (Pajares, 2002). |
| Student achievement | Student achievement will consist of the mean percentage of students in the school who met/exceeded state standards in reading and math on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test. The test was a criterion-referenced performance assessment conducted over a two-week period in the spring of 2005. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) reported for each school the percentages of students meeting/exceeding state standards in grades 3 reading, mathematics. Because school improvement scores are unstable for individual years and subjects (Linn & Haug, 2002), I averaged across grades and subjects to compile a composite school score. |
| Subgroups | Groups for which state testing data must be disaggregated that include ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability and English proficiency. In Illinois a group must have at least 40 students enrolled to be counted. Smaller schools benefit in this system because they do not need to meet AYP in as many categories as medium and large schools. |

Vicarious experience

One of four sources of efficacy that relies on social modeling. When an individual witnesses another person successfully complete a task, his belief in his own capacity to do so will also increase (Bandura, 1994).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------|--|
| AYP | Adequate Yearly Progress |
| DO | District Office |
| ELL | English Language Learners |
| ISBE | Illinois State Board of Education |
| ISAT | Illinois Standards Achievement Test |
| LEP | Limited English Proficient |
| MAP | Measures of Academic Progress |
| NCLB | No Child Left Behind |
| PBIS | Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports |
| PTA | Parent Teacher Association |
| RTI | Response to Intervention |
| SES | Socioeconomic Status |

CHAPTER 1

EDUCATIONAL PROMISES UNFULFILLED

Background

More than a decade has passed since American public education immersed itself in the high-stakes school reform era driven by the No Child Left Behind Act. On January 8, 2001, President George W. Bush signed the 670-page *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), touting it as the “cornerstone of his administration” (U.S. Department of Education website). This legislation was passed with strong bipartisan backing by the House of Representatives on December 13, 2001, by a vote of 381-41 and by the Senate on December 18, 2001, by a vote of 87-10. According to The Department of Education’s overview document *Facts and Terms Every Parent Should Know about NCLB*, President Bush made a commitment to ensure that all children receive a high quality education so that no child is left behind. Additionally, the Department of Education document asserts that NCLB has led to higher standards and greater accountability throughout the Nation’s school systems.

The primary argument for legislating such far-reaching educational reform is one of educational equity. As a result of this legislation, closing the achievement gap became a “national priority.” Margaret Spellings, Secretary of Education, is quoted in her support of NCLB on the Department of Education’s website, stating that “For the first time ever, we are looking ourselves in the mirror and holding ourselves accountable for educating every child. That means all children, no matter their race or income level or zip code” (<http://www.ed.gov>). The Department of Education offers several documents explaining how NCLB benefits various minority populations: African Americans, Hispanics and American Indians.

Since its passage in 2002, however, NCLB has been the subject of intense and protracted debate, even among civil rights groups. On March 13, 2007, a congressional hearing on the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) was held by the Senate Health, Labor and Pensions Committee, chaired by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, and the House Education and Labor Committee, chaired by Rep. George Miller, to study the role NCLB plays in closing the achievement gap between white and minority students. Ten years later, those academic achievement gaps persist despite the extensive, expensive and often intrusive reforms of NCLB. The promise of No Child Left Behind has remained unfilled and perhaps it is time to investigate other ways of successfully realizing organizational agency.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the highly politicized efforts to close the achievement gap, academic disparity continues, largely unabated. In fact, while states proudly report increases in state test scores, the achievement gap remains prominent. It is this failure to effectively address the achievement gap that requires further scrutiny. It is this failure to deliver on the promises of No Child Left Behind that inspired me to seek out more substantive ways of considering our collective failure. Certainly, if “scientifically-based interventions” and the arena of high-stakes testing had met with such failure, a more considered approach was needed.

The term “achievement gap” refers to the observed disparity on a number of measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. It most often describes the issue of low income/minority education in the United States; that is, Blacks and Latinos and students from poor families perform worse in school than their well-off White and Asian peers. (Congrero, 2007, p. 2)

In response to the achievement gap in Illinois, a number of task forces, coalitions and oversight groups have been created. Researchers from one such group, A+ Illinois, paint a bleak

picture of the achievement gap. According to Sandel and Batchu (2006), “The nation’s report card results show that Illinois has the largest achievement gap in the nation.” In October 2004, the U.S. Department of Education released the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP is a nationally representative assessment that is administered regularly over time, testing a sample of fourth and eighth grade students in math and reading. This assessment allows for a comparison of student achievement across states and now provides opportunities for states and districts to monitor the progress of their school improvement efforts.

Despite a gain at the national level, Illinois did not witness such progress, failing to demonstrate a significant gain from the 2003 NAEP. Sandel and Batchu argued that the 2005 NAEP results show that Illinois continues to have some of the worst achievement gaps in the country and has been ineffective in closing those gaps. In fourth grade math, the achievement gap between poor and non-poor students in Illinois ranked first in the nation (The Education Trust, 2003). The state fared no better in its efforts to close the achievement gap between black and white students in Illinois. That academic disparity remained significantly high despite 2 years of attempted reform. In both fourth and eighth grade math, Illinois has the third highest achievement gap between black and white students. Even more alarming, Illinois has the second highest achievement gap in fourth grade reading. On a more encouraging note, the achievement gap between Hispanic and white students narrowed in eighth grade. Despite that narrowed gap, Illinois still remains steadily among the worst in the nation when it comes to educating Hispanic 4th grade students (Sandel & Batchu, 2005).

On September 4, 2001, the Illinois State Board of Education issued this press release: *Year-3 ISAT scores up; achievement gap continues*. The state superintendent at that time, Max McGee, identified an increase in student performance on the Illinois Standards Achievement

Test (ISAT) but conceded that the “achievement gap” between white and non-white students remained unacceptably wide. The 2003 ISAT results reveal that while 64% of White eighth graders met or exceeded state standards in math, only 19% of their Black peers and 29% of their Hispanic peers scored comparably. When the 5-year ISAT data was released by the Illinois State Board of Education, the 5-year assessment data for Illinois elementary school students showed an upward trend in mathematics at all grade levels tested and a narrowing of the achievement gap in a number of subjects at a number of grades. The results, however, revealed little gain in elementary reading scores. It is important to examine the narrowing of the achievement gap and understand that the gap between White and non-white students, poor and non-poor students is unacceptable. In 3rd grade math, for example, the gap narrowed from 43.8 percentage points to 39.6 percentage points (Illinois State Board of Education, 2003). ISAT reading scores at the elementary level remained static, maintaining the achievement gap for non-white and poor students.

The achievement gap at the elementary level has significant implications for the lives of the non-white students. Those students who underperform at the elementary level are also underrepresented in Advanced Placement (AP) Courses at the high school level. According to The Education Trust, African-American students made up 21% of the public K-12 enrollment in 2004, but only accounted for 4% of the enrollment in AP Calculus, 5% of the enrollment in AP Biology and 9% of the AP English enrollment. Latino students fared only slightly better. While non-white students are underrepresented, white students are overrepresented in AP enrollment (The Education Trust, 2003).

The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act and the implementation of adequate yearly progress has become the centerpiece of many school districts’ instructional programming and

school improvement efforts. Buzz words such as accountability, testing, academic improvement, and research-based are heard resoundingly in schools and districts across the country. NCLB's first principle of accountability focused on the development of standards and high-stakes testing. For elementary schools across the state of Illinois, high scores on The Illinois Standards Achievement Test have become the Holy Grail.

As a result, schools around the country spend considerable time and resources preparing their students for annual testing often at the expense of higher level thinking, fine arts, and academic enrichment. Students performing below standards frequently are required to spend more time in direct instruction of basic skills and other test preparation curriculum materials. In many school districts, students identified as underperforming on standardized measures are relegated to more of the same in after school academic tutoring programs. Additionally, schools with limited resources must rely on a narrowing of the curriculum to emphasize test specific content. Urrieta (2004) argues that deficit thinking models undergird these assistance models. A deficit thinking model asserts that students who underperform or underachieve in schools or on school-based assessments do so because of internal deficits (Valencia, 1997). Theories regarding the sources of these perceived deficits include intellectual limitations, cultural or economic disadvantage, and lack of motivation or home environment. Deficit thinking argues that poor school performance is “rooted in students’ alleged cognitive and motivational deficits, while institutional structures and inequitable schooling arrangements . . . are held exculpatory” (Valencia, 1997, p. 9).

To ensure test preparedness and address these “deficits,” school district curriculum and instructional materials are “teacher-proofed” and reliant on prescriptive approaches to learning. Although these attempts at intervention may contribute to higher test scores, it does little to

provide students with the quality of instruction necessary in a democratic society (Shields, 2008). While pursuit of high test scores on one testing measure alone is considerably myopic, there may be lessons to be learned about organizational change from schools that have demonstrated significant increases in student achievement on that measure. Rather than continue to implement reforms that rely on scientific management principles of the early 1900s, schools need to explore and consider other emerging theories that emphasize organizational agency. One such theory that may hold promise is Bandura's seminal work on collective efficacy (1986, 1989, 1991, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of collective efficacy in the participating schools and to conduct a deeper interrogation of the underlying belief systems and tacit assumptions of collective efficacy. For this study, eight public elementary schools serving racially diverse students were identified. The selected schools earned Illinois Honor Roll recognition from the State of Illinois and were significant because they have defied the circular nature of school failure as evidenced by their demonstrated and significantly improved academic achievement on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). This study explored the extent to which selected schools demonstrated collective efficacy. It linked emerging literature on collective efficacy with the research on educator belief systems to gain an understanding of how schools can understand organizational agency as a means of mitigating academic risk factors. A secondary purpose of this study was to explore the nature of collective efficacy in these schools and to identify differences in teacher practice-based beliefs and expectations as they were related to levels of perceived collective efficacy in these schools. Finally, this study questioned the underlying belief systems and tacit assumptions of educators in these schools.

Research Questions

This study was designed to explore the following questions:

1. To what extent did selected award-winning schools demonstrate collective efficacy?
2. What was the nature of collective efficacy present in the selected schools?
3. What were the underlying belief systems and tacit assumptions about students on which efficacy is based?

Personal Background

I currently serve as an elementary school principal at Kenneth Murphy Elementary School in Beach Park, Illinois. During my tenure, I have witnessed the adoption, and subsequent abandonment, of a host of initiatives designed to increase student achievement on the Illinois Standards Assessment Test. Time, money and human resources have been exhausted in the pursuit of a single test score. While other schools in my district have narrowed instructional delivery to focus on test preparation, reallocated resources to serve students taking the ISAT at the expense of the remaining grades, and implemented after-school tutoring for underperforming students, staff members at Kenneth Murphy have taken a decidedly different approach to increasing student achievement. Despite taking markedly contrasting educational and social approaches to school improvement, our school and another Beach Park Elementary School earned an Academic Improvement Award from the Illinois State Board of Education for the 2004-05 school year. It is my own familiarity with the differing means to the ends that served as a catalyst for this study. Additionally, as an elementary principal serving in a racially diverse school, closing the achievement gap is a daily reality. In this study, I focused on one theoretical construct that offers promise for closing the achievement gap—collective efficacy—while examining its underlying beliefs and tacit assumptions.

Overview of Theoretical Perspectives

Collective teacher efficacy is a specific form of self-efficacy. The focus of collective efficacy is the organization to which the individual belongs, specifically the school. Collective efficacy focuses on “the perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students” (Goddard et. al., 2000, p. 480).

As an educational leader I understand the complex interplay between belief and practice. In American public schools, Valencia argued, the dominant paradigm that shapes educators’ expectations and subsequent practice is that of deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997).

The deficit thinking paradigm, as a whole, posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster—such as familial defects and dysfunctions. (p. xi)

The argument is that deficit thinking is pervasive in American culture and public education has been advanced by NCLB (Bishop, 2003; Shields, 2006; Valencia, et. al, 1997). Hawkins (1984) asserted that:

some scholars would have us believe that educability is largely dependent on individual intellectual ability and that social, political and economic conditions within the schools and society are largely unrelated to “why some of our children are so much more educable than others.” (Valencia, et. al, 1997)

Instructional practices and educational assumptions that emerge from the deficit thinking paradigm mask organizational and social issues, often overshadowing the abilities of students and teachers.

As recently as 1994, Herrnstein and Murray attempted to influence contemporary society with *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, making the case that the deficit paradigm could be supported by their interpretation of their data. Herrnstein, a Harvard

professor, and Murray, a public policy analyst, sought to legitimize the deficit paradigm by arguing that IQ varies among racial and ethnic groups. Perhaps more unsettling, was that their claim that these variations might be genetic further fueled pervasive beliefs about the deficits inherent in minority groups.

Although this publication is 14 years old, Herrnstein's and Murray's argument is still echoing in public schools throughout the nation. In many cases, those views are euphemized and sanitized to avoid controversy. Recently, while attending a multi-district teacher institute day, I heard a group of white educators from a predominantly African-American community argue that "these kids aren't able to think critically . . . they just do not come to school with the necessary background." Further discussion revealed a widely accepted belief that critical thinking skills were not on the curricular agenda for many of the classrooms represented in that training session. That this belief system was so readily offered and supported in a staff development day focused on critical thinking was appalling. That this public sentiment was offered by teachers from a school that had earned a 2004-05 school improvement award led me to question the belief systems that may co-exist with collective efficacy. Certainly these teachers expressed beliefs that they were effectively educating the students in their respective schools and recognition from the Illinois State Board of Education offered confirmation of those efforts. What was now at question was the course of action, or goal, the group had identified for their students.

The reality of continuous and sustainable school improvement is that in spite of external pressure and increased political scrutiny, educators, not politicians, remain solely responsible for creating learning environments that are conducive to academic achievement. Teachers operate collectively within an interactive social system, rather than as isolates. Understanding that belief systems are a precursor to action is critical. Two approaches to understanding teacher belief

systems include the Rand Studies (Armor et al., 1976) and Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986). Bandura's conceptual framework of efficacy focused initially on self-efficacy and later on collective efficacy. It is this work on collective efficacy which holds promise for the implementation of organizational change agency that will lead to continuous school improvement particularly in schools with risk factors.

Social cognitive theory asserts that individuals and collectives exercise agency through choice. Key to the exercise of agency, however, is the belief in one's efficacy or capability "to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). Bandura (1997) argued that efficacy beliefs, or perceptions of task-specific capabilities, are a key mechanism of behavioral change for individuals, organizations, and even nations. Perceptions of efficacy serve to influence the behavior of individuals and the normative environment of collectives by providing expectations about the likelihood of success for various pursuits.

In 1977, Albert Bandura introduced efficacy belief theory which began with the concept of self-efficacy or "beliefs in one's capacity to organize and execute the courses of action to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1977, p. 3). In the past 30 years, Bandura's work has expanded to include three areas of interest to educators: self-efficacy of students, self-efficacy of teachers and perceived collective efficacy. Perceived collective efficacy is the most recent theoretical construct and may have significant implications for effective organizational agency and school improvement efforts. Bandura (1986) identified four sources for building collective efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion and affective state.

When studied, schools with higher proportions of students from lower socioeconomic levels and of minority status had lower collective beliefs in their efficacy to achieve academic

success and their academic achievement followed accordingly (Bandura, 1995). Bandura identified key differences in these two types of schools—socioeconomic status and ethnic composition. Bandura also found that schools heavily populated with minority and poor students achieved high levels of success on standardized measures when their educators firmly believed that they could motivate and teach the students (Bandura, 1995, p. 21). “More research is needed to know whether this finding holds in more ethnically diverse schools, and if it does, to understand why teacher perceptions differ by race” (Goddard & Skrla, 2006, p. 228).

Results suggest that schools with historically poor student achievement tend to have teachers who, as a group, report a poorer image of school atmosphere which contributes to poorer perceptions of teacher effectiveness. Furthermore, path analysis suggests that this weak sense of efficacy is in part a function of the poor performance of the school’s students. What is of concern is the circular nature of this relationship. (Moore & Esselman, 1992, p. 14)

According to social cognitive theory, behavior, personal factors (e.g., cognitive, affective, biological events) and the external environment are interdependent. The control individuals and collectives exert over their lives is influenced by their perceptions of efficacy. Analogous to self-efficacy, collective efficacy is associated with the tasks, level of effort, persistence, thoughts, stress levels, and achievement of groups (Bandura, 1993, 1997). According to Bandura (1997), “collective efficacy is concerned with the performance capability of a social system as a whole” (p. 469). For schools, collective efficacy refers to the perceptions of teachers in a school that the faculty as a whole can execute the courses of action necessary to have positive effects on students.

If teacher efficacy is associated with productive teacher behaviors that foster student achievement, a related organizational-level concern is whether collective efficacy is similarly related to differences between schools with similar improvements in student achievement. An exploration of this question requires consideration of several issues involved in the formation

and assessment of collective efficacy. The relatively unexplored link between collective efficacy and group goal attainment may provide educators with one of the key factors in school improvement and offer guidelines for future staff development to promote the learning of all children.

Methodological Overview

This study examined the nature of collective efficacy in eight elementary schools and the impact that organizational agency has had on student achievement in those selected schools serving a poor and minority children. As an elementary principal, I recognize that all children may not have equitable means for academic achievement, particularly children in schools with large minority and low-income populations. This study used a three-phase design that incorporated survey and interview data from both teachers and administrators in elementary schools that received Illinois Honor Roll recognition. The data were collected and analyzed to understand the different approaches to improving student academic performance as measured by the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT).

Using the lens of “collective efficacy,” the focus of this study was to explore educators’ experiences in the school improvement process and the underlying beliefs systems that either remained static or changed in the process of school improvement. This study also investigated the nature of collective efficacy in these schools to determine whether a shared set of beliefs and values was evidenced by instructional practice and programming among the participating schools. The intent of this research was to conduct a deeper interrogation of collective efficacy and the implicit belief systems that undergird the theoretical framework. Despite the initial promise of collective efficacy, it was critical to examine the tacit assumptions underlying the

theory and to provide the results of that examination to the educational leaders who are ultimately responsible for creating organizations capable of improving student achievement.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was limited by the number and type of schools selected. Although there are more than 2,000 public elementary schools in Illinois, only a fraction of those schools met the criteria for this study: Illinois Honor Roll recognition as a Spotlight School and/or Academic Improvement school between 2004-2007, more than 25% of low SES students, minority-majority ethnicity enrollment, grade configuration significant and shifts in school demographics. This limited the range of communities from which I could identify participants for the study. As a full-time school principal, I was also limited by the time I had available to conduct the interviews and the financial resources I had available to conduct the study and travel to school sites. I chose to delimit my study to focus on full-time, certified staff at the selected elementary schools. Specifically, I delimited my study to focus on building administrators and certified teachers.

Significance of Study

This is a study of collective efficacy and its implications for educational leadership and change. In the growing debate on ways to reform how our schools operate as social organizations, it is important to empirically identify differences in the perceptions of those most directly responsible for student achievement—educators. This study added to the existing research on collective efficacy and organizational agency using data gathered from teachers in schools that have demonstrated successful and significant improvement. Rather than focus

primarily on quantitative data, this study attempted to mine the story behind the test results. Additionally, the study intended to better inform school leaders' decision making processes regarding school improvement initiatives and any actions that may unintentionally put students at greater risk. If we are committed to social justice, we should proceed cautiously with school reforms, being cognizant of who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by our decisions. We must also be aware of the actions we can take at the school level to mitigate those risk factors for our students and to close the existing achievement gap.

In the case of collective efficacy, it is not enough to naively embrace a theoretical construct that offers the powerful promise of mitigating the effects of socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Educational leaders must be careful consumers of research as they endeavor to achieve praxis. Although recent research has demonstrated that collective efficacy is a factor that positively correlates with school achievement and offers insight into increasing a groups' belief about its capacity to positively attain its goals, a more thorough examination is needed to determine the implications for real and sustainable school reform that does not rely on deficit model thinking or pathologizing practices to realize academic success.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is informed by two bodies of literature. The first is collective efficacy and the second informs tacit assumptions existing in educational institutions. Both theoretical constructs were used to examine the tacit assumptions of educators serving students from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The collective efficacy research in general is a compilation of Bandura's seminal work on collective efficacy and the studies that resulted. The body of literature about tacit assumptions covers a range of perspectives from deficit thinking to different approaches for dismantling deficit thinking.

The Evolution of Collective Efficacy Theory

This section provides a theoretical and historical overview of social learning theory, social cognitive theory, teacher efficacy, perceived collective efficacy and academic achievement. To develop a conceptual framework, an overview of student efficacy, teacher efficacy and perceived collective efficacy will be discussed before research on the relationship between collective efficacy and academic achievement is reviewed. According to social cognitive theory, the control individuals and collectives exert over their lives is influenced by their perceptions of efficacy (Bandura, 1989). Since the introduction of self-efficacy as a theoretical construct, researchers have found links between student achievement and three kinds of efficacy: the self-efficacy of students, teachers' beliefs in their own instructional efficacy and teachers' beliefs about the collective efficacy of their school.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory “adopts an agentic perspective to human development, adaptation and change” (Bandura, 2002, p. 269). As described earlier, a major component of social cognitive theory is the assumption of human agency. Social cognitive theory assumes that humans are active shapers of their lives. Social cognitive theory posits that individuals and collectives affect agency through their choices, choices about actions as well as belief systems. The theory establishes differences between three modes of agency: personal agency exercised individually; proxy agency where people influence others to act on their behalf to secure desired outcomes; and collective agency when people shape their future by acting collectively (Bandura, 1986, 1997).

“To be an agent is to influence intentionally one’s functioning and life circumstances” (Bandura, 2002, p. 270). Agency allows people to adapt flexibly to rapidly changing and diverse environments. This agentic perspective is particularly important for educators who are daily experiencing a changing cultural context and increasing diversity. Bandura asserts that people create devices:

that compensate immensely for their sensory and physical limitations, circumvent environmental constraints, redesign and construct environments to their liking, create styles of behavior that enable them to realize desired outcomes and pass on the effective ones to others by social modeling and other experiential means. (Bandura, 2002, p. 272)

In the educational context, agentic action may hold the key for choices that facilitate sustainable and meaningful school improvement.

Those choices are based on self-efficacy beliefs, or belief in one’s capability to execute the courses of action required for success. “At the school level, the related concept is organizational agency” (Goddard, 2001, p. 4). Organizational agency seems to be evidenced by school activities that support organizational goals (e.g., to maintain a safe learning environment

or to broaden curricular offerings). In addition to agency, social cognitive theory also assumes that individuals possess capabilities for self-reflection, vicarious learning, symbolization, and self-regulation (Maddux, 1995). These assumptions of social cognitive theory may apply to organizations because groups are actively engaged in analyzing, responding to, and controlling their behaviors, internal states, and environments (e.g., when schools change curricular offerings to meet student needs).

Student and Self Efficacy

Although there have been fewer investigations of student collective efficacy (Pajares, 1997), a relatively large body of research suggests that student efficacy and teacher efficacy are positively related to important educational outcomes. First, student self-efficacy for various academic tasks is an important predictor of achievement. For example, in a meta-analysis of 36 studies, Multon (1991) found that students' efficacy beliefs were positively related to their academic attainment (average effect size of .38) and their persistence (average effect size of .34) in academic endeavors. More recently, Pajares and Graham (1999) showed that students' sense of efficacy predicts academic success in mathematics. That is, students' perceptions of self-capability to organize and execute the actions required to attain success in various subjects are predictive of differences in academic achievement.

In 1977, Bandura introduced the concept of self-efficacy perceptions. Bandura initially studied the relationship between behavioral changes in phobic patients and the applied clinical treatment. Bandura sought to explain the indiscriminant results of behavior-oriented treatments and cognitively centered treatment. Bandura's model focuses on performance attainment and was unique in that regard (Pajares, 1997). Prior to the development of this model, many expectancy theories emphasized "people's hopes for favorable outcomes rather than with their sense of

personal mastery” (Bandura, 1997, p. 194). Because Bandura’s self-efficacy theory provides insight into human behavior that links beliefs people hold about themselves in relation to the exercise of control and agency, this theory has been applied to many domains.

As a result, research has explored the role of self-efficacy in the following areas: human learning, motivation and performance. Studies of self-efficacy perceptions have emerged in sports performance, diet and exercise, political agency and academic achievement. In general, people with higher levels of self-efficacy seek more challenging tasks, persist despite difficulty, experience less stress during taxing endeavors, are more resilient despite adversity and realize greater performance than those with low levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Similar research findings on perceived collective efficacy have been found in business management and sociology. Studies have demonstrated that collective efficacy beliefs are closely related to other important group outcomes including work group effectiveness and neighborhood safety (Goddard et al., 2004). Much of Bandura’s research on perceived self-efficacy has focused on self-efficacy as it regulates motivation, action and affect (Bandura, 1986). From that vantage point, research on self-efficacy has evolved to examine how it affects cognitive processes and/or serves as intervening influences on psychosocial functioning (Bandura, 1989). More specifically, Bandura’s work served to consider the impact of self-efficacy on cognitive functioning including analytical thinking, anticipatory cognitive simulations and cognitive motivation.

“Effective functioning rests heavily on inferences about conditional relations between events that enable people to predict and control those events” that are important to them. Bandura (1989) argued that a strong sense of efficacy is required to remain task oriented in the face of difficulty. The level of performance accomplishments is contingent on the quality of analytic thinking.

As much as analytic thinking and people's perceptions of their efficacy influence their ability to execute effective courses of action, self-efficacy is a particularly critical source of human motivation (Bandura, 1989). When individuals hold a strong belief in their capabilities, they will be more persistent in their efforts. This commitment to task and ability to persevere is most significant in challenging educational settings. Additionally, self-efficacy affects "intrusive affective arousal," or the amount of stress and depression people experience in taxing situations. Bandura argues that people's beliefs in their capabilities affect the levels of stress and threat they experience (1989). Individuals who believe in their ability to manage stressors are not perturbed by them while perceived self-inefficacy contributes to distress, lowering motivation. Understanding the relationship of self-efficacy and belief to motivation and persistence is critical for educators who are daily faces with a multiplicity of stressors both real and felt.

From Bandura's initial work on self-efficacy, four interventions were identified as sources of self-efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion and physiological states. These four primary sources contribute to individual levels of self-efficacy (1986) and will be revisited in later research on collective efficacy.

Teacher Efficacy

In addition to student self-efficacy, teachers' efficacy to educate students successfully has been the subject of considerable inquiry. The historical development of teacher efficacy and related measurement issues have been described elsewhere (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Teacher efficacy has been a topic of discussion since the mid-1960s when the Rand Corporation conducted studies based on Rotter's social learning theory. The survey instrument, "Generalized Expectancies of Internal versus External Control of Reinforcement," was designed to examine how teachers viewed the influence of the environmental context in relationship to

student achievement (Rotter, 1966). Teachers who perceived themselves as unable to exert influence in the educational setting perceived their efforts are external to themselves.

Essentially, teachers who agreed that environmental factors were more significant than their ability to teach experienced higher stress levels and lower motivation. Additionally, teacher efficacy was linked to persistence and teacher retention. Teachers with lower teacher efficacy did not remain in education at the same rate as teachers with higher teacher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The Rand survey instrument was limited, however, to two items whose sum was called teacher efficacy. The first item focused on teachers' belief that environmental factors are more influential than a teacher's ability to teach. The second item examined the teacher's belief that students can attain high achievement despite challenges (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

The results of these studies were published in 1976 and established a relationship between teacher efficacy and minority student reading achievement. Dembo and Gibson (1985) also reported findings demonstrating a relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement as well as teacher change. Concern about the reliability of the Rand two-item survey instrument led researchers to develop more comprehensive measures. Instruments such as the Teacher Locus of Control and the Webb Scale were developed using Rotter's work on teacher efficacy (1973). The implementation of these instrumented supported previous findings on teacher efficacy, suggesting that higher levels of teacher efficacy were positively linked to student achievement and student motivation.

Gibson and Dembo (1984) also examined teacher efficacy effects by completing classroom observations of both high and low efficacy teachers. Eight teachers were studied and differences in classroom teaching behaviors were evident. Teachers with high levels of efficacy

were observed to persist longer with students experiencing difficulty, be less critical of students, and provided more constructive feedback than low efficacy teachers. Interestingly, high efficacy teachers spent less time in small group activities.

The Teacher Locus of Control instrument was developed by Rose and Medway in 1981 while another research group developed the Webb Scale. The Webb Scale expanded on the initial Rand study and was designed to inform a more grounded theory of teacher efficacy. As teacher efficacy was studied further, the discussion among researchers continued to explore the means for measuring and conceptualizing teacher efficacy. A meta-analysis of the teacher efficacy literature reviewed 88 studies concerning teacher efficacy (Ross, 1994). Each of the 88 studies contained empirical measures for efficacy beliefs or teacher efficacy perceptions. Ross noted that the instruments based on Gibson and Dembo's Teacher Efficacy Scale had serious limitations in their designed. The meta-analysis provided a vast review of the existing research on teacher efficacy while critically examining the findings and identifying areas for further study.

Thus, it is sufficient to state that teacher efficacy is positively associated with several productive teacher behaviors, including organized and purposeful teaching (Allinder, 1994) and the use of activity-based learning (Enochs, Scharmann, & Riggs, 1995), student-centered learning (Czerniak & Schriver, 1994), and probing questions (Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

The relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement has been explored by a number of researchers (Bandura, 1997a; Good & Dembo, 1973; Pajares, 1992; Ross, 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The literature on this relationship indicates a positive relationship between the level of teacher efficacy and teacher motivation as well as increased student achievement. Teacher efficacy is "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize

and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular content (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 220).

Moreover, the higher teachers' efficacy, the more humanistic is their approach to pupil control (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990) and, importantly, the higher is student achievement (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988; Ross, 1992). Teachers' sense of efficacy exerts significant influence on student achievement by promoting teacher behaviors that enhance learning. Bandura's construct of self-efficacy and his work on social cognitive theory led to the emergence of teacher efficacy. Bandura's work on self-efficacy and Rotter's theory of internal-external locus of control are not the same construct and are not measured in similar ways (1997). Self-efficacy is a construct that examines beliefs about capabilities to take courses of action while locus of control explores whether beliefs have an effect on end results (1997).

To measure teacher efficacy Bandura developed a 30-item instrument using seven subscales: Efficacy to Influence Decision Making, Efficacy to Influence School Resources, Instructional Efficacy, Disciplinary Efficacy, Efficacy to Enlist Parent Involvement, Efficacy to Enlist Community Involvement and Efficacy to Create a Positive School Climate (Bandura, 1996). Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy (1998) advocated an integrated approach to measuring teacher efficacy that would rely on both Rotter's social learning theory and Bandura's social learning theory. This integrated approach sought to unify two decades of research on teacher efficacy. Given the relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement, an investigation of such ties between collective efficacy and school performance is needed. Currently there is limited research exploring the collective efficacy linkage but a renewed interest in the construct has emerged in the past ten years with the number of peer-reviewed research articles increasing considerably (Klassen et al., 2011).

Collective Efficacy

Although there was a small body of research on collective measures of teacher efficacy, those studies tended to aggregate individual level variable at the school level. Bandura (1993) was the first to establish a link between collective efficacy perceptions and school level performance. To do this, Bandura used his model of self-efficacy as the foundation for such efforts. The basis of Bandura's work was the idea that teachers work collectively rather than in isolation. The collective belief system of teachers was studied to better understand the extent to which teachers' beliefs impact the aggregated performance of the schools' students.

Collective efficacy as measured by aggregating teacher perceptions of the staff's collective ability to teach effectively strongly correlated with student achievement. In fact, collective efficacy was more strongly related to student achievement than was student socioeconomic status. Bandura also found that staff perceptions of collective efficacy predicted student performance as strongly as did prior student achievement (Bandura, 1997). The significance of this research is the direct challenge to previous research that argued that schools cannot overcome the biases attributed to socioeconomic status. Bandura made an effective argument that collective efficacy could be a promising construct for understanding and realizing systemic school improvement. Goddard successfully replicated Bandura's research although he used different statistical means for measuring collective efficacy (Goddard, 2000).

In Goddard, Hoy and Woolfolk Hoy (2000), collective teacher efficacy is defined as "an emergent group-level attribute, the product of the interactive dynamics of the group members" (p. 482). The emergent nature of the attribute is more than a sum of individual group members. Bandura identifies the groups' shared belief in "its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment" (Bandura, 1997, p. 477).

Goddard (2001) examined collective efficacy by offering a theoretical analysis of social cognitive theory at the group level. Data was collected from a sample of urban elementary schools at the student and the school level. One purpose of this study was to determine whether mastery experience is related to differences in collective efficacy. The study also sought to examine the relationship between collective efficacy and student achievement and to “determine whether group consensus about collective efficacy perceptions was related to student achievement” (p. 2). Teachers may also learn vicariously about their collective efficacy. Just as teacher efficacy is enhanced by observing successful models with similar characteristics (Gorrell & Capron, 1988; Schunk, 1981, 1983, 1987; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997), so too do organizations learn by observation. Replication of successful educational programs by schools aspiring to achieve similar success is a familiar example. Social persuasion may also strengthen teachers’ convictions that the faculty can successfully educate students. Indeed, Bandura (1997) suggested that effective group organizers, or leaders, often persuade group members of their collective capability. Finally, affective states may also influence collective efficacy. For example, high levels of distress may debilitate group performance by diminishing member confidence in group capability (Bandura, 1997).

It appears that collective efficacy beliefs influence group performance by shaping the behavioral and normative environment of schools. As Bandura (1997) observed, “people working independently within a group do not function as social isolates totally immune to the influence of those around them” (p. 469). Thus, one way to understand how collective efficacy affects the behavior of individual teachers is to consider the influence of social norms on group members.

From a social cognitive perspective, the power of such normative press may be understood as the effect of social persuasion on collective efficacy. In other words, if most of the teachers in a school believe the faculty can successfully teach the students, the normative and behavioral environment will press teachers to persist in their educational efforts so that students achieve to higher levels. The greater the collective efficacy of a school, the stronger should be then normative press for teachers to persist in their educational efforts.

The final purpose of this research was to investigate the meaning of the term collective efficacy. As collective efficacy emerges as a focus of research, it is imperative that researchers be clear about what they mean by the term. On the one hand, the degree to which there is consensus among group members regarding group capability may be viewed as the extent to which the efficacy perception is collective. From this perspective, the greater the consensus among members, the more collective is the perception. On the other hand, school-level constructs such as collective efficacy may also be measured by a group mean. The group mean approach emphasizes the average perception held by teachers in a school about the collective capability of the faculty.

In the past, collective efficacy researchers (Bandura, 1993; Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000) have used the group mean approach, omitting measures of variability in member perceptions. Bandura (1997a) observed, however, that “a group belief [horizontal ellipsis] is best characterized by a representative value for the beliefs of its members and the degree of variability or consensus around that central belief” (p. 479). In light of this gap in the literature, this study includes a test of the relation between group consensus and student achievement.

The construct of collective efficacy has received relatively little research attention. In his groundbreaking study of collective efficacy and student achievement, Bandura (1993) found that

average school achievement is significantly and positively related to collective efficacy.

Goddard, Hoy and Woolfolk (2000) found similar results when they developed their 21-item Collective Efficacy Scale (CES). Although these studies were not experimental in design, they do document a relationship between collective efficacy and student achievement.

In light of these findings, three new questions unanswered by this initial work were investigated in the present study. First, the group-level assumption of social cognitive theory that mastery experience should be strongly related to collective efficacy perceptions was tested in this study. Past school-level achievement was used as a proxy for mastery experience to examine this research question.

Next, the relation between collective efficacy and differences between schools in student achievement was tested. Importantly, this was the first multilevel analysis to include a prior achievement control in a test of the relation between collective efficacy and differences among schools in student achievement. Finally, variability in faculty perceptions of collective efficacy was examined. A measure of variability among group members was developed to represent the extent to which there was consensus among faculty members regarding their perceptions of collective efficacy. Multilevel modeling was then used to test the relation between group collective efficacy consensus and differences among schools in student achievement.

This research has several implications for the study of collective efficacy and school improvement. The results provide initial support for social cognitive theory at the group level: Group mastery experience was related to differences among schools in collective efficacy. This finding is consistent with the earlier discussion of mastery experience as an important way to build collective efficacy in schools. In addition, collective efficacy is strongly related to differences among schools in student performance. The agency that schools exercise and the

choices that teachers make are influenced by beliefs about collective capability. At the very least, collective efficacy is worthy of further consideration by researchers and practitioners alike interested in the linkages among efficacy and student achievement.

Collective efficacy beliefs in student work teams have also been examined for their relation to self-efficacy, cohesion and performance. Lent, Schmidt, and Schmidt (2006) found that collective efficacy related to indicators of team performance at both the individual and group levels of analysis. The study focused on the relation of social cognitive variables to outcomes achieved by students. Goddard argued that the connections between collective efficacy beliefs and student outcomes depends on the reciprocal relationship among teachers' collective efficacy beliefs, teachers' personal sense of efficacy, teachers' professional practice and teachers' influence over instructionally relevant school decisions (Goddard 2000, 2003).

Bandura (1997a, 1997b) identified four sources of collective efficacy—mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion and affective states. Vicarious experience is a particularly important aspect of this research. If the research on vicarious experience holds true, sharing information about schools making significant academic improvement will serve to increase perceived collective efficacy in schools that are struggling to improve student achievement.

Collective Efficacy and Student Achievement

Previous research has found a direct link between collective teacher efficacy and achievement, after controlling for demographic variables like SES, race, urbanicity. (Bandura, 1993; Goddard, 2001; Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2004; Goddard, LoGerfo & Hoy, 2004).

Despite the demonstrated links between collective efficacy and student achievement and its implications for organizational functioning, researchers have not systematically studied the measurement and effects of collective efficacy. Goddard (2001) responded to Bandura's call for study by examining the formation and impact of collective efficacy using student- and school-level data from urban elementary schools. After controlling for student demographics and prior achievement, Goddard found that "collective efficacy was positively and significantly related to differences among schools in student achievement" (2001). At the school level, teachers' perceptions that they as a staff can execute the necessary courses of action to positively affect student achievement are defined as collective efficacy.

Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2000) examined collective teacher efficacy and its impact on student achievement in their theoretical and empirical analysis of the construct. This study developed a model of collective efficacy that was later tested for reliability and reasonable validity. The researchers then administered the instrument in urban elementary schools in a large Midwestern school district. The results determined that collective efficacy was "positively associated with differences between schools in student-level achievement in both reading and mathematics" (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, p. 479). Their model of collective teacher efficacy elaborated on Bandura's self-efficacy and the work of Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy and Hoy, (1998).

The influence of past school academic achievement and school ethnic composition on teacher collective efficacy beliefs was examined by Goddard and Skrla (2006). Using hierarchical linear modeling, the researchers reported a relationship between past academic achievement, the role of special program placement for gifted students and faculty ethnic composition. These three factors accounted for 46% of the variation among schools in perceived

collective efficacy (Goddard & Skrla, 2006). The study also revealed a small but significant relationship between teacher collective efficacy and teacher race and experience.

In the 1990s, Bandura's research on collective efficacy provided educators and educational researchers with a new construct for examining the achievement gap. Rather than continue to focus on student demographics such as SES and ethnicity, Bandura's work shifted the focus to organizational factors. When Bandura (1993) controlled for student demographics, previous school achievement data and teacher experience, the relationship between schools with high levels of collective efficacy and high academic performance was established. This realization is particularly timely as current literature continues to emerge on high poverty, high performing schools, specifically the 90/90/90 schools. In 90/90/90 schools, academic success defined as 90% of the students meeting identified standards is attained despite student populations made of up 90% low SES and 90% minorities.

Goddard and Goddard (2001) again used hierarchical linear modeling to empirically test the relationship between teacher efficacy and collective efficacy. Data from 438 teachers in 47 schools in a large urban school district were collected. The researchers found that collective efficacy predicted variation in teacher efficacy beyond what could be explained by school contextual factors such as socioeconomic status and student achievement. Their work is important for educational leaders seeking to understand how organizational characteristics may influence teacher performance. Goddard and Goddard make the argument that "collective efficacy is an important school contextual feature that is systematically related to teacher efficacy" (2001, p. 10).

Ferguson (2003) looked at teachers' characteristics and qualities. He found that teacher's perceptions and expectations are critical, and often contribute to the problem. He concluded that

teachers have lower expectations for African-American students' potential and effort than for their white students. Additionally, he notes that because most teachers base their expectation of black children on past performance and behaviors, they themselves perpetuate the gap: "My bottom line conclusion is that teachers' perceptions, attitudes and behaviors probably do help to sustain and perhaps even to expand, the black white test score gap" (Ferguson, 2003).

When examining student achievement, student demographics such as socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnicity are key variables. Variables such as organizational agency and school climate have gained new attention as educational leaders are held increasingly accountable for systemic change. Organizational agency is demonstrated when groups make decisions based on their beliefs in the groups collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997b). Bandura's social cognitive theory provides schools with valuable insight on collective efficacy and organizational agency, demonstrating how certain practices result in increased student achievement despite previously established negative variables such as SES and ethnicity (1997a, 1997b). Goddard defined collective efficacy as an "emergent organizational characteristic formed from the perceptions about group teaching competence and the difficulties inherent in the educational task facing the school as well as the supports available in the setting" (Goddard, 2001, p. 469).

From Bandura's initial work on self-efficacy, four interventions were identified as sources of self-efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion and physiological states. These four primary sources contribute to individual levels of self-efficacy (1986) and will be revisited in later research on collective efficacy. As a theoretical construct, collective efficacy offers promise for educators seeking to move beyond the current failed reforms based on scientific management. Since 1998, the research on collective efficacy has increased and diversified. Greater attention to the sources of collective efficacy as well as the

practical application of the theory is needed (Klassen et al., 2011). This study attempts to address these existing gaps in the literature and elaborate on the following model of collective efficacy.

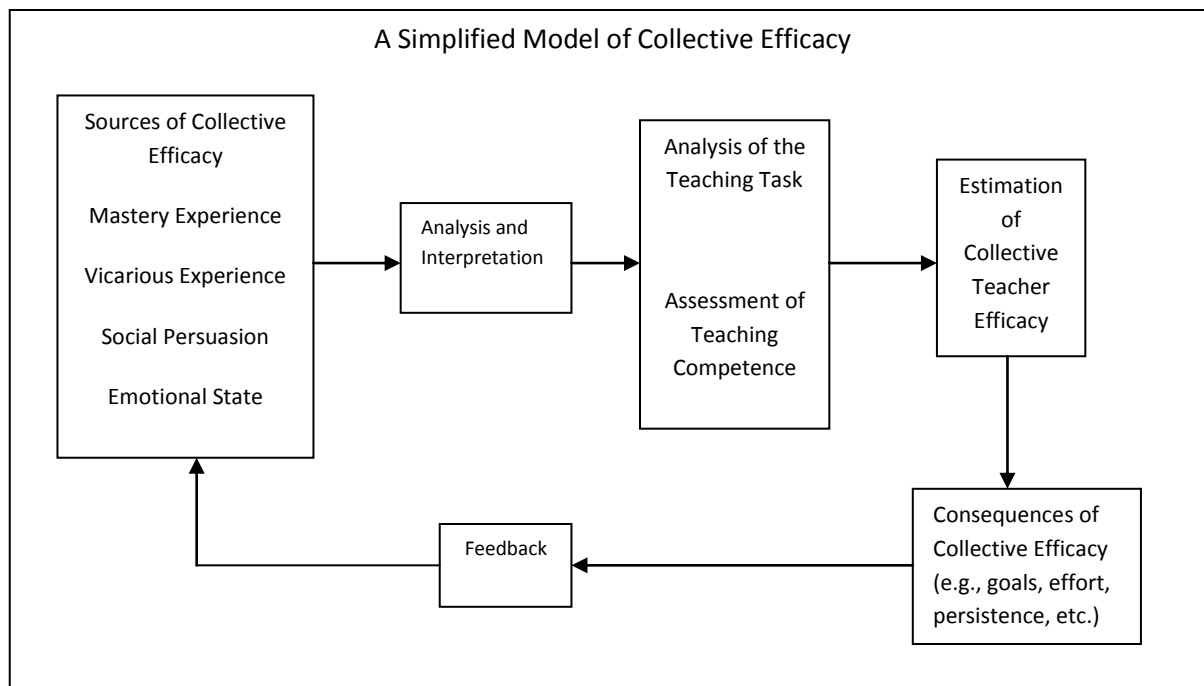


Figure 1. A model of collective efficacy (Goddard, 2000, p. 40).

Collective efficacy research holds promise for school leaders seeking to improve educational practice and increase student achievement by developing the organization’s belief in its capacity to realize its goals. This theory also shifts our focus to the importance of belief systems. In thinking about underlying belief systems and tacit assumptions, it is equally critical to consider the belief systems that may be sabotaging our success with poor and minority children.

Tacit Assumptions

Underlying educational practice and school reform initiatives, whether explicit or implicit, are individual and collective belief systems. These underlying beliefs and implicit

assumptions can either contribute to the success of reform efforts or weaken the very practices designed to address students' academic and social needs (Delpit, 1995; Shields, 2004; Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005; Valencia, 1997). These assumptions and beliefs about minority and/or low-income students encountered in underperforming schools require closer examination.

Deficit Thinking

The research on deficit thinking offers one model for examining those beliefs and to investigate the possibility that deficit thinking not only co-exists with collective efficacy, it may work in opposition to it. Perhaps more problematic is the possibility that schools and the professionals within them may demonstrated an inflated sense of collective efficacy while positioning the problem of school failure with the students they serve.

Although the deficit thinking model has been criticized by a number of scholars as pseudoscience and is held in disrepute by many current behavioral and social scientists, it nevertheless manifests, in varying degrees, in contemporary educational thought and practice. Furthermore, not only does deficit thinking demonstrate an adherence to current social thought and educational practice, but by all indicators it continues to gain ground as we approach the twenty-first century (Valencia, 1997).

Deficit thinking as a phenomenon has been emerging in the educational research (Delpit, 1995; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Pohan, 1999; Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005; Valencia, 1997; Valencia et al., 2001). Contemporary deficit thinking is built on a long and storied history, with roots as far back as the 17th century. The discourse of deficit is in itself problematic as it shapes educators' belief systems and influences "educators' responses to increasing demographic diversity or of the presence of children of color and difference in the classrooms (Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005, p. 5). Steeped in the deficit thinking paradigm, educational reform initiatives

have focused on structuring and restructuring policies and programming that further reinforces the institutionalized marginalization of poor and mineralized children (Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005).

Studies of comprehensive school reform argue that these initiatives frequently fail due to an unwillingness to interrogate the causes of underachievement and school failure, particularly among low income and minority students. As a result of the nation's attempt to close the achievement gap and adequately respond to NCLB mandates, "compensatory education" programs remain current practice. Despite William Ryan's impassioned critique of deficit thinking in *Blaming the Victim* (1971), the current high-stakes testing accountability continues a tradition of deficit thinking. As data are disaggregated and schools scrutinized for sub-group academic performance, the possibility of sanctions for low performance hold serious consequences for students and educators (Urrieta, 2004).

Shields, Bishop, and Mazawi (2005) selected the term pathologizing to explain social and political relationships that are common in schools. To successfully dismantle deficit thinking, educators must become aware of and understand the impact of pathologizing practices.

Pathologizing is a process where perceived structural-functional, cultural, or epistemological deviation from an assumed normal state is ascribed to another group as a product of power relationships whereby the less powerful group is deemed to be abnormal in some way. Pathologizing is a mode of colonization used to govern, regulate, manage, marginalize or minoritize, primarily through hegemonic discourse. (p. x)

Several common refrains in education that exemplify deficit thinking are "These kids do not come to school ready to learn," or "These parents just do not value education." It is the litany of phrases that begin with "these children" that serves as an indicator of deficit thinking. Educators too often elaborate on "these children" by pointing to the lack of prerequisite knowledge and skills, uncaring parents who are unable or unwilling to value education and who

do not support their child's schooling. Given these external and overwhelming challenges, many educators argue that their school is doing a satisfactory job given the challenges of "these children" or they accept, with resignation, that they can do no more for "these children" (Finnan & Swanson, 2000). Many educators are after all able to point to the children, with whom they are successful, further emphasizing deficit beliefs and returning the onus to the student and his subgroup.

In societies where inequity and inequality exists, Freire argued that assistentialism was the social response to that disparity (Freire, 1970). According to the oppressor, or dominant culture, certain groups of people lack the knowledge and skills to know what is necessary for their own success and those belonging to the more "able" culture had the rationality to identify what was needed (Freire, 1970). Assistentialism is one of those forms of domination that assume that some groups of people need the assistance of education and other social programs to live successfully.

Contemporary education can be characterized as assistentialism with deep roots in deficit thinking because it assumes that various subgroups are unable to address issues such as the academic achievement gap and academic failure (Urrieta, 2000). Our current system of high-stakes testing perpetuates this reality with years of student achievement data that suggest that poor and minority students still cannot achieve at the level of white, non-low income students, despite a decade of purported assistance-based programming. The more "advanced" group is the predominantly White, middle-class, paternalistic governing class. NCLB and the culture of testing have done little to close the achievement gap between White and non-White students, between poor and non-poor students. In fact, high-stakes testing represents a modern form of educational oppression, driven by deficit thinking and can be defined as:

The exclusive, or near exclusive use of a test score to make a significant educational decision about students, teachers . . . and schools. Such decisions can have desirable or undesirable consequences for students, teachers and school. That is, a great deal rides on the results of certain test scores. A significant gain or loss can result from test score outcomes (hence the notion of “high stakes”). (Valencia & Guadarrame, 1996, p. 561)

From a historical perspective there exist at least three different explanations for deficit thinking: hereditarianism, culture of poverty and accumulated environmental factors. The ideological nature of deficit thinking makes for a construct that is ever changing, influenced by the sociopolitical dynamics and the research climate of the time. During the 1920s, deficit thinking was grounded in the hereditarian views on racial differences in intelligence (Valencia, 1997). In this framework, poor intellectual performance of non-White people was accounted for in their inferior genetics. Early racist discourses steeped in deficit thinking influenced educational practices toward racial minorities. Menchaca (1997) examined a series of long-standing debates about race that began in the 1600s and ended in the late 1800s. These debates were predicated on the belief that non-White people were either biologically or culturally inferior to Whites.

Beginning with colonization and the enslavement of African people, justified by the racial belief that Africans were not human beings, deficit thinking has a strong historical founding. To understand the power and lasting nature of deficit thinking is to know that two distinct discourses on the inferiority of non-Whites took center stage in the mid 1700s, with one discourse going so far as to argue that only Caucasians were human and were created by God (Menchaca, 1997). Moving the debate outside the confines of Christianity, scholars turned to natural history to provide empirical evidence. Craniologists and polygenist scholars promoted the craniology movement to identify differences between Whites and non-Whites. To date, vestiges of these beliefs are found in an achievement gap between Whites and non-Whites.

As recently as the late 1700s, American statesmen and politicians kept the deficit paradigm alive and well, with Dr. Benjamin Rush proposing that the physical difference and intellectual inferiority of dark-skinned people were a result of cultural degeneration (Menchaca, 1997). Even Thomas Jefferson upheld the deficit model of thinking, arguing that a deportation mandate would be necessary after emancipation due to the feeble mindedness of Blacks and their pending burden on the state. There appears to be a glut of studies conducted to demonstrate the inferiority of Blacks. Nott and Glidden published two books in the mid-1800s—*Types of Mankind* and *The Indigenous Races of the Earth*. These two authors proposed that slavery was not only justifiable because non-Whites were of a different species than Caucasians, but beneficial to non-Whites because it was the only way to teach them to live among civilized people (Menchaca, 1997). These and a wide range of racist theories proliferated from the 1800s until Darwin wrote *The Origin of the Species* in 1859 offered a strong counterargument. Only after Abraham Lincoln emancipated slaves under the Thirteenth Amendment, did racial minorities become human under the law. Disparities between Whites and non-Whites persisted and the cognitive inferiority of racial minorities and poor whites continued to be offered as justification for their economic disadvantaged positions (Menchaca, 1997).

Between 1825 and 1870, all states and territories began funding public education that was mostly compulsory, age graded and provided by trained teachers. These schools were for White children and most states passed “compulsory ignorance laws” that prohibited the education of Blacks (Menchaca, 1997). To support these prohibitions, racist discourse was again advanced by craniologists and scholars who argued that non-Whites were cognitive inferior and unable to learn. Others argued blatantly racist positions such as non-Whites would become presumptuous and attempt to marry Whites to socially advance or that non-Whites would begin insisting on

better employment and strain the skilled labor market (Valencia, 1997). In 1896, however, the Supreme Court passed *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and states were given the right to segregate minorities in separate schools. By 1920, the majority of non-White children were provided public education (Menchaca, 1997; Valencia, 1997). While this represents a significant transition in American public education, another event signaled a new era of deficit thinking. In 1905, the first intelligence test was developed by Binet and Simon. The importation of the Binet-Simon scales and measurement tool to the United States served as a catalyst for the intelligence testing movement. Soon after, racial differences in intelligence were validly explained by differences in innate, genetically determined abilities. In response to these “findings” educational recommendations for these intellectually inferior people were offered that relied on instructional delivery that was low-level, concrete, segregated—in other words, commensurate with their alleged diminished capacity (Menchaca, 1997). Deficit thinking based on heredity and genetic predisposition did not lose its support until the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* demanded a reconsideration of racial equity and educational access. It is this history of institutional racism that continues to inform contemporary public education and contributes to deficit thinking in schools.

Culture of Poverty Paradigm

In the mid-1960s, deficit thinking shifted from the genetics model to one based on cultural attributes (Foley et al., 1997). Lewis redefined deficit thinking with his “culture of poverty” theory, arguing that the poor have their own subculture with its own values. This explanation of the cycle of poverty assigned blame for poverty to those most disadvantaged by the system, asserting that they remain in poverty due to their adaptations to poverty (Lewis, 1966).

Arguments based on the culture of poverty supported deficit thinking by emphasizing that “people living in poverty tend to create a . . . self-sustaining life-style . . . marked by a host of negative values, norms and social practices” (Lewis, 1966). Cultural traits of the poor identified them as lazy, violent, hedonistic, disengaged and dysfunctional. It is this way of life that served to keep them impoverished. While deficit thinking can be linked to pathologizing practices in a number of countries (Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005), Lewis argued that the culture of poverty which he identified occurred only in capitalist countries like the United States.

Theories of Social Inequality

As genetic and “culture of poverty” arguments supporting deficit thinking were dismissed, a different argument was advanced to explain differences in school achievement—cultural deprivation. While many theories about factors that lead to school success or failure have been advanced, “the theories differ significantly in where they locate the source of inequality” (Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2004, p. 401). For example, a theory of genetic inferiority locates the source of inequality in the individual and heredity while a theory of cultural deprivation positions the inequality in the student’s culture. Cultural deprivation theory is synonymous with cultural or linguistic deficit theory. These two theories find their origins in liberal social and intellectual traditions that argue that individuals exercise control of their destinies, beliefs popular in meritocratic arguments (Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2004). The institutional benefit of advancing these two theories is that the social institution is left intact because the source of inequality resides in the individual. Genetic inferiority theory relies on a “necessary lie” as found in Plato’s Republic.

“You are all brothers in the city,” we shall tell them in our fable, “but while God molded you, he mingled gold in the generation of some, and those are the ones fit to rule, who are therefore the most precious; he mingled silver in the assistants; and iron and brass in farmers and other craftsman.” (as cited in Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2004, p. 402)

This necessary lie or “the myth of the metals” continues to give sanction to our existing social institutions that allow us to sort and separate students based on perceived intellectual capacity or school-based achievement. The contemporary “myth of the metals” has now taken shape in high-stakes testing and school reforms, identifying some schools and communities as “mingled gold” while others as cast in “iron” and “brass.” The resulting achievement gap confirms this necessary lie on a daily basis in schools across the country. To dismantle deficit thinking based on the genetic inferiority theory, an examination of educational programs that successfully close the achievement gap is critical to countering beliefs that certain groups of students are destined to failure as a result of their genetics (Shields, 2003, 2008; Valencia, 2010).

Approaching the issue of social inequality and school failure from a critical theory perspective locates the problem in social structures and institutions. By interrogating the inequities of society and the status quo, educators who are committed to socially just education for all children need to understand the impact of deficit thinking and its continued presence in our educational institutions. As educators we must come to understand the moral implications in identifying those students we fail to serve as deficient, particularly when attempts to remedy these deficits are predicated on “false generosity” or well-intentioned efforts that result in a reductionist approach to education (Ashton, 1997).

Pathologizing Practices

Deficit thinking based on heredity and genetic predisposition did not lose its support until the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* demanded a consideration of racial equity and educational access (Pearl, 1997). As genetic and “culture of poverty” arguments supporting deficit thinking were dismissed, a different argument was advanced to explain differences in school achievement—cultural deprivation (Pearl, 1997). Guerra and

Nelson (2010) argue that “to deconstruct and reframe deficit beliefs, facilitators need to consistently use one approach each time they hear a deficit belief” (p. 55). There is an approach adapted from Hatton and Smith’s (1995) model of reflection. As educators we must come to understand the moral implications in identifying those students we fail to serve as deficient, particularly when attempts to remedy these deficits are predicated on “false generosity” or well-intentioned efforts that result in a reductionist approach to education (Ashton, 1997).

The past decade with its reliance on mechanistic, scientifically-based approaches to school improvement has been marked by a blatant failure to address academic achievement gaps for low income, minority students. The existing research on collective efficacy offers promise for addressing achievement gaps, particularly for low income students. While the research on collective efficacy works to address organizational belief systems and their impact on student achievement, the research on tacit assumptions adds another layer that must be considered to effectively implement school improvement efforts based on collective efficacy. Given the potential benefit of studying and quantifying organizational efficacy and agency, it is critical to thoroughly examine all theories that may work in opposition to that promise.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will describe the methods used to address the research questions of this study. Included in the chapter are a discussion of my research design, data sources, site and participant selection criteria, as well as my data collection and analysis methods. My primary approach in this study was a three-phase, sequential mixed methodology. The purpose of the design was to expand upon previous quantitative research and to add depth and description to that quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In this case, the second method was embedded, or nested, in the design. In this chapter, I also describe the data collection procedures and the methods of analysis employed to investigate my research questions. Using a sequential mixed methods study to more closely examine the tacit assumptions of Bandura's theoretical construct of collective efficacy, data were collected. The majority of the existing studies relied solely on quantitative methods. This study, however, was designed to more thoroughly examine and possibly build on the extant research on collective efficacy. Using mixed methods often dovetails model development or building which, in this case, provided the greatest benefits as a methodological approach (Reams & Twale, 2008).

Research Design

Greene (2005) regarded mixed methods research as a means to gain insight, noting that such inquiry generated "important understandings and discernments through the juxtaposition of different lenses, perspectives, and stances" (p. 208). My research design was informed by the holistic benefits of mixed methodology as well as the need for a greater methodological diversity in studies of collective efficacy (Klassen et al., 2011). Choosing a combination of quantitative

and qualitative methods for this study allowed the research to be conceptualized holistically; alone neither quantitative nor qualitative research makes a complete whole. Multiple data collection allows for complementarity and a counterbalance of strengths and weaknesses of each technique (Reams & Twale, 2008). Understanding that the results from one method can inform another method, this study employed a sequential mixed methods approach to extend the depth of inquiry regarding collective efficacy as it may or may not be evident in the selected schools. A mixed methods approach allowed an examination of the larger picture and opened the situation for greater scrutiny (Greene, 2005).

Specifically, quantitative and qualitative methods were combined to use results from one method to elaborate on results from the other method (complementarity), use results from one method to help develop or inform the other method (Goodyear et al., 2005; Beck, 2005), recast results from one method to questions or results from the other method (initiation), and extend the breadth or range of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components (expansion). Thus, they provided not only rationales for mixing methods and forms of data but also names for them (Hanson et al., 2005).

The multi-phase design of this study was intended to elaborate on or expand the findings of a quantitative method—a previously validated measure of collective efficacy—with semi-structured interviews. Collins et al. (2006) identified the following four major rationales for mixing quantitative and qualitative approaches: participant enrichment (i.e., mixing quantitative and qualitative techniques for the rationale of optimizing the sample—e.g., increasing the number of participants), instrument fidelity (i.e., maximizing the appropriateness and/or utility of the instruments used in the research, whether quantitative or qualitative—e.g., via a pilot study), treatment integrity (i.e., mixing quantitative and qualitative procedures in order to assess the

fidelity of interventions, treatments, or programs), and significance enhancement (i.e., mixing quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to optimize data interpretations).

Two of the four rationales informed the selection of mixed methodology as my approach to the research. In one of the three phases of my research, I assessed the fidelity of a potential intervention—collective efficacy. In the second and third phases of my research, I worked to enhance the significance of my research in order to optimize data interpretations and more deeply interrogate the theoretical construct of collective efficacy. Because the use of mixed methods research was “necessary to uncover maximum information and perspective, increase corroboration of the data, and render less biased and more accurate conclusions,” it was the most effective approach to vetting the tacit assumptions and underlying beliefs of collective efficacy, an established and promising theoretical construct for school improvement (Reams & Twale, 2008, p. 133).

Measures of Collective Efficacy

There are several methods used by other researchers for measuring collective efficacy. These are thoroughly described by Whiteoak, Chalip, and Hort (2004). One method is to collect and aggregate individual perceptions of self-efficacy. This method relies on a group mean of self-referent perceptions. Individuals would be asked to report on their perception of efficacy using “I statements.” The responses are then aggregated and a group mean is determined as a measure of perceived collective efficacy. This approach has its limitations because it does not ask individuals to assess the agentic capacity of the organization’s members.

A second method for measuring collective efficacy is to collect an aggregate individual perception of group efficacy. Replacing “I statements” with “We statements” provides

information on the group-referent capability. The responses to these questions are again aggregated and referent statement responses are averaged to determine perceived collective efficacy. While Bandura argued that “perceived collective efficacy is an emergent group level attribute rather than simply the sum of members’ perceived personal efficacies” (1997, p. 478), Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy believe this approach is an effective means of measuring collective efficacy (2004).

A third approach involves using a group consensus model that asks group members to discuss their capacity and come to agreement on their agentic capacity. Bandura (1997) identifies two problems with this approach. First, an attempt to gain group consensus on the perception conceals within group variability. The second problem is that of group desirability and undue influence to conform to group dynamics. The need for social desirability often undermines the data collection process.

Because this study was designed to conduct a deeper interrogation of collective efficacy, I began by verifying the assumption that participating schools not only believe in their conjoint capabilities to positively influence student learning and increase student achievement but manifest those beliefs in practice. To that end, I used the 21-item Collective Efficacy Scale developed by Goddard to identify the existing levels of collective efficacy in eight schools that received Illinois Honor Roll recognition, either as a Spotlight School or Academic Improvement School, between 2004-2007. This initial and previously validated survey will answer the first research question, “To what extent do selected award-winning schools demonstrate collective efficacy?”

The 21-item Collective Efficacy Scale was also selected to identify a range of collective efficacy in eight Illinois Honor Roll elementary schools and to provide information on the levels

of collective efficacy in a larger group of schools. In order to more extensively explore collective efficacy and examine the tacit assumptions of the theory, I further studied four schools with the widest variance in levels of collective efficacy, ideally those schools at farthest ranges of the scale.

In 2002, Goddard, Hoy and Woolfolk Hoy, conducted a study in which they developed a 21-item scale to measure collective efficacy. Then in 2002, Goddard reexamined the previous study and the psychometric properties of that 21-item Collective Efficacy Scale. Goddard worked to improve its measurement by constructing a more conceptually sound version of the scale. As a result of those efforts, a 12-item Likert-type measure of collective efficacy in schools was developed. This survey was designed to “assess the extent to which a faculty believes in its conjoint capability to positively influence student learning” (p. 97). Additionally this instrument is based on a social cognitive model that argues that perceptions of collective efficacy develop from the cognitive processing of the group.

For this study, I embedded Goddard’s 21-item Collective Efficacy Scale in the 67-item survey for the first phase of the research. I developed a questionnaire to explore in greater depth the beliefs and practices undergirding the identified collective efficacy in award-winning schools for the second phase of the study. The survey instrument included items designed to collect data about teacher demographics, teacher assumptions and beliefs, and school improvement practices. By using the 21-item Collective Efficacy Scale in phase one, I was able to verify the assumption that collective efficacy was present in the selected schools and I was able to calculate the extent to which collective efficacy was present.

Because several studies currently exist to establish the link between collective efficacy and academic achievement, I was not seeking to replicate those findings. Instead, I was

interested in verifying those assumptions and moving forward to a more considered examination of the theory.

Overview of Study Design

In the first phase of the study, I administered a survey instrument that contains previously tested survey items to obtain quantitative data on collective efficacy from eight racially diverse elementary schools that earned Illinois Honor Roll recognition within a 5-year period. Schools that earned either a Spotlight School Award or an Academic Achievement Award were considered for participation in the first phase of the study. Additional criteria were used to select the eight initial sites. The 67-item survey instrument was administered electronically using SurveyMonkey. In the second phase of the study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with building administrators in four schools that met specific criteria. Finally, in the third phase of the study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers in two sites in an effort to further explore the nature of collective efficacy in those schools and to examine the tacit assumptions and underlying beliefs of that collective efficacy in greater depth.

Site and Participant Selection

Site Selection

For phase 1 of the study, I selected eight elementary schools that serve low income, minority students the outlying areas of Chicago, Illinois. Specifically, I sought to identify and include schools that earned Illinois Honor Recognition as either an Academic Improvement School and/or as an Illinois Spotlight School during the 4-year period from 2004-2007. To be

recognized by the Illinois Honor Roll, schools needed to make adequate yearly progress according to the Illini Equal Steps Model.

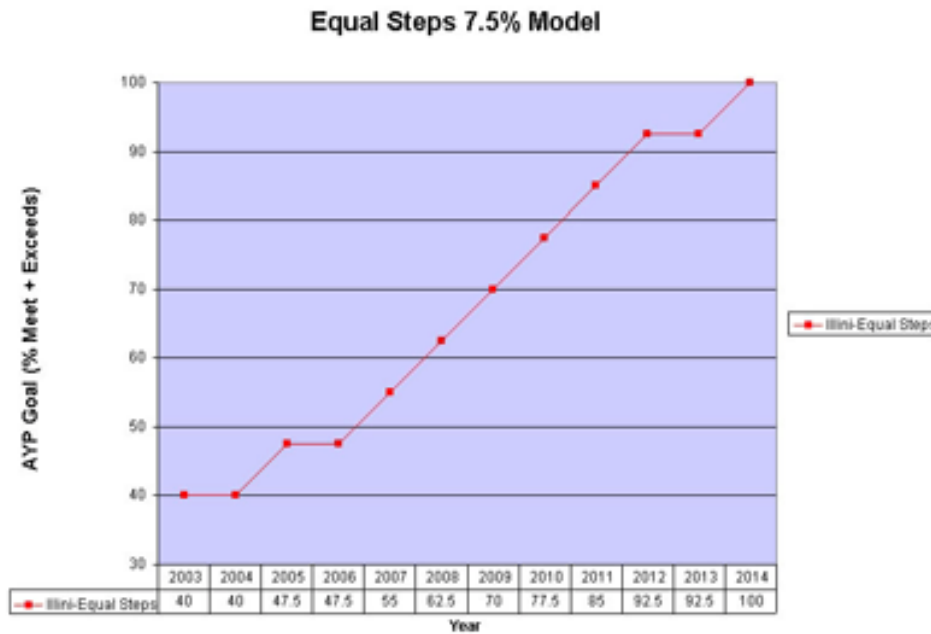


Figure 2. Adequate Yearly Progress: Illinois Equal Steps model.

“The Illinois State Board of Education in partnership with Northern Illinois University delivers three kinds of awards to recognize schools that demonstrate exemplary academic performance. These awards make up the Illinois Honor Roll” (<http://iirc.niu.edu>). The Illinois Honor Roll celebrates the accomplishments of Illinois public schools that are providing high quality education for all of their students, according to the criteria established by the Illinois State Board of Education.

The Spotlight Schools demonstrated that low-income students and schools with limited resources can show impressive academic performance. To receive this award, schools must make adequate yearly progress as defined in the Illini Plan, and school enrollment must include at least 50% low income students. As the AYP requirements increase each year, the number of schools

earning this recognition has continued to decline, with many of the schools making AYP through Safe Harbor Provisions.

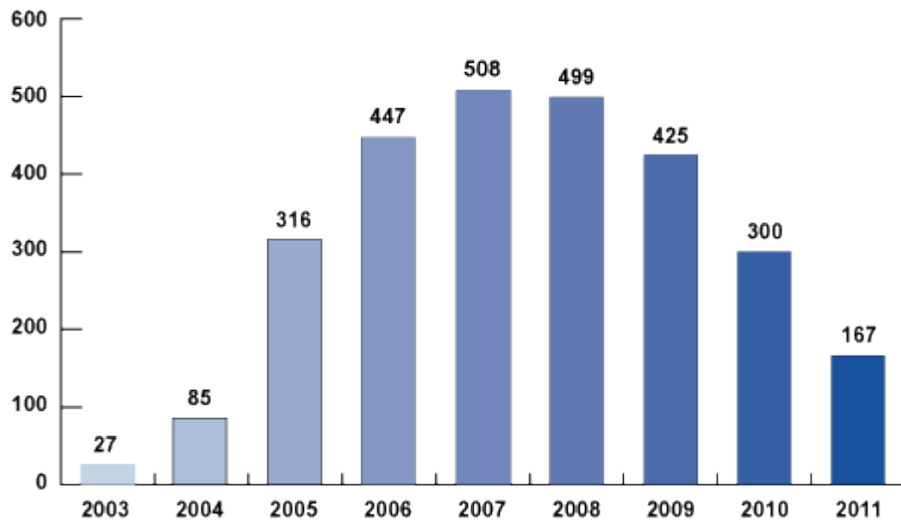


Figure 3. Total number of spotlight schools by year.

To earn Illinois Honor Roll recognition as an Academic Improvement School, schools must have shown at least a 7.5-point improvement on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in one year or have shown at least a 15-point improvement in ISAT scores in reading and math over the previous 3 years. Schools earning an Academic Improvement award must demonstrate substantial gains in student achievement in reading and mathematics over a 3-year period. The Academic Improvement Awards honored schools for substantial gains in academic performance. The award winners represent all types of schools, funding levels, and demographics. The schools demonstrated that significant progress is not only possible but sustainable at every level.

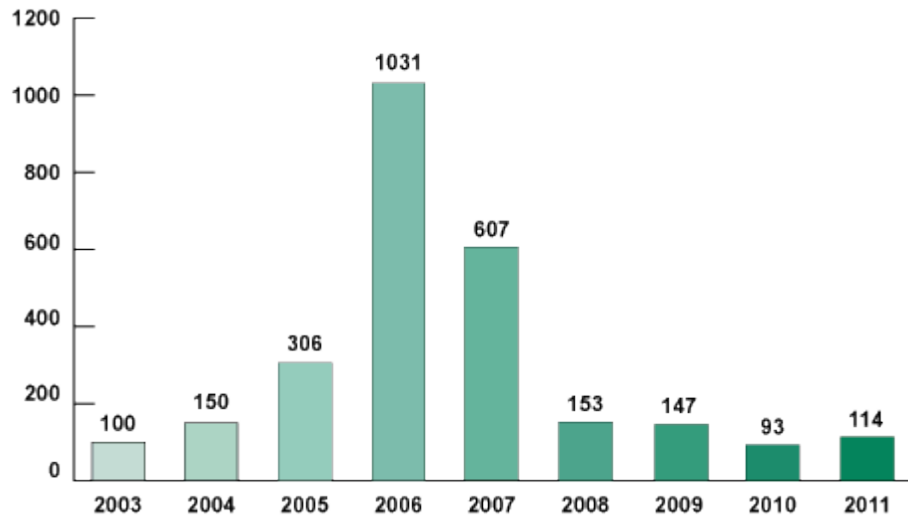


Figure 4. Total number of academic improvement schools by year.

After reviewing Illinois Honor Roll data available on the Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC), schools that met the criteria were identified. The principal of each of the schools in the areas identified was solicited via email to inform them of the study and invite their participation. Of the 10 schools invited to participate in the study, two principals declined participation. This yielded a response rate of 80% for the schools initially selected for inclusion. The eight schools were selected for inclusion in the first phase of the study were identified using the following criteria:

- Diverse enrollment with at least 51% of the student enrollment being comprised of nonwhite students. More than one minority group needed to be represented to be considered diverse for this study.
- Grade configuration includes K-5 or K-6
- A minimum of 25% of the students needed to qualify as low income according to free and reduced lunch status
- Schools were in close proximity geographically, within 20 miles of each other
- Schools earned either a Spotlight School award or an Academic Achievement award between 2004-2007

To participate in this study, school administrators had to consent to participate in all three phases of the research methodology if requested to do so. The three phases included the electronic survey instrument to be administered to certified, full-time teachers and administrators in the eight selected sites, semi-structured interviews of school administrators in four identified sites and semi-structured interviews of teachers in two schools. Additionally, building administrators were required to participate in interview phase of the study.

In addition to the criteria established for site selection, it was important to consider the population from which the sample was drawn. The schools selected had similar characteristics of urbanicity and covered three districts faced with changing demographics and limited resources. By limiting this study to elementary schools with similar grade configurations, I controlled for the organizational structures of the school and consistency of the population studies.

In the first phase of the study, the 67-item survey was designed to measure the extent to which the selected schools demonstrated collective efficacy. In addition to the 21-item Collective Efficacy Scale, other items were included to determine the nature of collective efficacy in those schools. Specifically, educators were asked to identify instructional and social programming implemented in those schools. The eight schools selected served diverse student populations with at least three racial subgroups. Each of schools served Limited English Proficient students but that subgroup varied from 7.1 % to 73.2%. Additionally, the schools had a range of low SES levels from 30 % to 87.4 %. Provided below is an overview of the eight school sites selected for participation in the study.

Table 1. Selected Sites by Demographics, Student Ethnicity, Low Income, Enrollment

| School | School size | % Low SES | % LEP | % White | % Black | % Hispanic |
|----------|-------------|-----------|-------|---------|---------|------------|
| Willow | 300-350 | 78.7 | 19.1 | 11.7 | 42.5 | 40.9 |
| Thoreau | 300-350 | 75.0 | 17.2 | 16.3 | 29.7 | 43.8 |
| Lee | 300-350 | 47.7 | 23.4 | 11.4 | 31.2 | 52.3 |
| Ferris | 350-400 | 73.1 | 9.2 | 18.7 | 41.3 | 30.3 |
| Rhodes | 350-400 | 39.3 | 15.0 | 26.6 | 28.3 | 32.1 |
| Madison | 450-500 | 30.0 | 7.1 | 39.1 | 22.2 | 23.0 |
| Reynolds | 450-500 | 87.4 | 22.0 | 11.3 | 48.8 | 31.8 |
| Sterling | 600-650 | 50.1 | 73.2 | 2.2 | 7.7 | 87.9 |

Phase One: Participant Selection for Survey Administration

Participants were 130 full-time certified educators, 125 full-time certified teachers, and 5 administrators in the eight participating schools completed the 67-item online survey instrument that included Goddard’s 21-item Collective Efficacy Survey. An overview of the survey respondents’ demographics is provided below.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

| Characteristics | Survey respondents | |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------|
| | <i>n</i> | % |
| Gender | | |
| Female | 113 | 86.9 |
| Male | 12 | 9.2 |
| Not Answered | 5 | 3.9 |
| Total | 130 | 100.0 |

Table 2 (cont.)

| Characteristics | Survey respondents | |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------|
| | <i>n</i> | % |
| Race | | |
| White | 104 | 80.0 |
| Black | 9 | 6.9 |
| Hispanic | 7 | 5.4 |
| Asian/Pacific Island | 4 | 3.1 |
| Multiracial | 1 | .8 |
| Not Answered | 5 | 3.8 |
| Total | 130 | 100.0 |

For the first phase of the study, respondents represented the larger trends in elementary education, that of a field dominated by white, middle-class women. 86.9% of the survey respondents identified as female and 9.2% identified as male. Additionally, 80% of the respondents were white and 20% were non-white. Even in schools serving minority-majority populations, the educators who completed the survey were not representative of their school communities.

Table 3. Participant Gender by School

| School | Male % (<i>n</i>) | Female % (<i>n</i>) | Not answered % (<i>n</i>) | Total <i>n</i> |
|----------|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Ferris | 19 (3) | 75 (12) | 6 (1) | 16 |
| Rhodes | 11 (2) | 83 (15) | 16 (1) | 18 |
| Willow | 0 (0) | 92 (11) | 8 (1) | 12 |
| Madison | 12.5 (3) | 87.5 (21) | 0 (0) | 24 |
| Thoreau | 10 (2) | 85 (17) | 5 (1) | 20 |
| Lee | 7 (1) | 93 (13) | 0 (0) | 14 |
| Sterling | 7 (1) | 72 (10) | 21 (3) | 14 |
| Reynolds | 0 (0) | 92 (11) | 8 (1) | 12 |

When gender was disaggregated by site, the% of male respondents ranged from 0 to 15%, or 0 to 3 men at the different sites. Female participants represented the clear majority of respondents at all sites with percentages ranging from 72% to 93%.

Table 4. Participant Race by School

| School | White % (n) | Black % (n) | Hispanic % (n) | Other ^a % (n) | Not answered % (n) | Total n |
|----------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
| Ferris | 69 (11) | 13 (2) | 6 (1) | 6 (1) | 6 (1) | 16 |
| Rhodes | 94 (17) | 6 (1) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 18 |
| Willow | 84 (10) | 8 (1) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 8 (1) | 12 |
| Madison | 83 (20) | 4 (1) | 0 (0) | 13 (3) | 0 (0) | 24 |
| Thoreau | 65 (13) | 10.0 (2) | 15 (3) | 5 (1) | 5 (1) | 20 |
| Lee | 79 (11) | 7 (1) | 14 (2) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 14 |
| Sterling | 71 (10) | 0 (0) | 7 (1) | 0 (0) | 21 (3) | 14 |
| Reynolds | 83 (10) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 17 (2) | 12 |

^aIncludes Asian/Pacific Islander, Multiracial and Native American/Alaska Native.

The eight sites, while served predominantly by white educators, do have a broader range of diversity in terms of race. The percentage of white respondents ranged from 65 to 94%, a considerably wider range than seen with gender at the selected sites. At several sites, a number of respondents chose not to identify their race. The range of participants opting not to identify their race was 0 to 21%.

Phase Two: Semi-structured Interviews of Building Administrators

To determine participation in phase two of the study, collective efficacy scores were examined. A discussion of how the collective efficacy scores were calculated is provided in the subsequent chapter on data analysis. The results of the 21-item Collective Efficacy Survey were unexpected. I had predicted a wide range of collective efficacy scores based on the different level of student achievement among the eight selected sites. The range of scores for the eight schools

included in this study is 408-589, with all schools falling within the average range. Three schools demonstrated high average scores; four scored in the average range and one in the low average range. This lack of variance required further analysis to select the four sites for participation in phase 2.

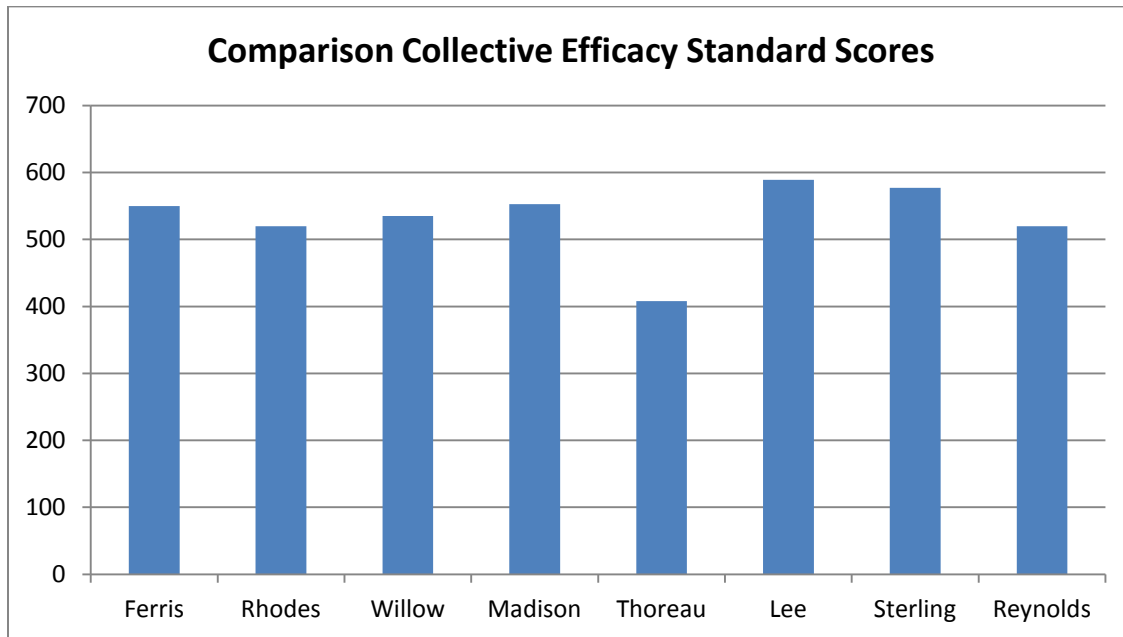


Figure 5. Collective efficacy standard scores by site.

Using data analysis I established the range of collective efficacy values among the eight schools. The initial intent of the research design was to identify a range of collective efficacy scores among the schools and include two schools demonstrating the highest level of collective efficacy and two schools demonstrating the lower levels of collective efficacy. Given the similar characteristics of the eight school sites and the lack of a significant variance between collective efficacy standard scores, additional analyses was needed to identify the sites for participation in phase two of the study. To inform my selection of four sites for the second phase of the study, I used school demographic data and school size. Four sites—Thoreau, Rhodes, Willow and Ferris—were identified for the phase two interviews based on the following criteria:

- Small school enrollment less than or equal to 400 students
- Fewer than 20% Limited English Proficient (LEP) students
- Similar levels of racial/ethnic diversity

Because LEP students are now required to complete the same Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) as native English speakers, schools with large LEP populations are not fairly represented. Since the collective efficacy (CE) scores for the schools were similar, these schools represented a sample that benefitted from further qualitative data.

Phase Two: Semi-structured Interview of School Administrators

In Phase two of the study, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews of five building administrators and one administrative designee in the four schools in order to develop a richer, more complete picture of collective efficacy in the schools. Prior to the interview, administrators were required sign a consent letter indicating their willingness to be interviewed for the project. The interviews were completed in person and lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interviewees were one white female principal, one white female assistant principal, one white male principal, one African-American female principal, one African-American male principal and one white male administrative designee. In one of the buildings, the principal was just completing her first year at that site even though she was a veteran administrator in the district. For that reason, she recommended that I also interview a veteran teacher who was the informal leader among staff. His interview is included in the instructional leadership section of the study. These interviewees were volunteers who elected to have their schools participate in the study.

The interview opened with a brief description of the research study and then posed general questions about collective efficacy as it relates to the sources of collective efficacy,

academic achievement, underlying belief systems and perceptions about the school context. The interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. A copy of the interview protocol is available in Appendix B.

Phase Three: Semi-structured Interview of Teacher Participants

In phase three of the study, a review of achievement data using Illinois test results was conducted and two schools were identified. After collecting and analyzing the interviews from the school leaders and further analyzing the survey data and school demographics, two schools were selected for a second round of interviews with certified staff from both buildings. The two schools were selected for both their similarities and their differences. The schools, Ferris and Rhodes, were remarkably similar in their collective efficacy scores, school size and 2010 ISAT results. At each of the schools 3 teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured approach to more thoroughly interrogate the tacit assumptions underlying collective efficacy. All six teachers were white female veteran teachers.

Table 5. Comparison of Collective Efficacy Scores, Student Achievement and SES

| School name | CE score | CE standard | CE rating | 2008 ISAT M/E ^a | Low SES % |
|-------------|----------|-------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|
| Ferris | 4.44 | 550 | Average | 75 | 71.4 |
| Rhodes | 4.24 | 520 | Average | 77 | 51.7 |

^aPercentage of students meeting or exceeding on annual state testing. Represents annual composite.

Their primary differences were seen in socioeconomic status and student ethnicity, two factors that are purported linked to lower student achievement. In this case, Ferris Elementary School had increased risk factors but performed at a similar level to Rhodes. The in-depth semi-structured interview approach will be used to tell the stories of both schools while examining collective efficacy and seeking to reveal tacit assumptions underlying school belief systems. The interview opened with a brief description of the research study and then posed general questions

about collective efficacy as it relates to the sources of collective efficacy, academic achievement, underlying belief systems and perceptions about the school context. The interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. A copy of the interview protocol is available in Appendix B.

Data Collection

Phase One: Survey Administration

The first phase of the study is designed to answer the first research question, “To what extent do selected award-winning schools demonstrate collective efficacy?” For this phase of the study, the extent to which these eight schools demonstrate collective efficacy was analyzed using a 67-item survey that included the 21-item Collective Efficacy Scale (Goddard, 2000). This previously validated survey instrument was administered electronically to obtain quantitative data on perceived collective efficacy and to determine the extent to which the eight selected sites demonstrate collective efficacy in their schools. Survey respondents were full-time, certified teacher and administrator volunteers who completed the survey on their own time in remote locations. Respondents were invited to participate in the survey via email. Response rates were higher than expected for online surveys with the lowest participation rate at 36% and the highest rate at 77%.

The primary data sources for this study were certified teachers and school administrators.

Table 6. Survey Response Rates by Site

| School site | Rhodes | Thoreau | Ferris | Madison | Reynolds | Lee | Sterling | Willow |
|-------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|----------|-----|----------|--------|
| Certified staff | 28 | 27 | 29 | 31 | 33 | 29 | 33 | 28 |
| Surveys completed | 18 | 20 | 16 | 24 | 12 | 14 | 14 | 12 |
| Response rate | 64% | 74% | 55% | 77% | 36% | 48% | 42% | 43% |

This study used SurveyMonkey, a web-based survey instrument to gather preliminary data that responds to the following research questions:

1. To what extent do selected award-winning schools demonstrate collective efficacy?
2. What is the nature of collective efficacy present in the selected schools and to what extent is it present?
3. What are the underlying and tacit assumptions about students on which it is based?

With the increased sophistication of web surveys, researchers now have another mode and method for collecting data. In the last ten years, web surveys have emerged as a new approach to conducting research via websites (Couper, 2000; Weimiao & Zheng, 2010). The use of web surveys offer several advantages not available in traditional methods such as mail and telephone surveys. These benefits include shorter transmission time, lower delivery cost, increase options for design and ease of design modification, and significantly reduced data entry time. There are often challenges specific to web surveys. Challenges include limited access for potential participants who do not have internet access and low response rates that could impact results (Couper, 2000; Schonlau, Fricker, & Elliott, 2002). Because the study participants in this design consisted of full-time school staff, there was no risk of excluding participants. Recent research has “estimated that the response rate in the web survey on average is approximately 11% lower than that of other survey modes” (Weimiao & Zheng, 2010, p. 132). Weimiao and

Zheng (2010) do acknowledge that academic and governmental agencies do experience greater response rates than other researchers. To increase response rates, I used prenotification and routine reminders about survey completion. The overall response rate for this survey is 55%. Two hundred thirty eight certified staff, including administrators and teachers, were invited to participate in the survey. One hundred thirty surveys were completed for an average response rate of 55%. Specific information on individual site response rates for this survey is provided below.

The survey instrument used in this study incorporated Goddard's Collective Teacher Efficacy survey. Goddard's 21-item Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale expanded on the work of previous researchers. The Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale identifies four means for assessing collective efficacy beliefs. The four types of survey items include (a) positive group competence (GC+), (b) negative group competence (GC-), (c) positive task analysis (TA+) and (d) negative task analysis (TA-). Goddard completed an analysis of the Gibson and Dembo instrument and found that the instrument contained only GC+ and TA- items. To expand the survey, Goddard added items assessing the GC- and TA+ dimensions of collective teacher efficacy (Goddard, 1998). The 21-item Goddard survey instrument is provided in Appendix A and includes information on the four types of survey items. Of the 21 survey instrument items, there are seven items pertaining to positive group competence, six survey items related to negative group competence, and four representing positive and negative items pertaining to task analysis.

In addition to the 21-item Collective Efficacy Scale, the survey instrument included the following sections: perceptions of school demographics, Teacher Efficacy Items, beliefs and practices, student activities, and educator activities. For example, participants responded to a series of items that indicate how often students participate in activities such as community

service, fine arts education, ISAT preparation, direct instruction, character education, classroom meetings, and community meetings. Participants had an opportunity to provide additional insights in a short answer format about strategies that contributed to their school's success. Additionally, I further evaluated the relationships between the following study variables: collective efficacy, poverty, and achievement.

By revisiting questions that addressed collective efficacy as well as expanded the inquiry to discuss the actual practices that accompany the beliefs, the second phase of the study was designed to answer the second and third research questions, "What is the nature of collective efficacy present in the selected schools and to what extent is it present?" and "What are the underlying and tacit assumptions about students on which it is based?"

Phase Two: Semi-structured Interviews of Building Administrators

I initially conducted in-depth semi-structure interviews with the building administrators at the four selected sites. Because this method was non-directed, open-ended and non-standardized, it allowed the researcher to learn "what is most important in the minds of participants: *their* meanings, perspectives and definitions; how *they* view, categorize and experience the world" (Nulty, 2008). As an educational practitioner, I sought to establish a partnership with the participants rather than a researcher-subject relationship. Phase two was designed to extend and add depth to the quantitative findings by investigating administrative perspectives, belief systems, existing practices and tacit assumptions. This phase was also intended to provide examples of the lived experience of building administrators in different school settings.

The semi-structured interview protocol was grounded in collective efficacy but also expanded on the questions from the survey. Interviewees were asked to discuss the factors that

led to their academic achievement and recognition on the Illinois Honor Roll as either a Spotlight School or an Academic Improvement School. Additionally, questions that explored the different sources of collective efficacy were provided. For example, to gain a better understanding of mastery and vicarious experience, the interviewees were asked to describe staff development and training opportunities in their respective schools. Questions about staff morale and motivation were included to explore affective states and social persuasion as sources of collective efficacy. The semi-structured approach also allowed participants to offer observations and insights that may be broader than our initial research questions. All of the interviews were completed in person. To better understand contextual factors, interviewees were asked to discuss their schools and the challenges they have faced.

The researcher opened the interview with a brief description of the research study. In addition to exploring the different sources of collective efficacy—mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion and affective states—prompts included questions about changing demographics, NCLB requirements, the role of high stakes testing, administrative support, parent support, student readiness to learn and staff morale. After exploring the interviewee's perceptions of the school context, the participant was invited to share the different initiatives that they believed contributed to the school's success in earning the Illinois Honor Roll recognition. Throughout the interviews in both phase two and phase three, participants were asked to reflect on their individual beliefs and practices as well as the demonstrated beliefs and practices of the school as it increased student achievement as measured by state testing. Questions were also designed to answer the third research question in greater depth, "What are the underlying and tacit assumptions about students on which it is based?"

Phase 3: Semi-structured Interview of Teachers

The third phase of the study was designed to more narrowly focus on two school settings, comparing and contrasting the belief systems, tacit assumptions, existing practices and lived experiences of teachers as well as building administrators. The respondents were each interviewed for a minimum of one hour. The semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded with the respondent's express written permission, transcribed and then coded for subsequent analysis. I used a semi-formal interview protocol with open-ended questions covering a range of topics that explore collective efficacy and underlying belief systems. In each interview, all of the questions were covered although the order of the questions varied from interview to interview. Additionally, respondents were invited to add their own perspectives and commentary that they felt may not have been discussed.

Data Analysis

Phase 1: Analysis of 21-Item Collective Efficacy Survey Data

Richards and Richards (1994) argue that the use of computer software effectively addresses barriers to qualitative research such as size limitations, complexity of data records and flexibility. Data from the survey instrument were exported to Microsoft Excel and SPSS for statistical analysis. Survey responses were analyzed and presented by school site.

Using the Collective Efficacy Scoring Guide (Hoy, 2010), a collective efficacy score was obtained for each of the eight schools. Of the 21 items in the survey, 10 in this scale were reversed scored. For example, the item, "If a child doesn't want to learn teachers here give up," is scored in reverse. Thus, a strongly agree "6" would be scored "1," suggesting low efficacy. The following items were reverse scored: 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 18, 19, and 20. Scores for all the

items were then added to determine a score per column. Higher scores on the individual items indicated high levels of collective efficacy. To obtain an organizational value of collective efficacy for the school, all of the individual teacher scores were averaged.

For each of the eight schools in the study, I also computed a standardized score with a mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100, which we call SdS score, use the following formula: $SdS \text{ for CE} = 100(CE - 4.1201) / .6392 + 500$ (Hoy, 2005-2010). The following steps were performed:

- Step 1 Compute the difference between the school's average collective efficacy score and the mean for the normative sample (CE-4.1201).
- Step 2 Multiply the difference by one hundred [$100(CE - 4.1201)$].
- Step 3 Divide the product by the standard deviation of the normative sample (.6392).
- Step 4 Then add 500 to the result.

Once I computed the SdS for each school, I compared them against the normative data provided in the Ohio sample provided for review. For example, a school's SdS is 700, "it is two standard deviations above the average score of all schools in the sample; that is, the school has stronger collective efficacy than 97% of the schools in the sample" (Hoy, 2010). The range of scores for the eight schools included in this study is 408-589, with three schools demonstrating high average scores, four in the average range, and one in the low average range. The range of the normative scores is listed below:

- If the score is 200, it is lower than 99% of the schools.
- If the score is 300, it is lower than 97% of the schools.
- If the score is 400, it is lower than 84% of the schools.
- If the score is 500, it is average.

If the score is 600, it is higher than 84% of the schools.

If the score is 700, it is higher than 97% of the schools.

If the score is 800, it is higher than 99% of the schools.

Phases 2 and 3: Coding and Analysis

Data analysis began immediately after each interview was completed and transcribed so that I could reflect on the emerging themes and their commonalities. Additional analysis was done using school specific achievement and demographic data, survey responses, and coded interview transcripts. Because qualitative studies generate a significant compilation of data, I used coding to organize and make sense of the data for each case study. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. I developed several theoretical codes based on the central research questions. In anticipation of data overload, I attempted to limit the ambiguity of the words and use coding (e.g., descriptive, interpretive and pattern) to analyze the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using Miles and Huberman's guidelines for the developing of codes, I have created a provisional "start list" of codes, or a priori codes (e.g., CTE, TA+, TA-, DT). The codes were developed using the conceptual framework of collective efficacy, my research questions, and variables I expect to encounter; they included the following.

The master code for this study was CE to indicate collective efficacy. Additional codes aligned with the four sources of collective efficacy—mastery experience (CE-ME), vicarious experience (CE-VE), social persuasion (CE-SP) and affective states (CE-AS). Each of these codes was expanded to indicate a deficit paradigm (DEF) or an equity paradigm (EQ). The codes were utilized for both qualitative interview phases. An overview of the qualitative data codes is provided below in Table 7.

Table 7. Qualitative Data Codes

| Code | Concept or theory |
|------|-----------------------------|
| CTE | Collective teacher efficacy |
| TA+ | Task analysis positive |
| TA- | Task analysis negative |
| GC+ | Group competence positive |
| GC- | Group competence negative |
| VE | Vicarious experience |
| ME | Mastery experience |
| SP | Social persuasion |
| AS | Affective state |
| DT | Deficit thinking |
| GDT | Genetic deficiency theory |
| CDT | Cultural deficit theory |
| PP | Pathologizing practice |
| EQ | Equity paradigm |

When combined with previous codes, a response that addressed mastery experiences but exposed an underlying reliance on deficit paradigm was coded CE-ME/DT while a similar response that identified a belief in equity was be coded CE-ME/EQ. As expected, coding evolved and the list of codes increased. As expected, codes evolved and themes emerged. For the administrative interview, areas of emphasis were organized into the following area: academic achievement, staff development, the impact of ISAT testing, staff beliefs and attitudes, parent support and those advantaged or disadvantaged by school initiatives.

Ethical Considerations

One of the challenges I experienced during this research study was the unexpected impact of positionality. As a school principal conducting research in nearby school districts, several teachers expressed concerns about participating in the interviews. For those teachers who did choose to participate in the interviews, I made certain to carefully review the IRB protocols requiring confidentiality.

There were benefits to both the participants and the researchers. This study provided insight into Illinois Honor Roll schools that successfully increased academic achievement in racially diverse elementary schools. This study also provided new knowledge about the link between collective efficacy and school improvement, discussing the implications for educational leadership, school improvement and staff development. It may also have offered a cautionary note to educational practitioners about the risks of pursuing promising theoretical constructs without critically examining underlying belief systems and unspoken assumptions.

This proposal was reviewed and approved by the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board and by the participating school districts before the study was conducted. Once approvals were received, I contacted building administrators to review the purpose of the study and to explain the research project.

Summary

One of the lessons learned from high-stakes testing is that quantitative data has its limitations. Interestingly, the majority of the studies researching collective efficacy and student achievement are quantitative in design. As a result, the voices of those advantaged and disadvantaged by the present drive to demonstrate school improvement are not heard. There is,

however, much to be learned from those schools who have realized success in the school improvement process. This study offers one opportunity to mine the data more thoroughly by telling the stories of educators working in racially diverse elementary schools that earned Illinois Honor Roll recognition. Perhaps more important, though, is this study's effort to more thoroughly investigate collective efficacy as a theory with implications for school improvement and to identify the tacit assumptions while interrogating the belief systems that may undergird that efficacy.

CHAPTER 4

PHASE 1 RESULTS

This chapter reports the results of the first phase of the study. Site and participant sample sizes are described as are the results of statistical analyses conducted on these samples. The purpose of this phase was to examine the extent to which the eight selected sites demonstrate collective teacher efficacy. Specifically, this phase of the study was designed to not only investigate the level of collective teacher efficacy and the relationship between collective teacher efficacy and achievement, but to inform the selection of participants for the second phase of the study. Given the range of academic achievement of these eight schools, my expectation was to identify schools with significantly different levels of collective teacher efficacy for participation in the second and third phases of the study. While schools did have different collective efficacy scores as provided in rank order below, those differences were not substantial.

Table 8. Rank Order of Schools by Collective Efficacy Standard Score

| School | Score | Rank |
|----------|-------|------|
| Lee | 4.69 | 1 |
| Sterling | 4.61 | 2 |
| Madison | 4.46 | 3 |
| Ferris | 4.44 | 4 |
| Willow | 4.34 | 5 |
| Reynolds | 4.24 | 6 |
| Rhodes | 4.24 | 6 |
| Thoreau | 3.53 | 8 |

Research question one asked to what extent do selected schools demonstrate collective efficacy. To answer this question, a collective efficacy (CE) was calculated for each of the school sites using their responses to the survey instrument. Based on those scores, no one school emerged as a high efficacy school and none emerged as a low efficacy school. The schools all fell within the average range with one school on the low average level and three fell on the high average end of the continuum.

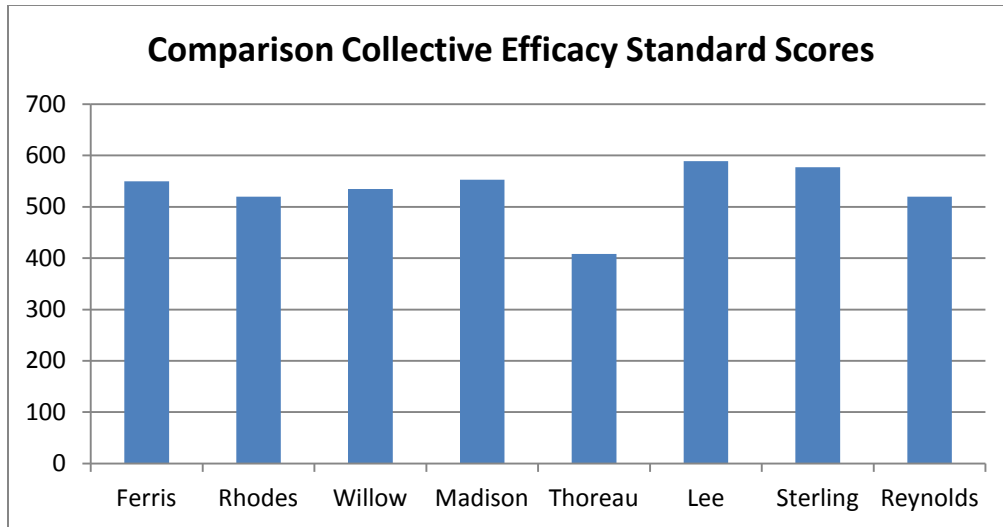


Figure 6. Collective efficacy standard scores by school.

My analyses in phase 1 were designed to explore differences in the school characteristics such as student achievement, poverty levels and collective teacher efficacy. I also sought to explore whether collective teacher efficacy (CTE) was significantly related to those variables. Collective teacher efficacy (CTE) data for the eight schools were gathered using a reliable and well-validated measure of collective teacher efficacy: the 21-item collective efficacy scale developed by Goddard (2000). This chapter summarizes the results of these analyses as well as the description of the participants.

Sample Size

This section reports the size of the sample secured for the survey administration. The results of the semi-structured interviews are described in the following chapters.

School Level Sample

Of the eight schools selected for the first phase of the study, there were 130 certified educators, comprised of both teachers and administrators, who returned usable surveys. This

represents an overall return rate of 55%. Table 9 describes the number of teachers surveyed in the eight sampled schools.

Table 9. Survey Response Rates by Site

| School site | Rhodes | Thoreau | Ferris | Madison | Reynolds | Lee | Sterling | Willow |
|-------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|----------|-----|----------|--------|
| Certified Staff | 28 | 27 | 29 | 31 | 33 | 29 | 33 | 28 |
| Surveys Completed | 18 | 20 | 16 | 24 | 12 | 14 | 14 | 12 |
| Response Rate | 64% | 74% | 55% | 77% | 36% | 48% | 42% | 43% |

The minimum number of educators surveyed in any sampled school was 12 and the maximum was 24. Survey responses were aggregated to the school level to construct operational measures of collective teacher efficacy. The population standard deviation is 3.93 while sample standard deviation is 4.20.

| Respondent <i>n</i> | Mean # of teachers per school | Standard Deviation | Minimum # of respondents per school | Maximum # of teachers per school |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 130 | 16.25 | 4.20 | 12 | 24 |

Figure 7. Number of respondents.

The schools selected for the survey administration are similar demographically with three distinct racial groups (e.g., White, Black and Hispanic), a minimum of 30% low SES and a range of LEP students. Because AYP is based on subgroup academic achievement data, these factors contribute to the overall understanding of composite scores for student achievement and are critical to better understanding school ISAT data. Additionally, this information is essential when making comparisons between schools and interrogating beliefs based on either the deficit thinking paradigm or an equity paradigm.

Table 10. School Demographics, Student Ethnicity, Low Income, Enrollment

| School | School size | % Low SES | % LEP | % White | % Black | % Hispanic |
|----------|-------------|-----------|-------|---------|---------|------------|
| Ferris | 350-400 | 73.1 | 9.2 | 18.7 | 41.3 | 30.3 |
| Rhodes | 350-400 | 39.3 | 15.0 | 26.6 | 28.3 | 32.1 |
| Willow | 300-350 | 78.7 | 19.1 | 11.7 | 42.5 | 40.9 |
| Madison | 450-500 | 30.0 | 7.1 | 39.1 | 22.2 | 23.0 |
| Thoreau | 300-350 | 75.0 | 17.2 | 16.3 | 29.7 | 43.8 |
| Lee | 300-350 | 47.7 | 23.4 | 11.4 | 31.2 | 52.3 |
| Sterling | 600-650 | 50.1 | 73.2 | 2.2 | 7.7 | 87.9 |
| Reynolds | 450-500 | 87.4 | 22.0 | 11.3 | 48.8 | 31.8 |

Participant Demographics

Survey participants were 130 certified educators. Five administrators and 125 full-time, certified teachers completed a 67-item survey on collective teacher efficacy, teacher efficacy and school wide policies and practices. Eighty-six and 9/10 percent of the respondents identified as female and 9.2% identified as male. Additionally, 80% of the respondents were white and 20% were non-white. The race/ethnicity of survey participants is an important consideration since the school demographics are a stark contrast to the educators who serve them. This cultural gap may account for differing perceptions of both group competency and task analysis, key features of collective efficacy. An overview of the survey respondents' demographics is provided below.

Table 11. Demographic Characteristic of Participants

| Characteristics | <i>n</i> | % Teachers |
|-----------------|----------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 113 | 86.9 |
| Male | 12 | 9.2 |
| Not Answered | 5 | 3.9 |
| Total | 130 | 100.0 |
| Race | | |

Table 11 (cont.)

| Characteristics | <i>n</i> | % Teachers |
|----------------------|----------|------------|
| White | 104 | 80.0 |
| Black | 9 | 6.9 |
| Hispanic | 7 | 5.4 |
| Asian/Pacific Island | 4 | 3.1 |
| Multiracial | 1 | .8 |
| Not Answered | 5 | 3.8 |
| Total | 130 | 100.0 |

School-level Variables

A collective efficacy scale score was obtained for each school as the mean score of survey responses by school to the collective teacher efficacy items. Within each school, a collective efficacy rating and standard score was also constructed. Additionally, student achievement data and the percentage of low SES were reported in Table 12.

Table 12. Schools Collective Efficacy (CE) Score, CE Standard Score, CE Rating, Achievement Rating, Poverty Rating

| School | CE score | CE standard | CE rating | 2008 ISAT composite % | % low SES |
|----------|----------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| Ferris | 4.44 | 550 | Average | 75 | 71.4 |
| Rhodes | 4.24 | 520 | Average | 77 | 51.7 |
| Willow | 4.34 | 535 | Average | 70 | 70.1 |
| Madison | 4.46 | 553 | High Average | 73 | 40.9 |
| Thoreau | 3.53 | 408 | Low Average | 68 | 81.4 |
| Lee | 4.69 | 589 | High Average | 67 | 76.6 |
| Sterling | 4.61 | 577 | High Average | 63 | 81.7 |
| Reynolds | 4.24 | 520 | Average | 73 | 80.5 |

These values were used to calculate the standard deviation for the collective efficacy score and the collective efficacy scale score. The results are provided in the following table.

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics for School Level Variables

| Variable | Mean | Standard deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|-------------|-------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| CE score | 4.32 | .36 | 3.53 | 4.69 |
| CE standard | 531.5 | 55.70 | 408 | 589 |

The measure of collective efficacy (CTE) relies on statements of group competence (GC) and task analysis (TA).

Collective Efficacy Scores

The model of collective efficacy represented in this study includes two main elements: group competence and task analysis (Goddard, 2002). In a 1998 study of teacher efficacy, the researchers argued that teachers measure their beliefs about their personal capabilities in relation to the difficulty of the task at hand (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). As such, efficacy is not reliant on a single perception of competence but competence relative to the situation. Similarly, perceptions of group competence (GC) are not just dependent on the group’s capabilities but are judged within the context of the task (Goddard, 2002). Group competence is representative of these judgments and “include inferences about the faculty’s teaching methods, skills, training, and expertise” (Goddard, 2002, p. 100).

Task analysis (TA) represents educators’ beliefs about the real and/or perceived difficulties associated with task at hand. For example, teacher beliefs about the students’ homes, families and communities are considered. Task analysis addresses teachers’ assumptions and concerns about limitations, barriers and opportunities in their current context.

Both group competence (GC) and task analysis (TA) are further identified as either positively (+) or negatively (-) worded (Goddard, 2002). As applied in the 21-item Collective Efficacy Scale, GC and TA elements are not weighted equally. In the survey, there are a total of 13 GC items. Of those 13 items, seven are worded positively (GC+) and six are worded negatively (GC-). The remaining eight items are divided equally between positively worded (TA+) and negatively worded (TA-).

Examples of GC+ statements include “Teachers in this school have what it takes to get the children to learn” and “Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their students.” Negatively worded group competence statements include “Teachers here don’t have the skills needed to produce meaningful student learning,” and “If a child doesn’t want to learn teachers here give up.” TA+ statements include “These students come to school ready to learn,” while TA- statements include “Learning is more difficult at this school because the students are worried about their safety.” A complete list of questions indicating the different elements is provided in Appendix A.

Among the eight schools, mean value for positive group competence is 4.87 with a standard deviation of .43 indicating a low degree of variability between schools. The mean value for negative group competence (GC-) is 4.52 with a standard deviation of .70. GC- has a wider range of values with 2.89 as the minimum value and 5.11 as the maximum value. In this case, the mean GC- value is considerably lower than the GC- at Sterling School.

Regarding task analysis, there is less variation between the mean values of positive task analysis (TA+) with minimum value of 2.57 and the maximum value of 3.53. TA+ has a mean value of 3.03 with a standard deviation of .34. Negative task analysis (TA-) had a mean value of

4.0 with a standard deviation of .36. The minimum value was 3.55 and the maximum value was 4.42.

Table 14. Average scores for group competence (GC) and task analysis (TA) elements of collective efficacy (CE)

| School | GC+ | GC- | TA+ | TA- |
|----------|------|------|------|------|
| Thoreau | 4.21 | 2.89 | 2.57 | 3.55 |
| Ferris | 4.49 | 4.82 | 2.94 | 3.9 |
| Reynolds | 4.40 | 4.57 | 2.81 | 3.63 |
| Willow | 5.04 | 4.67 | 3.15 | 3.82 |
| Rhodes | 5.12 | 4.65 | 2.66 | 3.69 |
| Madison | 5.18 | 4.38 | 3.38 | 4.42 |
| Lee | 5.21 | 5.01 | 3.52 | 4.47 |
| Sterling | 5.24 | 5.11 | 3.19 | 4.22 |

Correlations among Study Variables

A Spearman correlation analysis on the dependent variables, collective efficacy standard score, achievement, and poverty was conducted. There were no significant relationships among the study variables (Table 15). For the eight schools in the current sample, the variables of collective efficacy, achievement, and poverty are not related.

Table 15. Spearman Correlations among Collective Efficacy (CE), Achievement, and Poverty

| Variable | Poverty | Achievement |
|-------------|---------|-------------|
| Achievement | -.47 | |
| CE | -.21 | -.26 |

Differences among Study Variables

To evaluate differences between the study variables, the variables collective efficacy, poverty, and achievement were broken down by levels and the eight schools were assigned to a level based on their total collective efficacy, poverty, and achievement scores. For collective efficacy, this variable was sectioned into three levels, low average, average, and high average; achievement was sectioned into three levels, low (63-68), medium (69-74), and high 75-80); poverty was sectioned into two levels, medium poverty (<70%), and high poverty (>= 70%).

Collective Efficacy

To determine if there were differences between achievement levels and poverty levels on collective efficacy scores, a 2 x 3 ANOVA was conducted. The results of the ANOVA were not significant (Table 16). Although high poverty schools had a lower mean collective efficacy score (M = 529.83, SD = 64.96) than medium poverty schools (M = 536.5, SD = 22.33), the difference was not significant. Low achieving schools were found to have the lowest collective efficacy (M = 524.67 (SD = 101.21) compared to medium achieving schools (M = 536.00 (16.52) and high achieving schools (M = 535, SD = 21.21); however these differences in means were not significant. That is in the current investigation schools with differing poverty levels and achievement levels did not differ on collective efficacy.

Table 16. Factorial ANOVA: The Effects of Poverty on Achievement on Collective Efficacy

| Factor | <i>SS</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>eta</i> ² |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|-------------------------|
| Poverty | 5.786 | 1 | 5.786 | .001 | .979 | .002 |
| Achievement | 350.161 | 2 | 175.080 | .025 | .975 | .017 |
| Poverty X achievement | 880.071 | 1 | 880.071 | .128 | .744 | .041 |
| Error | 20601.167 | 3 | 6867.056 | | | |

Achievement

To determine if there were differences between collective efficacy levels and poverty levels on achievement, a 2 x 3 ANOVA was conducted. The results of the ANOVA were not significant (Table 17). Although high poverty schools had a lower mean achievement score ($M = 69.33$, $SD = 4.32$) as compared to medium poverty schools ($M = 75$; $SD = 2.82$), this difference was not significant. There were differences in achievement based on level of collective efficacy and schools with the highest collective efficacy had a higher mean ($M = 73$, $SD = 28.9$) than low average schools ($M = 68$, $SD = 0$) and high average ($M = 67.66$, $SD = 5.03$), the differences were not significant. That is in the current investigation schools with differing poverty levels and collective efficacy levels did not differ on achievement.

Table 17. Factorial ANOVA: The Effects of CE and Poverty on Achievement

| Factor | <i>SS</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>eta</i> ² |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|-------------------------|
| Poverty | 53.69 | 1 | 53.69 | 7.793 | .068 | .722 |
| CE | 49.18 | 2 | 24.59 | 3.57 | .162 | .704 |
| Poverty X CE. | 4.75 | 1 | 4.75 | .689 | .467 | .187 |
| Error | 20.667 | 3 | 6.886 | | | |

Research Questions

Statistical analysis of the collective efficacy scores indicated no significant variance in the eight scores. A collective efficacy score (CE) was calculated for each of the eight school sites using their responses to the survey instrument. Based on those scores, no one school emerged as a high efficacy school and none emerged as a low efficacy school. The schools all fell within the average range with one school on the low average level and three fell on the high average end of the continuum. While there were differences among the schools in collective efficacy (CE),

student achievement and poverty levels, those differences were not statistically significant. The eight schools were too similar in those categorical values to identify sites for phase two based on that data.

While the data analysis confirmed previous research on collective efficacy and academic achievement, it did not identify the distinctions between the selected sites I had expected. The participating schools did not demonstrate collective efficacy on a continuum with any school representing either end of that continuum. All eight schools scored within the average range with scores tightly coupled.

Additional Criteria

Given the similar characteristics of the eight school sites and the lack of a significant relationship between school collective efficacy, school achievement and poverty, additional analyses was needed to identify the sites for participation in Phase 2 of the study. Using school demographic data, four schools were identified for the Phase 2 interviews: Thoreau, Rhodes, Willow and Ferris. Schools were selected on the following criteria: small school enrollment (fewer than 400 students), diversity and the lowest percentages of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. Because LEP students are now required to complete the same Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) as native English speakers, schools with large LEP populations are disadvantaged. Since the collective efficacy (CE) scores for the schools were similar, these schools represent a sample that benefit from further qualitative data.

CHAPTER 5

THE ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

As I investigated my second research question regarding the nature of collective efficacy present in the selected schools and the extent to which it is present in four minority-majority schools that have earned Illinois Honor Roll recognition, it became evident that even schools with similar levels of collective efficacy have remarkably different stories to tell. That is, the nature of collective efficacy in those schools is distinctly different. In some cases, those differences are particularly interesting because three of the four schools are located in one district and are guided by focused district initiatives and district specific professional development.

The Sources of Collective Efficacy

Collective teacher efficacy is an emergent group-level attribute. As such it is the product of the interactive dynamics of the group members. Analogous to self-efficacy, collective efficacy is associated with the following factors: tasks, level of effort, persistence, shared thoughts, stress levels, and achievement of groups (Goddard, 2000).

Bandura (1986, 1997) asserts that there are four sources of collective efficacy information: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and emotional arousal. Goddard et al argue that there are two key elements in the development of collective efficacy: analysis of the teaching task and the assessment of teaching competence. Further consideration of the perceived group capability is arguably essential to the development of a highly efficacious organization. That perception relies on teachers considering the level of difficulty of the teaching task as it relates to their perceptions of group competence (Goddard, 2000).

Mastery and Vicarious Experience

Mastery experiences are the most powerful efficacy changing forces but are difficult to deliver to a faculty with low collective efficacy. To do so, staff development activities and action research projects must be thoughtfully designed and implemented within the school context (Goddard, 2000). For example, Rhodes Elementary School received the Reading First grant early in their school improvement process. The grant provided extensive staff development in reading instruction and pedagogy. That staff development afforded the Rhodes staff with multiple opportunities to witness expert teaching and acquire skills requisite for increased student achievement in reading.

“For example, a school that responds to declining achievement scores by implementing a curricular reform that was effective in a neighboring district is engaged in a self-regulatory process that is informed by the vicarious learning of its members” (Goddard, 2000).

Organizations do not rely solely on direct experience to inform their collective efficacy. Individuals within those organizations listen to accounts of success from their colleagues both within and outside of their schools. Existing bodies of research on effective schools and turnaround schools serve to inform practice and promote collective teacher efficacy. Schools learn by observing other schools that have experienced success. Huber (1991) argues that organizations learn by observing the successes of other organizations.

Vicarious experiences include visits to model schools, videos of effective practices particularly if the models are similar demographically and have similar resources. Hiring and retaining excellent teachers who believe that they can successfully meet the challenges of the task is another key factor when creating vicarious experience. Administrators were asked to describe staff development opportunities at their respective schools to help identify potential

sources of collective efficacy and to better explore the nature of collective efficacy in those schools. The extent to which teachers are afforded opportunities to develop their professional capacity and skills is linked to a higher sense of efficacy. Given the similar levels of collective efficacy in the selected sites, I expected the schools to share similar approaches to staff development, in both the scope and access to mastery and vicarious experiences.

Social Persuasion and Affective States

“Faculty cohesion is a strong indicator of social persuasion. Social persuasion is another means of strengthening a faculty’s conviction that they have the capabilities to achieve what they seek” (Goddard, 2000, p. 8). Schools, like individuals, have affective states. Like individuals, school organizations can either be highly efficacious or they can operate with limited efficacy. Efficacious organizations can tolerate pressure and crises and continue to function without severe negative consequences; in fact, they learn how to adapt and cope with disruptive forces. Less efficacious organizations when confronted by such forces react in dysfunctional ways, which reinforce their basic dispositions of failure. They misinterpret stimuli, sometimes overreacting and other times underreacting or not reacting at all. The affective state of an organization has much to do with how challenges are interpreted by the organizations (Goddard, 2000, p. 9).

These two sources of collective efficacy are essential to understanding the belief systems existing in the four selected sites. School administrators were asked to describe staff morale and motivation in addition to assessing their own beliefs and expectations for their schools. By better understanding the nature of collective efficacy from the principals’ perspective, sources of collective efficacy can be more thoroughly considered. With that understanding, collective efficacy theory can better inform school improvement efforts. These two sources of collective efficacy are particularly important to identifying deficit

thinking. For example, teachers may express a strong sense of cohesion among themselves but that cohesion may be based on their collective sense of self that is noticeably different than the communities they serve.

Administrative Perspectives: A View from the Principal's Office

For phase two of this study, building administrators were interviewed to investigate existing sources of collective efficacy within their schools. The interviews of building principals were particularly important as school leaders experience the school as a whole. During the interviews of four principals, one assistant principal, and one teacher, a number of commonalities emerged. Each interview participant spoke to the following themes: an emphasis on reading that resulted in a narrowed curriculum, an extensive yet often diffused RtI approach, data-based decision making, instructional programming driven by demands to perform on the ISAT and the demoralizing effect of ISAT results that do not represent their successes as a school.

There were differences among the interviewees as well. While some principals perceived their school communities as supportive, others felt the weight of deficit thinking and a sense of futility. Some building leaders expressed a frustration with limited staff development while others benefitted from district wide trainings and a comprehensive reading grant initiative. Most of the discussion emphasized a scientific management approach to schooling—mechanistic, almost industrial, and efficiency-based. There were only momentary lapses that addressed purposeful dialogue and the difficult work of challenging status quo. Interview data were organized according to the following topics: academic achievement, staff development, the impact of ISAT testing, parent involvement, staff beliefs and attitudes and those advantaged or disadvantaged. These topics allowed for the inclusion of the sources of collective efficacy as

well as a discussion of tacit assumptions and underlying belief systems. For example, “staff development” data included mastery experience and vicarious experience while allowing staff to share their beliefs about the training either needed or required to serve their school populations.

Willow Elementary School

Willow is a small, neighborhood elementary school that serves approximately 350 students in grades K-6. Seventy percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The school is located north of a major urban area and serves a small urban community. Student enrollment has demonstrated a significant demographic shift, specifically in the increase of Hispanic students. In 1999, approximately 33% of the students were white, 47% of the students were black and 18% were Hispanic. In 2010, white students made up 12% of the enrollment, black students decreased to 41% and the percentage of Hispanic students had increased from 18% to 40% of the school enrollment. During this period, the number of Limited English Proficient students increased from 7 to 25%.

Principal Paul Giovanni has been an administrator for approximately 15 years. When he first decided to pursue his administrative certification, Giovanni believed that his role would primarily be that of a manager. Since coming to his current district, he realized that school administration “is about management but it’s more about managing people’s attitudes about how to use data.” Principal Giovanni began his educational career as a high school teacher at a parochial school in an affluent suburb. The primary ethnicity was Caucasian with a small Asian cohort. After teaching for nearly a decade, Giovanni moved to his current district and has since worked at both the middle school as an assistant principal and at the elementary level as a principal. He has been the principal at Willow for the past 4 years and articulated a strong

commitment to increasing student performance on state testing. Giovanni spoke with a unique blend of emotion and reason when speaking about his school community.

Academic Achievement

Over a 7-year period, Willow has made significant progress academically, increasing its composite scores from 54 to 70% despite an increasing LEP population. As have the other schools, Willow has earned a place on the Illinois Honor Roll as a spotlight school for several years. Principal Paul Giovanni has served as Willow's principal for the 4 of those 8 years. When I asked him to explain the factors that contributed to his school's academic achievement, Principal Giovanni focused on the use of achievement data, specifically the NWEA Map test and ISAT data. He talked at length about the data analysis that is performed at the beginning of the school year. This data analysis is then used to target reading intervention, the school's primary instructional aim.

Principal Giovanni explained the school's reliance on standardized testing data to determine instructional priorities.

When we get the MAP data we compare the MAP data to the ISAT data. And then we tweak our reading groups and then when we get that first MAP data then we can decide who needs some kind of intervention so we have, we've traditionally had at least two or three intervention groups at each grade level where we're pulling kids, working in small groups to build up their reading level.

After discussing a series of reading interventions that are prescriptive in nature, Principal Giovanni explained that "The kids who are below standards or below the percentage for passing ISATs will be sorted out and put into some type of intervention group." The intervention programs and groups are designed to increase student achievement in reading and mathematics, ultimately resulting in gains on the ISAT.

Throughout our interview, the emphasis on assessment, intervention and testing remained common themes. Staff development was also a recurrent factor discussed in our interview.

Willow was one of the Illinois Schools designated to receive a Reading First grant and Principal Giovanni credited the grant with significantly impacting achievement. Because the grant focused on reading as a critical component for academic achievement, Giovanni explained its role as a catalyst for redefining instructional practice by teachers.

One thing that radically changed instructional practice for reading because that way people were really forced to use reading groups according to data and the whole focus, the continued focus on using data to determine who is in the reading group rather than teachers just saying “Well, I think this kid belongs over here.” I think those have been really potent forces in guiding the instruction especially in reading here.

The emphasis on instruction seemed to purposefully shift from a traditional curriculum-based approach that brought classrooms together to discuss literature and share stories, to instruction that was narrow in scope and focused on reading fundamentals and strategies necessary for performance on standardized testing. Additionally, strong emphasis was placed on intervention programming for individual students.

Staff Development

At Willow, Principal Giovanni discussed the role of professional development both at the district and at the building level. At the district level, a new reading series was also adopted a new reading series that included ELL components. Like two other schools in the district, Willow received the Reading First grant and benefitted directly from intensive staff development in early literacy. According to Giovanni, the Reading First initiative “radically changed instructional practice for reading because . . . people were really forced to use reading groups according to data” rather than their individual opinions of students’ performance.

Staff development was also targeted to addressing changing demographics. For example, “people from outside of the district” were brought in “to talk about best practices for ELL people” and to facilitate a change in instructional practices. At the time of the interview, 1 in 4 of the children at Willow was learning English as a second language. To accommodate their learning needs, the number of ELL resource teachers increased from one to three, with two self-contained bilingual classes. In a relatively short period of time, this small school had to seriously reconsider its instructional approaches school wide. To support the changing population, the district provided staff development that shifted the approach from a pull out model to a collaborative model. Giovanni explained that “instead of sending ELL kids out of the room during reading instruction” the school has moved to a push-in model, with “all the ELL resource people are in the classroom during the 90-minute reading block.” The district has encouraged an inclusionary model to better meet the needs of a changing student population.

In addition to district level staff development, Willow teachers spend one staff meeting each month examining student data from both benchmarking and progress monitoring. After the data are reviewed, Giovanni explained, “every teacher sat down with every kid with a goal sheet at the beginning of the year” to establish an expectation for the year. Each month that goal was reviewed with the student. According to Giovanni, “right before ISAT we posted a lot of scores of classes in the halls” for the students to review. This initiative he asserted sparked student motivation and was instrumental to their increased student achievement. Throughout the interview, Willow’s emphasis on state testing as an indicator of school success was evident. There was little to no discussion of alternative definitions of academic success. Teaching and learning was identified as a means to an ends, with the ends being performance on state testing.

The Impact of ISAT Testing

Principal Giovanni, like most of the administrators interviewed, expressed a frustration with his school's success being represented by ISAT scores. When asked whether he believed that the increase emphasis on state testing or NCLB requirements was a challenge, Principal Giovanni responded that the testing itself wasn't a hindrance and shared,

I think what's a hindrance is that when you get the scores and the scores say that we failed, we didn't make AYP, it doesn't do justice to the fact that there are kids who are making not one year but two years and sometimes three years of growth during the course of an academic year so I think that's the injustice is that there's not good reporting of actual student growth. And the expectation that our kids if they're starting out 3 or 4 years behind are supposed to be at a grade level that doesn't make sense because if I can show you that that kid has grown two years in one year then that's something to be celebrated as opposed to just making AYP for that particular year.

At Willow Elementary School, state testing drives not only instructional practice, it impacts student-staff relationships. Principal Giovanni explained that teachers now reward and recognize students for demonstrating good academic habits like turning in reading logs and perfect attendance. In addition to setting academic goals and providing rewards, the school has developed and implemented competitions designed to improve attendance and behave well at school. For example, students who meet their established goals on standardized benchmark tests celebrate at a party. These celebrations are held more regularly now, and if ISAT scores are received early enough in the year, a celebration is held for students who do well on the test. There was no discussion of how many students participated in the rewards or what students who did not meet their goals did during the celebration. Perhaps most concerning was the level of burden placed on the students to achieve academically. While it may occur, Giovanni did not discuss individual teachers being asked to set goals and earn rewards for meeting those goals.

Staff Beliefs and Attitudes

When asked if teachers' beliefs and attitudes have changed as a result of their improvement, Principal Giovanni explained that he believed that beliefs and attitudes had changed.

One of the things to working with a population that is high minority and 70% poverty, that's not the same population as working in another district where kids come a lot better prepared than some of our kids . . . just getting them in the right mindset to work without particular population sometimes takes a while and then I think that accounts for the ebbs and flows in scores because as people are coming and going you have to get them up to speed and that doesn't always go smoothly.

He also believed that the staff has begun to see that their reading intervention efforts have resulted in student gains. In a further discussion of staff commitment to the different initiatives being implemented, Giovanni believed that all staff now "buys into the whole system of flexible grouping and looking at kids' scores and data in order to guide instruction," but he did acknowledge differing levels of commitment in the implementation of those initiatives. Unlike schools that promoted these instructional practices at the grades assessed by ISAT, Willow works to implement them school wide and Principal Giovanni emphasized the importance of other schools embracing the school wide approach as well. Because families in the area are highly mobile and often move between schools in his district as well as the neighboring districts, Giovanni asserts consistent approaches are needed to ensure that schools aren't just exchanging "kids who are not prepared" and he expressed a deep commitment to make certain that his students "were not going to leave this building in that condition."

In recounting challenges school has faced in the last 10 years, Principal Giovanni identified the biggest challenge as the "huge shift in our demographics" focusing primarily on the increase of poverty. At Willow, the percentage of students identified as low income increased from "40-50% . . . to 80%" where it remains to date. Principal Giovanni also discussed shifts in

race and ethnicity, identifying the growth of the schools Hispanic students to approximately 40%, replacing White students. As the percentage of students needing ELL services increased, Principal Giovanni explained that the current system of ISAT administration disadvantages schools like Willow. In 2008, Illinois eliminated the IMAGE test which made accommodation for second language learners, choosing instead to require all ELL students to take the same test as non-ELL students. By rating schools with ELL populations according to the same measure as schools that do not the state unintentionally positions that population in opposition to the school's success. This reality further contributes to educators' perceptions of their ELL students as one of the challenges that must be met and contributes to deficit thinking, particularly from a cultural paradigm. The strength of ELL students are not the focus of schooling; instead schools emphasis the need to provide intervention programming to remediate their perceived deficit and increase student performance. This institutionalized bias cannot be ignored when discussing an organization's sense of efficacy.

For schools like Willow with a large ELL population, test scores are not a reflection of student learning. When asked to describe the instructional impact of this demographic shift, Principal Giovanni explained "we've gone from having one ELL resource teacher basically to have three. This year we have two self-contained bilingual classrooms." Demographic shifts like these have caused Principal Giovanni's own views and attitudes to change, especially as he has seen the power of student data used to challenge the status quo.

It's just continuously putting out the data, continuously challenging people and continuously saying you know we've done it this far, why wouldn't we do it that much further? Why wouldn't we take it to the next level? And it's really I think it's really galling for a lot of people to know that it's the same kids who are going to the school up the street and if they can do it, why can't we do it?

Even as his school had made progress in reading, Principal Giovanni expressed a commitment to continue challenging the status quo using data, articulating a goal for the coming year that focused on math instruction. Ironically, Giovanni identified the strength of the staff as its very weakness—their veteran status and their experience. At Willow, most of the teachers are veteran teachers who have remained at the school throughout their careers. Giovanni acknowledged that he has “a lot of people who have a lot of years working with kids so they understand how school works.” Challenging the beliefs and attitudes of such a veteran staff, can prove challenging though, he admitted.

Parent Support

When asked whether parents at Willow were supportive, Principal Giovanni responded positively,

You know I think we have really good parent support. You know it’s not like we have people banging down the doors to get into our PTO meetings, but I have to say generally when we ask parents to do things, they show up. We’ve had for the last three years, a school wide fun fair on a Saturday at the end of May and for the most part, everybody shows up.

He also provided examples that crossed cultural lines. For example, Principal Giovanni shared,

We have our Hispanic Heritage festival in the fall pretty much every Hispanic family in our school community donates something whether it’s time or food or something. So basically if we ask them and we show our appreciation they will show up.

Principal Giovanni generally did not appear governed by deficit thinking when it came to his school community. As we discussed parent involvement at the school, Giovanni spoke of parent support in terms of participation in events and at conferences.

On Those Advantaged and/or Disadvantaged

When asked whom Principal Giovanni believed had been most advantaged by school improvement efforts, he stated that the students were most advantaged because the school staff

was “looking at every kid as an individual” from an instructional perspective and making decisions based on their individual student data. By doing so, Giovanni believed that the students themselves were “taking ownership and being proud of what they do.” In considering those disadvantaged by the initiatives, Giovanni could not identify anyone disadvantaged but he did acknowledge that the initiatives did make “some people uncomfortable because they have to change their instructional practice.” In an attempt to increase student achievement, Giovanni explained, some teachers saw the approach “as a bad thing because it means more work. But once they get it, it’s just like the kids. Once it clicks, then it’s like . . . this makes sense.”

In our discussion about advantage and disadvantage, the issue of addressing the specific needs of minority students was raised. Giovanni explained that “most of our initiatives are not focused on the fact that kids are black or kids are Hispanic, other than the ELL kids who don’t have the language skills.” Approximately 83% of the staff is white while 88% of the student enrollment is non-white, indicating a significant and increasing cultural gap between students and staff that has not been addressed. Addressing that cultural gap was not perceived by Giovanni to be a priority, “we’re not doing specific things targeting how you get black kids to achieve or how you get Hispanic kids to achieve; we’re just doing what we think is best practice and then engaging the kids as much as we can.”

Principal Giovanni articulated both a belief in his organization’s sense of agency and a sense of collective efficacy. That sense of agency and efficacy was informed, however, by the deficit thinking paradigm. Throughout our interview, discussions of equity and social justice were noticeably absent. There was no articulated need for diversity training or culturally response curriculum. Many, if not all, of the initiatives at Willow Elementary School focused on

narrowing the curriculum to improve reading and mathematics, ISAT test preparation and response to intervention.

Thoreau Elementary School

Thoreau is a small neighborhood school that serves approximately 350 students in grades K-6. Like Willow, it is located north of a major urban area and serves students from a small urban community. More than 80% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Like the other schools in the area, Thoreau's student demographics have changed significantly with Hispanic students now claiming the largest group. In 1999, 51% of the students were white, 36% were black and 12.6% were Hispanic. In 2010, 14% of the students were white, 30% were black and 43% were Hispanic. During this period, the number of Limited English Proficient students increased from 5 to 20%.

Although Thoreau is in the same district as Willow and is similar in many regards, Principal Vanessa Davis had a unique perspective after completing her first year at the school. Principal Davis is an African-American administrator in a predominantly minority school. Of the five administrators interviewed, Principal Davis was the one who strayed from a discussion dominated by scientific management and confronted issues of race, class and misunderstanding. Like many administrators, Davis has a broad range of professional experiences, having been a teacher in predominantly white, affluent suburbs and an assistant principal for several years at a upper middle class junior high school. Eventually she transitioned to the role of an elementary principal in a more diverse suburb before coming to her current district. Within this district, Davis has held several key roles. She has been both an assistant principal and principal at the middle school and recently transferred to Thoreau.

Since this was her first year at Thoreau, Davis recommended that I also interview Stan Shepard, a veteran teacher who served as an informal building leader. Shepard was in his final year as a teacher and had taught in the district for nearly 30 years. Not only did Shepard spend his entire career in the school district, he was born and raised in the community, having attended the local schools as well. His voice, Davis believed, would add to the history of Thoreau as hers was a new voice.

Academic Achievement

Over a 7 year period, Thoreau has made significant progress academically, increasing its composite scores from 49 to 73% despite a rapidly increasing LEP population. As have the other schools, Thoreau has earned a place on the Illinois Honor Roll as a spotlight school for several years. Principal Davis has served as Thoreau's principal for the past year. When I asked her to explain the factors that contributed to her school's academic achievement, Principal Davis focused on the sense of community and the school's small size. Davis explained,

I think one thing is that the kids are comfortable here. That's number one. This is more of a family-oriented school because we're very small and there's a lot of interaction not only with the kids but with the parents so we have a quite a bit of parent support here. I think that helps quite a bit.

As a K-6 school serving fewer than 350 students, students benefit from small class sizes with only two sections at each grade level. When presented with the same question, Stan Shepard's answer corroborated Principal Davis' perception. In his discussion of what has led to the school's increases in academic achievement, Shepard began with his assessment, "What is unique about this school is that it is one of the last that has a family orientation to it." Shepard further explained that Thoreau Elementary is the smallest school in the district and, as a result, the staff and parents work together because the opportunity to do so is there. In his 13 years of teaching at Thoreau, Stan has worked for four different principals. Despite that administrative

turnover, Shepard credits a veteran staff and small school community with maintaining a family orientation that focuses on students.

Staff Development

Prior to Principal Davis joining the Thoreau staff, staff received extensive training under the Reading First program, a literacy-based grant designed to increase student achievement in reading for students in high poverty schools. The Reading First program provided “assistance to states and districts to establish scientifically based reading programs for students enrolled in kindergarten through grade three” (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>). Funds were allocated to support increased professional development and the use of screening and diagnostic tools and classroom-based instructional reading assessments to measure how well students read and to monitor their progress. When asked to identify what types of staff development she will bring to the building, Principal Davis stated that “many of our teachers are teachers of reading and not so much of math. So I would really like to bring in more professional development with math.” She emphasized the need to focus more on critical thinking in mathematics so that the students perform better on ISAT.

Principal Davis also discussed the key role that data collection and analysis plays in staff development. Staff meetings are no longer used to disseminate information but are instead devoted to the review of benchmark and progress monitoring data. Davis credits this data-driven approach with increasing student achievement, “I think because we meet quite often and we a lot of looking at data that has really helped.”

Stan Shepard shared his experiences with professional development, identifying an evolving central office as critical to the improvements in the district. Shepard confirmed that teachers benefit from “professional development on a regular basis” due to the efforts of an

assistant superintendent of curriculum who “has done his research and gone out and gotten the things . . . needed as best a poor community can.” That staff development and support, Shepard shared has allowed him to do a better job as a teacher than he did in the past. For example, teachers were trained in the new reading series that the district adopted and provided literacy coaches who worked with them in the classroom. This availability of staff development opportunities and access to instructional coaching are indicators of mastery and vicarious experience, two critical sources of collective efficacy that have been correlated with increases in student achievement (Bandura et al., 1996; Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004). The studies that demonstrate these correlations have, however, been quantitative and largely reliant on standardized tests as measures of academic success. It is this singularity of focus that continued to inform our discussion about student performance.

The Impact of ISAT Testing

Both Principal Davis and Stan Shepard acknowledged that ISAT testing has had a strong influence on instructional practice in the district and at their school. Davis stated an understanding that ISAT is “something we have to do” but framed that reality with an understanding of the limitations of that “snapshot” assessment. Shepard also shared his concerns about the influence of ISAT,

Shamefully I think it drives too much of what we all do, even the 2nd grade that doesn't do ISAT. We still have to look at preparing them for ISAT. We did 6 writing prompts this year that were geared along the lines of what an ISAT prompt will be. And so, we didn't do a math extended response, we haven't done any of that sort of thing yet but we have done more reading things so we're preparing that way. We take computer-generated tests to prepare.

Stan Shepard emphasized the increasing sense of competition between the buildings as a result of NCLB requirements and state testing. In addition to the competition between buildings, Shepard spoke to the punitive nature of not demonstrating success, “If your building is doing well, you

get things. If not, you get things but not necessarily what you want.” This heavy reliance on punitive measures contributes to tension among the staff. Shepard explained the restrictive nature of teaching within a high-stakes testing context, “We can’t expound and expand and be creative on our own part but I guess it’s just that overall breathing down your neck aspect that you just aren’t comfortable ever. You’re not allowed to be.” The role of data analysis and intervention programming were identified as key determinants of instructional planning and delivery. In addition to the narrowing of the curriculum, Shepard also identified the changing role of building principals due to high-stakes accountability systems. Formerly a “good old boys network” where teachers seldom saw school principals and were left to teach in accordance with their own professional judgment, Shepard painted a sharp contrast of current administrators, “I see principals now. The noose is a little tighter around their necks and they want to share that discomfort to a certain extent with us too. If it’s tight around them, we’ve got to get them out of it.”

Still Shepard worked to find the benefit of ISAT testing by acknowledging that it has caused schools to re-evaluate their expectations and work to serve all children instead of making excuses for those children who were not performing at grade level. In the past, Stan explained,

It was okay that they didn’t achieve because that was just who they were. Their circumstances weren’t going to change that, their genetics weren’t going to change that, and so . . . it was okay to have your bell curve in a sense.

While professing an adherence to data-based decision making and intervention-based instructional programming, Principal Davis expressed an understanding of the limitations of state testing. Davis shared her reservations, “We don’t look at one test and let one test be the determination of what we’ve done with the kids” and focused more on the school’s efforts to increase student achievement by monitoring student progress and academic growth.

Staff Beliefs and Attitudes

With nearly 80% of Thoreau's students identified as low income, Principal Davis discussed the impact of poverty, "Many of our parents have not, they're not . . . some of them have graduated high school but many of them have not gone to college so even if they want their kids to do well a lot of them can't really help their kids." Principal Davis emphasized the perception that students at her school do not have the type of support at home to assist with homework. Her perception that her parent community is incapable of assisting with elementary level work seems symptomatic of deficit thinking because it suggests that parents cannot function at even the elementary level of learning.

When asked what Thoreau has done well to succeed with minority students, Principal Davis spoke with conviction,

I think one thing we've done well is we get rid of all of the excuses. There are no excuses. And so we take a look at where kids are and we push them. We don't care who they are or their backgrounds . . . there are no excuses. You can still learn. We're here for you.

As asked if the staff has high expectations, Principal Davis paused and, with hesitation, stated that they do. Given her hesitation, I followed up by asking if their expectations could be higher.

Principal Davis answered quickly,

I think they could be higher. When I first came here, there were a few that were a little skeptical. But after this year of seeing how kids can soar, I feel that . . . I mean you have a few naysayers, but, for the most part, we're setting the bar high and we're really pushing.

More than a verbal commitment to raising expectations, Principal Davis shared that they are using data to dispel negative perceptions. "If a kid is scoring in the 80th percentile and they're not doing homework in your class, and you're giving them D's and F's, something's wrong, something's wrong."

One theme emerged in my conversation with Principal Davis that differed from the other administrators dealt with cultural difference. She explained,

A majority of our staff here is white and you know that you can tell a kid that oh you can do this but you don't look like me and you don't understand me. . . . Kids have to see that there are people out there that can be successful. A majority of our kids here, that's where they always are, they don't venture outside our town, they only see what's here and they get into this hopeless state.

Critical to the success of her students, Davis argued, is using data to measure their growth and actually show them that they can succeed. This recognition and rewarding of student academic growth was offered not only as essential to fostering hope in the students but to changing the opinions of the teachers. When asked if that data changed teacher beliefs, Principal Davis replied, "Oh, absolutely. They were shocked. There were even a few that wanted the kids to take it (the test) over because they didn't think . . ." At that point, Davis paused and hesitated. With prompting, Davis continued, "They were surprised that the child grew that much."

Parent Support

When the question of parent involvement was raised, Principal Davis and Stan Shepard held different perceptions. Shepard felt that parent involvement was inadequate.

Parent involvement is not as strong here. You go down the way and the parents are too involved. Here we just don't have enough parent involvement. We have parent nights here and the good kids' parents show up. The bad kids' parents don't show up.

Davis understood that her parents' socioeconomic status and educational backgrounds were a challenge. With more than 80% low income enrollment at Thoreau, Davis acknowledged the challenge of serving parents who may or may not have graduated high school and few who have a college education. While realizing the limitations of parental support for education, Davis did so with the understanding that the school needs to be responsive to the students' lives.

Explaining that she didn't "want kids to fail because they didn't do the homework," Davis

stressed the importance of trying “to do as much as we can with kids here and make sure that when they leave here they can pretty much do the homework.” The issue of parent support was raised several times during the interview with Principal Davis explaining that the teachers perceive their greatest challenge to be working with low income families and the belief that parents do not value education. Rather than embrace the idea that Thoreau parents did not value education because of their economic challenges, Principal Davis expressed an understanding of the parents’ lived experiences.

Some will say they don’t feel like their parents are supportive and I don’t see it that way. Yeah, their phone numbers change every so often. That’s because they live in poverty. But there’s not one person who’s walked into my office and said they want their kid to do bad. They want their kids to do well. If you get past that, and the whole idea that they live here and may not be well off, parents really want their kids to do well. But you have to always remember that many of these parents are in survival mode so what may, what you may feel is important, like education is important. To that parent, education is important, my kid needs to do that but right now I may have to worry about our next meal.

Stan Shepard saw parent support in a different light going so far as to make distinctions between the different racial groups and the level of support experienced by the teachers. In particular, Shepard discussed changing values and the need for schools to now “teach students character things like please and thank you. Common courtesies that aren’t being taught.” In the past, Shepard explained that teachers only reinforced what was being taught at home. Making distinctions between Hispanic families and the black and white community, Shepard argued that the “Hispanic community is very courteous, very gracious,” while “the black and white community has begun to fail to teach their children respect, teach their children common courtesies.” Along with perceived cultural differences, Shepard noted that Thoreau’s community is “a gang community” that influences the children’s behavior. To Stan, the children are acting out “because their parents do. They just do it because their parents are gangbangers. They’ve been all their lives and these kids are growing up in that culture.”

As a white staff member in a predominantly minority community, Shepard felt that teachers have had to prove themselves to minority families to get their support,

I think that's one of those things you have to do. You have to prove yourself to them for them to back you up and not fuss with you. I still see some fussing going on but when you've been here are long as some of us have, we have shown ourselves to be successful with parents.

Principal Davis, as an African-American educator, shared her belief that school staff need to be better educated on the culture to understand the students and their families. At Thoreau, the staff is comprised primarily of white, middle-class women, many of whom do not live in the community. In fact, according to Davis, the majority of the staff commutes from predominantly white, affluent communities to work in their minority community. As a result, the cultural gap is pronounced and little has been done to address those cultural differences. Davis offered the following example,

A person will say "Well, you know they don't have money to buy this but mom drives this car," or "He's always wearing the new Jordans," but . . . well, the culture is an African-American culture, parents are not going to let their kids come out looking . . . it's just the way it is . . . material things are sometimes important because they want their kids to be just like everyone else and if it means sacrificing something else . . . that's what they do. But you have to understand that and not think it's somebody looking for a handout.

Principal Davis also wondered aloud about the sources that inform white educators about other cultures since there is no effort to address these issues in the district. Despite the reality of a cultural gap, diversity training is not a priority and, in some cases, Davis explained, "They haven't done any type of training since I've been here. Diversity training. Some people don't want to do that." Thoreau remains a school where parent involvement is perceived as insufficient without a real understanding of the community it serves.

On Those Advantaged and/or Disadvantaged

Stan Shepard paused thoughtfully when asked who he believed had been most advantaged by Thoreau's school improvement initiatives and responded with a hope that the students had benefitted the most. Principal Davis responded similarly indicating that she thought the students "built confidence in themselves" despite the lack of minority role models on staff. Due to the lack of staff diversity and the persistent cultural gap, Davis understood the importance of providing the students with "evidence" that they can be successful academically. This approach further advantaged the students because it challenged teachers views about what the students could achieve. In several cases, Davis shared, teachers expressed disbelief that the students had actually made such gains and requested that students repeat the assessments because "they were surprised that that child grew that much."

Stan expressed a belief that the teachers and administrators had also benefitted from the changes because they were better equipped to do their jobs. When asked if anyone had been disadvantaged, Stan was quick to respond,

Probably your elite kids. Your high levels. At one time our district had an enrichment program pull-out where they had fourth, fifth, sixth grade gifted kids. It wasn't run the way I would have liked to see it run because I don't think they challenged them nearly enough. They fluffed up what everybody else was doing instead of really driving.

Again, Shepard and Davis seemed to be in agreement with Davis acknowledging that students in the 90th percentile were not being served to their potential due to the continued focus on moving students into the meets category on standardized testing. Shepard reinforced the emphasis on ISAT and the scarcity of resources by saying, they're not looking at us for our exceeds kids. They're really looking at our bottom line kids so time, energy and resources are really being pushed into that." Both Shepard and Davis discussed plans for the coming year that would focus more enrichment resources on students who were performing above grade level.

At Thoreau Elementary School, there was evidence of several sources of collective efficacy as well as evidence of deficit thinking. According to both Stan Shepard and Principal Davis, teachers had opportunities for staff development and instructional coaching. While Stan expressed views congruent with deficit thinking when talking about the school community, Principal Davis articulated an understanding of both minority parents and students. Both Davis and Shepard shared a commitment to increasing student achievement but appeared limited by the notion of student achievement as performance on ISAT testing.

Ferris Elementary School

Ferris Elementary is a neighborhood schools that serves approximately 400 students in grades K-6. More than 70% of those students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Ferris serves students from a small urban community and is located north of a major urban center. The student demographics have shifted substantially at Ferris. In 1999, 46% of the students were white, 39% were black and 13% were Hispanic. By 2010, enrollment was made up of 14% white students, 40% black students and 38% Hispanic students. During this period, the number of Limited English Proficient students increased from 2.5 to 13%.

Principal Patricia Rhea is a veteran school administrator with a considerable amount of experience in schools like Ferris. In fact, she is herself a product of similar systems and shared her affinity for her community, explaining, “When I went to school, I grew up and went to school in Westwood so that was a really diverse population. As a teacher I worked at a parochial school that had a lot of low income kids and minority students.” Most of her 24 years as a school principal has been spent serving in schools like Ferris, a choice she embraces. Although she is a

white, middle-aged woman, Principal Rhea has considerable experience with her school population.

Because Ferris is one of the larger elementary schools, an assistant principal, Molly Jensen, is assigned on a part-time basis. Like Principal Rhea, Jensen has a diverse background as an educator having worked in both poor, minority communities and in affluent white districts. Jensen also embraced her decision to work in schools serving low income, minority students because she felt a sense of mission, “every single day I make a difference in a child’s life.”

Academic Achievement

When asked to discuss their school’s gains in academic achievement, Jensen and Rhea offered different explanations. Principal Rhea attributed their success to Response to Intervention (RtI) efforts and the teachers’ “hard work identifying children that need extra assistance and giving those kids the assistance they need.” Jensen, on the other hand, believed that staff development and the commitment of the staff were responsible for gains in achievement. Both Rhea and Jensen emphasized the importance of using data to drive instructional decision making and programming, with a heavy reliance on academic intervention. Jensen described a range of reading intervention programs available to address student needs including “comprehension strategies kits” for teachers. Most of the intervention kits offer scripted lessons and prescriptive programming that can be implemented with minimal training.

Principal Rhea credited her school’s gains in academic achievement to an early adoption of RtI programming, explaining that Ferris “started RtI before the district incorporated it” and provided every student with “an extra dose of reading.” To successfully implement this expansive model of intervention for all students, Rhea explained that she had paraprofessionals “as well as the teachers working at the same time within one classroom.” As a result, students

who were not reading at level received more intensive instruction while “the rest of the kids were given some kind of an activity . . . or some kinds of meaningful work.” Additionally, Rhea emphasized her school’s narrowed focus on reading instruction as the key factor in increasing student performance. She explained,

Everything is all about reading. All day long and trying to incorporate reading into science and social studies as well as in the daily reading. We do have a reading block of at least 90 minutes whereas some teachers may even have 120.

This emphasis on reading combined with an expansive continuum of reading intervention programming seemed to provide the basis for school improvement. Jensen corroborated Principal Rhea’s account of the initiatives implemented to increase student achievement, as measured by the IAT. Jensen also indicated the importance of staff development and collaboration of problem-solving teams.

Staff Development

According to Rhea, much of her staff development time is spent analyzing student data and targeting identified needs. Each Wednesday, school is dismissed early for professional development (PD) days. Wednesday PDs are generally one hour long but once a month the staff meets for 1.5 to 2 hours for staff development. Wednesday PDs are district wide. Principal Rhea explained,

What we’ve been doing as a district is meeting in grade level teams once a month also so that’s been going really well too. They share ideas and we’ve been working on our standards, our curriculum, and our report cards. Everything tied together to make sure we’re covering all the material that we need to cover.

Ferris teachers “don’t have a lot of opportunities to go out . . . because our money is limited right now. It seems like in the past when the district was not performing as well we had more state money.” Ironically, once the district began seeing improvements in their test scores, state funding was decreased.

According to Rhea, teachers can, however, “go and see another teacher within the building. We can arrange that pretty easily because we have certified paraprofessionals that can take a class for an hour . . . I’m sure we can arrange that.” Another facet of professional development at Ferris includes teacher team meetings with the principal once a quarter. At those meetings, Principal Rhea works with the teachers to review and analyze student data. She acknowledged,

you know I wasn’t a real data-driven person to start with and I would say that now I really truly believe in the data and I think that all of my teachers it’s an eye opener for them. They are really starting to get into it and they are really starting to analyze . . . the data really does tell the true picture.

Both Jensen and Rhea spoke in detail about specific staff development efforts designed to support recent adoptions of reading series and intervention programming. Jensen also attributed Rhea’s leadership as critical to the school’s success,

She’s been here 6 years. In her 6 years she’s done a lot working with the teachers providing them with professional development, feedback, constructive criticism. She has grade level team meetings . . . in the last couple years that has really made a big difference.

Staff development has included both opportunities within the school as well as the district. At the school level, Jensen and Rhea work with teacher teams to discuss what they perceive to be working and to support their efforts by providing time for them to review data and plan for instruction.

Parent Support

When asked about the challenges her school faces, Principal Rhea discussed the growing number of low income students and the difficulties encountered by their families,

A lot of our families seem to have some unemployment problems right now, and they seem to move a little bit here and there and they get up and move and leave and they don’t work with their children so that seems to be a big issue.

While much of our interview focused on data informing targeted interventions, much of this discussion seemed to be based on assumptions. Parent support, according to Rhea, is “very poor. Poor.” She further clarified that “We have a handful of people that come regularly to different meetings and different events and different things and that want to help out at the school, but it’s poor, it’s poor.” Despite serving the same school community as Thoreau and Willow, the perception of parent support was very different at Ferris.

Jensen acknowledged that Ferris has “some really wonderfully supportive parents who call all the time and are really on top of their children” but echoed Rhea’s concern that parent support in general is minimal. For children who are struggling academically, Jensen noted, the staff experiences considerable frustration enlisting their support. In some cases, Jensen and Rhea work with area agencies and social services to provide outreach to the Ferris parent community. In most cases, though, Jensen and Rhea “try to be an ear for the staff because we understand that it’s challenging, so, here we try to provide as much service as we can on our level.” This understanding of their community context seems to inform their sense of agency without being prohibitive.

The Impact of ISAT Testing

At Ferris School, ISAT testing is a significant component of their instructional program. Jensen explained that considerable time and energy is spent preparing for the ISAT. Student data is reviewed frequently and students are assigned to ISAT preparation groups. Additionally, students who are not on target to meet state standards attend afterschool ISAT tutoring. Even the newly adopted reading series is designed to improve student performance on the ISAT. Jensen provided a quick overview of the benefits,

What's so nice is our reading program . . . they have the test available for students, the unit tests available in ISAT type format and I think that is so much more beneficial than an ISAT coach book that some other company makes.

In her discussion of ISAT testing, Jensen explained the different impact state testing has on school districts depending on school-related factors. For example, in the affluent district where she previously worked, ISAT has little impact because “everyone pretty much passes” while Ferris teachers “really have to push . . . just to make the cutoff.” In addition to the benefits of personal affluence, students in wealthier districts receive supplemental services even if they are performing at grade level because the expectation is that all students will exceed. In Ferris’ district, resources are scarce and that scarcity requires that schools take a triage approach to intervention. The result is a systemic reinforcement of achievement gaps based on socioeconomic status.

For schools like Ferris, Jensen acknowledged that considerable time is spent preparing for ISAT testing while wealthier districts do not invest in ISAT coaching materials, whereas her current district adopts reading series that incorporates test preparation. Furthermore, Jensen explained that administrators in those more affluent districts do not bear “the heavy weight that the administrators here do,” worrying if “our school is going to pass.” While Ferris has been “passing,” other schools in the district have not, and Jensen noted that those schools are experiencing a sense of anxiety. Jensen did acknowledge that Ferris expends considerable effort and worry because of ISAT. Rhea concurred with Jensen’s assessment, stating that “everybody is stressed during ISAT time or prior to it, making sure that we cover all that we can possibly cover.”

At the end of our interview, Principal Rhea shared her pride in the Ferris staff, saying,

We just work really hard to be successful and to make good things happen for kids. I know I say it’s all about the ISAT tests which it really is but if you are meeting or

exceeding state standards it means you are on grade level and that's really what we want our kids to be.

For Ferris Elementary School and many others like it, passing the ISAT has become the primary focus of education, redefining and narrowing educational aims for students who would most benefit from a more expansive education.

Staff Beliefs and Attitudes

Ferris is an open concept school, popularized in the 1970s, and Principal Rhea attributed staff collegiality to the collaboration required for daily life of an open school concept. According to Principal Rhea's description of staff interaction, several sources of collective efficacy are accessed each day. When asked to identify the strengths of the Ferris staff, Principal Rhea answered warmly,

We're a big, happy family basically. One of the strengths would be that we are an open school, we don't have walls and I think that everybody knows a lot about each other. About who really works hard and who doesn't work as hard. I think everybody really clicks well together and they support each other.

For example, Principal Rhea explained that:

people do outside things together. We do maybe a happy hour or we just had a staff party. It was to celebrate the end of ISAT. Everybody just comes together and let's their hair down and relaxes and gets to know each other better. It's a good feeling. We have climate. Good people.

Jensen also believed that while they have their moments, "overall staff morale is terrific" and that "people love coming to work . . . because the staff is nice and friendly. They know that they can close the door . . . and vent. Then it's all okay and they can come back out and do a wonderful, professional job." When asked how the staff has changed as a result of their efforts, Principal Rhea discussed a shift in their perceived capacity and their need to "take ownership of their classroom and . . . of their students." To succeed, teachers had to give up that ownership and "trust that other educator or paraprofessional or that support person" to make certain that students

achieved. Teachers had to learn to work more as a team rather in isolation. In doing so, Rhea reported that teachers have begun to “believe that all kids can learn and that they just need to make sure they have the right avenue to them to it.”

On Those Advantaged and/or Disadvantaged

During the interview, Principal Rhea was asked who has been disadvantaged by the school’s initiatives to raise student achievement; she responded in a manner similar to the three other principals in this study. “Right now, I think our higher achieving students are probably not benefitting as much as our low-achieving students, but that will change next year because we’re doing our RTI completely different next year.” Like the other principals, Rhea could see no disadvantage to the other students. She did, however, acknowledge that sacrifices did have to be made to focus resources on intervention programming. For example, Rhea realized that science and social studies were being excluded from the curriculum because “it’s all about reading . . . it’s all about reading.” Although a narrower curriculum was being implemented, like other principals Rhea believed that “if you can read you can do anything.”

Jensen also expressed a belief that the school was losing its gifted population and had fewer students exceeding on the ISAT. In contrast, though, Jensen offered a different perspective on who had been disadvantaged by these intervention-based initiatives. Jensen articulated an understanding of staff’s response to the changes and their changing roles within the school.

It has changes some people’s jobs . . . and their jobs have changed. Maybe they used to do more of their own lessons and create things and it’s made them just focus more on the interventions that we have that are scientifically-based . . . initially they felt very overwhelmed by this.

While some staff and students did not benefit directly, Jensen stated that she felt the entire school had been advantaged by the initiatives. Staff, for example, had begun to feel that they had begun

to “have a firm grasp” on intervention programming. Students also benefitted, according to Jensen, because their confidence was increasing and they were beginning to realize success.

Principal Rhea and Assistant Principal Jensen both provided examples of all four sources of collective efficacy during their interviews. According to them, the Ferris staff were collegial in their approach to learning and teaching, had high expectations for their students and benefitted from a commitment to staff development. Although their interviews did not address issues of social justice or equity, they did tell a story of a school with a positive sense of efficacy as well as a belief system informed by deficit thinking.

Rhodes Elementary School

Rhodes Elementary School is situated on a large, wooded lot and serves approximately 360 students in grades K-5. Located north of a major urban area, Rhodes serves students from a small urban-suburban area. Rhodes has also experienced a substantial change in student demographics. In 1999, 70% of the students were white, 17% were black and 12% were Hispanic. By 2010, white student enrollment had decreased to 26%, black student enrollment had increased to 29% and Hispanic students increased to 24%. During this period, the number of Limited English Proficient students increased from 5 to 13%.

Louis Richards is in his second year as principal of Rhodes Elementary School. Unlike the other principals interviewed for this study, Richards has experience both in the private and public sectors. Richards has worked as an administrator and a teacher both in Illinois as well as in other states. Prior to becoming an administrator, Principal Richards taught high school business and finance courses in both low income and affluent schools. His broad and varied experiences in communities of difference inform Richards practice as an elementary principal.

As an elementary principal, Richards articulated the need to make a difference in the lives of children, particularly minority children, understanding that “the earlier you can get a child the greater difference you can make.”

Academic Achievement

Rhodes Elementary has earned a place on the Illinois Honor Roll on several occasions as a Spotlight School. One of the factors contributing to the increase in academic achievement, Richards contends, is an understanding “what needed to be accomplished and how it would happen.” Citing changes in programming and an increased reliance on progress monitoring using standardized assessment. By adopting prescriptive instructional programming for reading, Richards believes that the teachers are changing their practices to return to the basics. Teachers, on the other hand, were “really wanting to be more independent . . . instead of looking at what the core is all about and what the kids really need to know.” Richards explained that district wide, the emphasis was returning to the core academic areas in reading and math, the two areas measured by the ISAT. At Rhodes, data drives instructional practice and academic achievement

Richards also emphasized the importance of providing academic intervention for students who are perceived to be struggling, “not only does every classroom have a 30 minute intervention but all the kids who are struggling have an additional time that can work with them 1:1 or in smaller class sizes.” The perceived need to narrow and prescribe instruction for “struggling students” was a common theme at Rhodes as well as the other elementary schools. Throughout the interview, Richards focuses on the importance of academic intervention for students rather than for teachers. In this regard, deficit thinking appeared to frame the discussion of academic achievement.

At Rhodes, instructional programming focuses primarily on reading and math. When asked if Richards expected the ISAT scores to go back up as a result of the initiatives implemented, he responded affirmatively and explained that they are

really looking at reading first because reading really ties into everything else we're trying to do. So if a student is struggling in fluency but is fine in comprehension we don't necessarily want to continue to give them additional support in comprehension when it's fluency that they really need. So I think that now we're able to pinpoint . . . using . . . data and to try to determine where they're weak we can make faster adjustments.

This approach, Richards argued, is essential to changing beliefs and attitudes that lead to increased achievement as measured by the ISAT. When asked if the staff would be would be very aware of what their different performance scores on the ISAT have been for the past few years, Principal Richards believed that they would have that awareness. When I spoke with the teachers, however, that awareness of performance was not a shared reality. In fact, awareness of school achievement data was largely dependent on grade level team member's willingness to review the data.

Staff Development

At Rhodes Elementary School, opportunities for professional development were available but were disconnected and unintentional. When asked about staff development, Principal Richards shared that he takes an informal approach, encouraging teachers to share how they are doing things and what they can do to improve. Additionally, Richards works to generate interest in taking different approaches by reviewing articles.

There are a variety of things that we do. I personally like providing teachers with different articles that they can read about, things that they can you know really take hold of that they're doing in their classroom, that upon reading the article they might want to do something different. Then I also try to have a time that they can share with one another as to how they are doing things and what they can do to improve and make whatever they're doing better. That's what we do.

When asked about changes in instructional programming, Principal Richards expressed a belief that the teachers were changing their instructional approaches based on the changes being encouraged at the district level. The changes cited included the introduction and implementation of prescriptive instructional programming. These teacher-proofed programs are increasingly popular in schools serving low income and minority children. They are at the core of academic programming and staff development in all of the schools included in this study. Additionally, Richards reiterated the importance of examining core instruction, “You have to begin with a look at the core and understand what your core, how’s your core doing, helping the kids?” When asked to clarify his concept of core, Richards returned to a discussion of academic basics. Richards approached the improvement of instruction from more of a technical perspective, asking questions such as “are the teachers teaching with fidelity, are they covering all the areas that need to be covered?” By examining whether the teachers are covering established curriculum guidelines, Richards believed that he could better determine if a child was struggling due to a lack of academic instruction or individual deficits. In a sense, Richards was using his current context to deconstruct deficit thinking, working to position the responsibility for student academic failure on the system rather than the individual students.

At Rhodes, Principal Richards explained that teachers “are trying some of these things on their own to improve . . . the five areas of reading.” The emphasis is on intervention and “taking the steps to make sure they’re (teachers) familiar with certain programs that they can utilize to help kids.” Richards further explained that every classroom has an intervention block and that struggling students received additional time to work either in small groups or on a 1:1 basis. Like schools around the country serving low income students, Rhodes was narrowing its curriculum without a realizing the implications of doing so. Principal Richards did believe, however, that

scores on the ISAT would increase as a result of these efforts and, to date, his school had witnessed those gains. Staff development within this context relied on introducing teachers to this narrowed curriculum and the prescriptive instructional programming necessary to advance such an approach.

Staff development at Rhodes is also dependent on “getting away from that traditional model of teaching that we teach everyone the same,” Richards explained. He credited a willingness to start looking at students from an individual perspective with increases in student achievement on the ISAT. Much of the discussion about staff development focused on preparation for state testing.

The Impact of ISAT Testing

According to Klassen, Tze, Betts and Gordon (2011), nearly 80% of the 218 studies of teacher efficacy research they reviewed were quantitative in design. Those studies using quantitative designs to study collective efficacy typically examined the relationship between perceived collective efficacy and student achievement on standardized tests. The role of standardized testing is on one level important to understanding the collective efficacy of the Rhodes’ staff. When asked to describe the role of ISAT test preparation in improving test scores, Principal Richards expressed an understanding that test preparation near the start of ISAT testing is needed because “there are certain areas that by the time the kids get ready to test that we have not covered.” While he acknowledged that he had not reviewed any research on the efficacy of test preparation, Richards believed that the test preparation seemed to work for his school because “at least it gets the kids prepared for what the format might be like, what the test itself might look like and they actually begin to work some of the problems that have been on the test” in the past. Richards also believed that ISAT test preparation was a contributing factor to their

increased ISAT performance. He also stated that he would like the teachers to implement more thorough test preparation and begin doing so throughout the year rather than waiting until January or February.

Principal Richards described three challenges that he encounters at Rhodes. The first challenge for the school is the mobility rate. He explained that Rhodes has “a population that is constantly moving and either they’re moving or moving out.” As a result, Richards discussed the implications of that mobility include “kids . . . coming in with different levels of learning” that require the school to “really pinpoint what those areas are and try to develop them to get them up to their grade level.” In addition to students’ mobility, Richards identified incoming kindergarteners’ readiness to learn as part of the challenge.

We’re not seeing that they’re ready to learn. A lot of is just, not all the kids have the same experiences that other children so they’re not, everybody’s not starting off a the same level playing field so as a group and as teachers and as staff we have to give kids those experiences.

The second challenge identified by Richards was getting the staff to collaborate more “to understand what those gaps are and what those needs are.” He did perceive staff collaboration to be increasing but Richards stated the need “to continue to understand what the kids seem to be lacking in and need more support in.” The third challenge facing Rhodes was the lack of curricular guidelines. In particular, Principal Richards noted the importance of curriculum mapping to guide their instruction. During a discussion of staff affective state, Principal Richards did acknowledge that staff morale was a struggle due to staff turnover. He did feel that staff turnover was beneficial as well, inspiring the veteran teachers to try new approaches. The current Rhodes staff is a predominantly veteran staff with an average of 15 or more years of experience. With that level of experience, the majority of the Rhodes staff has been together throughout the decade of ISAT testing. Asked whether he believed that the teachers would attribute the

increases in achievement to their efforts or to external factors, Richards stated that he believed that the teachers would “see that they can affect change but there are so many things that are changing now.” Richards asserted that he felt responsible for getting them “out of the old way of doing things . . . to start looking at some new ways of making progress.” As with Willow Elementary School, having a veteran staff was both a strength and a weakness, depending on the context. Most schools serving low income, minority students do not benefit from teacher experience and frequently experience significant turnover. Several of the schools in this study did have predominantly veteran staff but there are trade-offs. While the veteran staff bring with them strong background knowledge and a developed repertoire of teaching strategies, they often contribute to, or maintain, the status quo.

Parent Support

When asked to characterize parent support at Rhodes, Richards provided an interesting perspective, willing to redefine parent support “with the way dynamics . . . are today.” In general, Richards expressed a belief that parents were supportive, understanding that they may be supportive in ways different than previously expected. As an African-American administrator, Richards articulated an appreciation and understanding of his parent community.

They may not always be able to make the PTA meetings but they sign up for things they know they can do. We get support that way. If it’s Picture Day and we have a group of parents who sign up for picture day, we call them and they will come. When we have our school musicals . . . we have 100-150 parents there. . . . We had a family reading night. That went over real well. We had 200 families there.

On Those Advantaged and/or Disadvantaged

The promise of many school improvement efforts for schools serving low income, minority student populations is to close existing achievement gaps. RtI is a key initiative promoted to close gaps in reading and mathematics by focusing resources, often limited, on the

students who are not meeting stated expectations. In every day practice, school principals often have to make critical choices when resources are limited and Richards is no exception to that rule. As he considered his responses to the interview questions, he was thoughtful and often paused to reflect. In considering who was advantaged or disadvantaged by Rhodes' current efforts to increase student achievement, Richards relied on a technical understanding within the context of standardized testing.

I think the kids that are struggling benefit the most but that can really vary too, because, ideally, I think everyone benefits but . . . if we're talking about just the results perspective. If you have a kid that gets tested . . . and they're on the yellow then ideally you want to try to help this kid move into the green in order to help your results, but I think everybody benefits because even kids who are scoring in the red, you give them more help, you given them smaller classes . . . but what you may not see is the increase you might see with a kid who is in the yellow.

Richards asserted that eventually all of the students would benefit ultimately but it might take longer for those benefits to be realized. By using data to drive instructional decision making that would result in increased student achievement, Richards acknowledged that students who need enrichment or who were already performing at grade level may be disadvantaged by the current system. Additionally, Richards noted that in some instances students performing "in the red" might not get what they need because limited resources would target kids "that are in the yellow, high yellow or low green." He did not, however, believe that would occur at Rhodes.

In telling his story, Principal Richards seemed to speak in generalities. Throughout our conversation, there was no discernible sense of direction for school improvement other than ISAT test preparation. Although Richards saw his parent community as supportive, his narrative seemed guided by deficit thinking in the form of an overreliance on intervention programming, a narrowed curriculum designed to emphasize the basics and a focus on the technical aspects of teaching and learning.

Discussion

While investigating the nature of collective efficacy from a leadership perspective, a notable difference between two schools in two different districts was evident in two of the four sources of collective efficacy: mastery experience and vicarious experience. These two sources of collective efficacy are most present in quality staff development initiatives. The principals in all four schools emphasized the need to improve instructional practice in their buildings.

Thoreau Elmwood School and Willow Elementary School are similar in their school enrollment, student demographics and low Collective Teacher Efficacy. Both fell into the 16th percentile for Collective Teacher Efficacy. Ferris Elementary School and Rhodes Elementary are also similar in their school enrollment and above average Collective Teacher Efficacy. Rhodes, however, has a significantly higher low income population and larger minority population. Despite having a considerably larger set of risk factors, students at Ferris Elementary School perform similarly on state assessment, with Ferris making slow but steady gains over the past three years while Rhodes has experienced a decline during that same time period. The two schools are in different, but neighboring school districts and both have repeatedly recognized as Spotlight Schools.

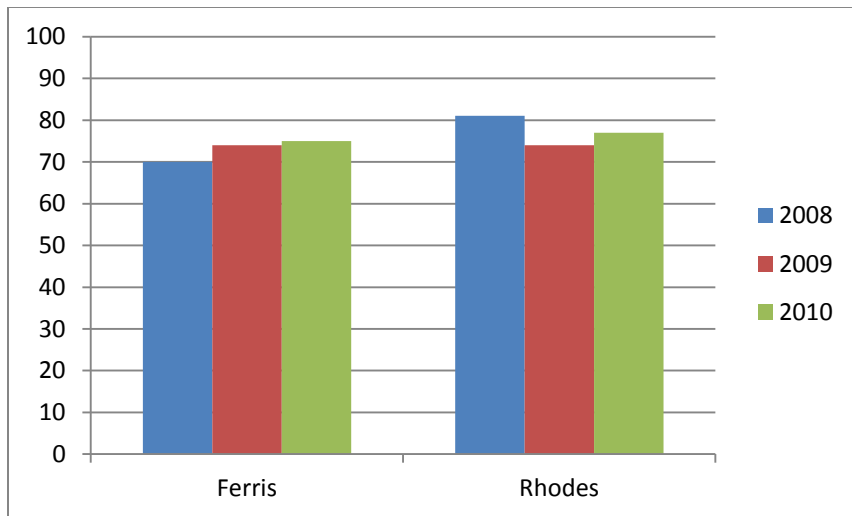


Figure 8. School comparison—ISAT composite meets/exceeds.

Upon initial investigation, the differences between Ferris and Rhodes might be attributable to district level supports. This does not appear to be the case, though, as the two other schools, with the lowest collective efficacy scores of the eight schools surveyed, participating in Phase 2 of the study are located in the same district as Ferris. Within school factors seem to account for differences. For example, three of the four schools selected for this phase are served by the same district. As a result, they have the same level of access to staff development. Yet, one of the schools, Ferris Elementary School, reveals a distinctly different narrative than the other two despite facing similar challenges in demographics and resources. Although their collective efficacy scores fall within the average range, Ferris Elementary demonstrated a high average score and has witnessed higher student achievement on the ISAT. Their academic achievement parallels that of Rhodes Elementary, a school with nearly half the number of low income students and a larger White population. The need to further examine the nature of collective efficacy in both Rhodes and Ferris Elementary Schools is clear.

CHAPTER 6

THE CLASSROOM NARRATIVE

For phase three of this study, certified teachers were interviewed to investigate existing sources of collective efficacy within their schools. The interviews of teachers were particularly important as teachers experience the school from a distinctly personalized context. During the interviews of six elementary teachers, three from each school site, two separate narratives unfolded. Given the similarity of the two schools collective efficacy scores, their 2008 ISAT achievement and their nearly identical school size, these two narratives contributed to a better understanding of the underlying belief systems that can co-exist with collective efficacy. Each interview participant spoke to the following common themes: an emphasis on reading that resulted in a narrowed curriculum, an extensive yet often diffused RtI approach, data-based decision making, instructional programming driven by demands to perform on the ISAT and the demoralizing effect of ISAT results that do not represent their successes as teachers

There were differences among the interviewees as well. While the Rhodes teachers perceived their school leadership as contentious and unsupportive, Ferris teachers felt supported and expressed a sense of team at their school. Both staff felt the weight of deficit thinking but their positioning of agency differed. Teachers at Rhodes expressed a frustration with limited staff development while Ferris teachers benefitted from district wide trainings and a comprehensive reading grant initiative. At Rhodes, most of the discussion emphasized their profound sense of loss and limitation. Teachers at Rhodes spoke at length about the loss of professional freedom and the perceived lack of funding and resources. This sense of limitation contributes to a negative perception of task analysis and can work in opposition to highly efficacious thinking. At Ferris, teachers expressed a sense of camaraderie and collaboration. Both sets of teachers

discussed the return to an emphasis on the basics in education and the scientific management approach to schooling—mechanistic, almost industrial, and efficiency-based. Additionally, teachers at both schools shared a certain nostalgia for the past when the schools served predominantly Caucasian working and middle class communities.

A Tale of Two Schools: A View from the Teachers' Lounge

While the two schools selected for this phase of the study are similar in school size, demographics, achievement and collective efficacy, their narratives are considerably different. Rhodes Elementary School teachers struggled to explain their academic performance or articulate any school wide reform, speaking at length about their perceived challenges: student demographics, parent involvement and administrative support. Ferris Elementary School teachers, on the other hand, shared a common narrative about how their school has improved student achievement. Although not every Ferris teacher was a staunch proponent of the initiatives, they spoke to their common efforts. Additionally, Ferris teachers did not disparage their building administrators. Both schools did appear to operate from a deficit thinking model often embracing pathologizing practices that now appear too often to be the unfortunate norm in schools that serve predominantly low income, minority students. The school staff at both sites was comprised mostly of white, middle-class women while the student body at both schools was predominantly low-income and minority. This cultural gap, while unaddressed, emerged often in the conversations about school challenges. Here are the stories of two elementary schools who have demonstrated academic success on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test as defined by the Illinois Honor Roll.

Rhodes Elementary School

Rhodes is a small elementary school that serves approximately 350 students. It is located in a semirural area that serves a small urban area located north of a major Midwestern city. More than 50% of Rhodes Elementary School's student body receives free and reduced lunch. The school is situated in a small wooded area with a moderate yet attractive playground area. From the outside, there is nothing about this school that suggests it serves a low-income, mostly minority population. The facility is well-kept and has recently been renovated and expanded. Less than a decade ago, this school served a predominately white, middle class community. Principal Richards has been at Rhodes for the past 2 years and is the fourth principal in less than a decade.

In the past 10 years, Rhodes, like the other schools in this study, experienced a significant shift in demographics. In 1999, 70% of the student population was white, 17% was black and 12% was Hispanic. Few children qualified as LEP. In 2010, the white population was less than 25% of the school and a growing number of LEP children qualify for ELL services. Nearly 30% of the students are Hispanic.

Academically, Rhodes has made significant improvements raising test scores from 63% in 2002 to 77% in 2010. During this time period, scores have peaked as high as 91% and the school earned recognition on several occasions from the Illinois Honor Roll—Spotlight School, Academic Improvement. Rhodes again earned Illinois Honor Roll recognition as an Illinois Spotlight School in 2010.

The story of Rhodes is driven by two different perspectives—that of the staff and that of the building principal. This stated disconnect between the building principal and teachers interviewed was present throughout the three teacher interviews. All three of the teachers

interviewed at Rhodes Elementary were veteran teachers who revealed a common narrative, a story of frustration, discouragement and low morale. While teachers at Ferris Elementary shared similar frustrations related to the difficulty of the task, their affective state did not appear dysthymic as did the affect expressed at Rhodes. All three of the Rhodes' teachers interviewed echoed the same discouragement. Jennifer Kyle shared her frustration at the lack of programming for children, "We have nothing. And that's a lot of this decline (indicating the decline in test scores). We've had nothing for the last couple of years because they said there was no money." This statement characterized a reliance on external locus of control with the teachers interviewed not necessarily embracing their own senses of agency.

Academic Achievement

Much of the conversation about academic achievement focused on ISAT preparation, student deficits and RTI programming. For example, Principal Richards discussed the important role various intervention programs play in improving student achievement.

Read Naturally, Foundations, a lot of them are trying some of these things on their own to improve reading whether it be the five areas of reading. Teachers know that the kids are struggling in these areas so the teachers are taking the steps to make sure that they're familiar with certain programs that they can utilize to help kids.

The degree to which Rhodes students struggle was emphasized by all three teachers interviewed.

Jennifer Kyle explained,

You have kids who come in here and they don't even know their letters. I feel like our first grade is teaching kindergarten. My daughter is 4 years old. And what they're learning in first grade my daughter already knows. We're behind the eight ball. When they come in, they're not ready.

To address this lack of readiness, a variety of intervention programs are provided at the school. Fran Dixon did not perceive current RTI initiatives as positively as did Principal Richards. Rather than supporting classroom instruction, Dixon shared frustration at the

fragmentation of instruction, “They’re pulling them here and pulling them there. Pulling them out. It’s just changing the whole complexion of teaching.” When discussing RTI programming, even Principal Richards seemed to locate the source of the problem with the student. He emphasized the need for intervention by explaining,

We’ve also changed the schedule so that they have some interventions. So the kids that are struggling have intervention. Not only does every classroom have a 30 minute intervention but all the kids who are struggling have an additional time that we can work with them 1:1 or in smaller class sizes. So they can be successful in reading as well as math.

When the conversation was not focused on RtI it seemed to center on ISAT preparation. When asked to predict his ISAT scores for the current year, Principal Richards had positive expectations, stating “I expect them to go back up because these initiatives are more focused. They’re looking at really, again, at the five areas of reading.” Unlike Richards, the teachers did not seem to share his expectations. In fact, few seemed to value the ISAT scores and focused primarily on the lack of resources to teach the students. Teachers also shared the belief that instruction had become too narrow and less rigorous. In some cases, teachers explicitly stated that they believed that state standards had been lowered, thus enabling their students to meet standards. For example, when asked about the increase in student achievement over the eight year period, Kyle stated, “I think that over the years they’ve lowered the bar. I don’t think it’s as high as it used to be when we started.”

Richards did confirm their concerns that the curriculum had narrowed but he did not seem discouraged by that trend and reinforced his belief in improved student achievement on the ISAT sharing,

I expect scores to go up because we’re trying to pinpoint now how kids are struggling and . . . really looking at reading first because reading really ties into everything else we’re trying to do. So if a student is struggling in fluency but is fine in comprehension we don’t necessarily want to continue to give them additional support in comprehension when it’s

fluency that they really need. So I think that now that we're able to pinpoint . . . data and to try to determine where they're weak we can make faster adjustments.

Each teacher was asked to share what she believed accounted for the variances in Rhodes' performance over the year. The lack of a common narrative was surprising as no identified school wide initiatives emerged. Given the close-knit nature of these veteran teachers, the inability to "tell their story" related to student achievement was surprising. For example, Fran Dixon was unable to explain or account for the range of scores. As a teachers working with the grades that administer the ISAT, I expected all three teachers to be able to provide a rich history of the school's progress. For the most part, the discussion relied on perceptions of building administrators, loss of professional freedom and changing demographics. For example, Fran Dixon asserted that what she really believed that student achievement was largely reliant on changing demographics. She explained,

What I believe was happening was our population really changed. When I started at Rhodes . . . it was primarily a white, blue collar school. We had a lot of parent involvement. It was just a different clientele.

All three teachers perceived the growing number of ELL students as a challenge. Dana Nichols confirmed that "bilingual students have definitely been a challenge. We have a large number of bilingual students in our building." In the past 5 years, Rhodes has had approximately 15%, or 49 out of 350 students, of their student body identified as Limited English Proficient. In speaking with the teachers, it became clear that their perception of the number of LEP students was larger than the actual number of those students. Nichols went on to discuss the changes in the student population, "Before it was very Anglo. It was very Anglo. It was a very Caucasian building because . . . you didn't have the Section 8 housing." The issue of race was an underlying issue throughout the interviews with teachers even acknowledging that "a lot of people have taken their kids out whom live in the area because they do not like the makeup of the

classrooms.” Nichols went on to explain that parents had concerns that “the other kids in the class don’t look like their kids.”

Along with the discussion of student factors, the issue of expectations was raised several times. Interestingly, teachers acknowledged that their school district did not have high enough expectations for achievement. When asked why that was tolerated by the community, Dana Nichols explained, “I think we bank on the fact that our parents are uneducated, and they don’t know so we just keep passing along. . . . It’s disheartening.” In general, the teachers acknowledged that this acceptance of mediocrity would not be tolerated in more affluent, white school districts. Even though the issue of lower expectations was raised as a concern, the interview dialogue was replete with examples of the same teachers perceiving the students lived experiences as deficient and responding with pathologizing practices. For example, Fran Dixon explained, “I think that you have to make sure that the basics are covered before you do anything that’s really too I’ll call it North Shore.” The reference “North Shore” is associated with wealthy suburban communities north of Chicago. Dixon continued,

I think what happened when the clientele changed here, we went back to basics . . . because they don’t come in with the backgrounds that students maybe from a different socioeconomic group have. So you have to have a basic education. . . . It’s very basic. It has become a very basic, kind of old school actually. Like an old school education. Not a lot of frills.

As a result of this back-to-basics approach to education for low income, minority students, after school tutoring was perceived to be a necessity that the school no longer offers. Jennifer Kyle shared that students who were not on grade level for ISAT were referred to the after school program. In that program, according to Kyle, teachers “pushed and pushed and pushed and pushed. We did practice after practice after practice after practice. They were here until

4:15 p.m. and we would just drill, drill, drill.” Ironically, the loss of the after school tutoring program has not resulted in lower ISAT test scores.

Staff Development

At Rhodes, there were no consistently articulated school wide staff development initiatives. Principal Richards shared his view of staff development as an inquiry-based approach to school-wide improvement by explaining that “there are a variety of things that we do. I personally like providing teachers with different articles that they can read about, things that they can you know really take hold of that they’re doing in their classroom, that upon reading the article they might want to do something different. Then I also try to have a time that they can share with one another as to how they are doing things and what they can do to improve and make whatever they’re doing better. That’s what we do.”

Dana Nichols explained the school’s emphasis on ISAT preparation as the focus of their professional development,

I know we always went to the ISBE trainings and we would send different people at each time. So, someone would go a reading, someone would go to a math and always for the short response in writing because it wasn’t, they didn’t do the full-blown writing back then. So we would bring information back and make sure that as a team we were aware of the strategies that they shared with us through the ISBE training.

Jennifer Kyle supported Nichols’ view on staff development, emphasizing grade level efforts versus school wide initiatives. Fran Dixon’s perspective on staff development served as a contrast to both Nichols and Principal Richard’s views. Asked if Rhodes had any school wide initiatives, Dixon replied, “I don’t think there were any school wide initiatives. I don’t think there was anything particularly geared to the whole of the staff, but I think there was a lot of freedom. I’m going to keep saying that because I think freedom to do the things that you’re good at, things that you want to try.”

The Impact of ISAT Testing

The primary focus of Rhodes' school improvement initiatives focus on increasing the number of students meeting or exceeding on ISAT. Each of the teachers interviewed in this study spoke to the importance of ISAT scores, even while acknowledging the limited instructional value of that data. Fran Dixon, for example, said "ISAT scores, they come in so late that by the time they come in I have a whole new group of students so I'm not really too invested in what the previous group did because now it's too late." When asked if the staff review and disaggregate the data to get a better sense of who is achieving state standards and who is not, Fran stated, "Never. Not that I know of." Additionally, Fran stated that she did not believe that the staff had ever looked at their results. This admission seemed to be in direct conflict with the principal's perspective and with the school's strict adherence to ISAT. Fran's colleagues did assert, however, that ISAT was the key determinant for instruction planning and delivery. Dana Nichols openly discussed the stress associated with ISAT preparation, explaining that teachers spent approximately one-third of the year preparing for the ISAT. Nichols emphatically stated, "They practiced the test. They practiced the test." Jennifer Kyle explained the impact of ISAT preparation on their reading curriculum, "We only do three themes out of the reading series when there are six. We only do three because from January to March, it's ISAT prep. There is no reading going on. It's prep, prep, prep. "

Throughout the interview, Fran Dixon returned to her feelings of discouragement commenting on the feeling of being limited as a teacher, identifying the current emphasis on NCLB and testing as it impacts her teaching. Fran explained that NCLB diminished her professional freedom, stating "I feel boxed in. I don't see it changing either. I don't think that RTI is helping the situation."

Staff Beliefs and Attitudes

At Rhodes, a common refrain among the three teachers interviewed was a belief that they were deprived, deprived of resources, of parent support, of administrative leadership. When asked to identify specific initiatives that contributed to increases in student achievement on the ISAT, Jennifer Kyle spoke about what they no longer had at Rhodes. In this case, Kyle spoke at length about the loss of afterschool tutoring that prepared students for ISAT testing. In her opinion, Kyle said, “We have nothing. And that’s a lot of this decline. We’ve had nothing for the last couple of years because they said there was no money.” Even when I pointed out that their scores had increased in the past few years, Kyle returned to her concerns about the lack of programming.

One recurring theme among the teachers was the lack of staff morale as a result of their current principal’s leadership style. Jennifer Kyle described the declining morale, loss of mutual respect and pervasive fear of humiliation. Kyle explained, “It’s that respect. Humiliation in front of other administrators. It’s just this terrible feeling that we never had before and that’s I think has a lot to do with it . . . Everybody keeps their doors closed.” Dana Nichols also attributed changes in staff beliefs to administrative leadership and the resulting stress. Nichols explained that the staff has always had a strong sense of collective confidence, believing that they were successful. That belief, she contends has changed, due to “the administrations belief that we’re not good enough.” The effect on staff has been noticeable, Dana explained,

It’s never enough. You’re never doing it right. Constantly. That’s just like beating somebody while they’re down. It’s not using constructive criticism. It’s not giving you other methods or other tools to change something if it needs to be changed . . . you have to give people an opportunity to learn and to grow.

At Rhodes, the teachers interviewed talked at length about the different principals who served the school, with each of them reflecting on past principals with varying levels of

nostalgia. In the interview with Jennifer Kyle, I asked whether the different building principals had that much of an influence on the group dynamic. Jennifer replied, “85% is the administrator.” Even when we examined the data together and determined that positive principal perceptions did not seem to be related to student achievement, Jennifer, Dana and Fran persisted in their belief that administration was the most influential factor. Unexpectedly, (to these teachers) under their current building principal, scores have risen despite increases in low income and LEP students.

When the issue of racial and ethnic diversity was raised during the interview, staff were quick to dismiss the implications of a cultural gap. Dana Nichols explained, “That (race) doesn’t really come up to be quite honest. That doesn’t come up. . . . They see it as kids are kids.” Rather than directly address issues of race and/or class, the conversation was indirect with commentary on single parent families and Section 8 housing offered as more tenable concerns. Jennifer Kyle provided insight into the difference between working in a White, middle class district and working at Rhodes.

It was a culture shock going from these two-parent families who were in your face all the time and they want to know the curriculum and here where a lot of parents don’t even care. People that didn’t even show up for conferences.

Parent Support

As the interview progressed, teachers were asked to talk about challenges they faced at Rhodes. Parent support emerged as a common challenge among the teachers. Asked if the current clientele was more challenging or less, Fran was quick to reply, “Much more challenging. It’s much more challenging. There’s more working parents. Both mother and father working. There are more single parents. There isn’t a lot of parental interaction. There isn’t a lot of parent support now in these days.” Fran shared memories of a time when parents were visible

throughout the building, “You’d have parents all over the place. You’d have parents in classrooms, you’d have parents running stuff off, and you’d have parents bringing in goodies for the teachers.”

The teachers at Rhodes seemed to share a common view of parent support as deficient. In some instances, teachers went so far as to believe that parents were not only unsupportive but unable to understand schooling and the value of education. Jennifer Kyle spoke to the limitations of the ELL parents,

I don’t think they understand what they’re striving for. I don’t think the parents understand our standards. They don’t understand the whole thing. They don’t understand when we write vocabulary. I don’t think parents get it because they’re used to reading A, B, C. I don’t think they understand what all that means at all. They just get the report card. When I sit for report cards and I try to explain. They have no idea. They don’t even get it. So that means that I think that if they don’t get it. What’s going to push the kids to get it? They just don’t understand.

Dana Nichols attributed the lack of parent support to the lack of community building. “We don’t have enough back up. We don’t have enough community building and that’s a big part and if you don’t have that parental support you need it to at least feel safe and successful throughout your education.” Both Nichols and Kyle talked about the number of Rhodes parents who are incarcerated and the negative influence of single parent families. During our discussion of parent support, Jennifer Kyle was asked to explain who was responsible for school failure. When asked to assign a percentage to the system, teachers, students, parents or society, Kyle responded, “I would say 50% is the parent.”

On Those Advantaged and/or Disadvantaged

The three teachers interviewed offered different opinions about who was advantaged and disadvantaged by the initiatives, most of which focused on ISAT preparation. Dana Nichols believed that children who remained consistently enrolled at Rhodes benefitted from the school

improvement initiatives because they received more consistent instruction than students who had higher levels of residential mobility. Nichols shared a unique perspective on those disadvantaged by school reforms. In this current context, special education students were disadvantaged according to Nichols. As a special education teacher, Nichols expressed a sense of futility in engaging special education students in ISAT preparation instead of focusing on their individual learning needs. When asked to do ISAT practice with the special education students, Nichols stated that she explained that she would not use her time with special education students to do that because “they need to write a sentence. They need to learn how to add and subtract. They can’t learn how to do all these five-paragraph essays. They need to learn their basic skills.”

Summary

The story of Rhodes Elementary seemed conflicted at best, with two different narratives occurring simultaneously. Teachers presented one narrative and the building principal shared another. Commonalities were notes, however, as both factions discussed an overreliance on intervention programming, a narrowed curricular focus, and a strong emphasis on test preparation at the expense of innovative and student-centered learning. Although Rhodes and Ferris Elementary Schools share nearly identical collective efficacy scores, the schools offer considerably different insight into the nature of collective efficacy at each site. In many ways, these two narratives suggest competing realities co-existing with an average level of collective efficacy. These different narratives warrant further critical review and highlight the importance of qualitative research methodologies to better understand the effects of collective efficacy on school improvement efforts.

Ferris Elementary School

Ferris is a small neighborhood elementary school that serves approximately 350 students. It is located in an urban area located north of a major Midwestern city. The school is situated in a low income neighborhood with small single-family homes and apartment buildings surrounding the property. More than 70% of Ferris Elementary School's student body receives free and reduced lunch. The building is dated, dim and in need of updating, like many schools that serve low-income, mostly minority students. The facility is well-kept, though, and the exterior is simple yet properly maintained. Principal Rhea has been at Ferris for the past 7 years.

In the past 10 years, Ferris, like the other schools in this study, experienced a significant shift in demographics but it served a significantly more diverse population than did Rhodes. In 1999, 46% of the student population was white, 39% was black and 13% was Hispanic. Few children qualified as LEP. In 2010, the white population was less than 15% of the school and a growing number of children qualified for ELL services. The LEP student population increased from less than 3% in 1999 to 15% in 2010. In 2010, approximately 35% of the students were Hispanic with African-American student population remaining constant at approximately 40%.

Academically, Ferris has made significant improvements raising test scores from 62% in 2002 to 70% in 2010. During this time period, scores have increased steadily in small increments and the school earned recognition on several occasions from the Illinois Honor Roll—Spotlight School, Academic Improvement. Ferris has repeatedly earned Illinois Honor Roll recognition as an Illinois Spotlight School.

Ferris Elementary is unique in its open school concept and the perceived increased collegiality that results. Despite having significantly higher risk factors than Rhodes, Ferris has a higher collective efficacy score. Ferris is not only competitive academically with Rhodes, it far

surpassed Willow and Thoreau schools academically, even though the three schools are located in the same district and receive the same staff development and instructional supports.

The story of Ferris, while told by two administrators and three teachers, has similar elements and themes. All three of the teachers interviewed at Ferris Elementary were veteran teachers who shared frustrations, similar to those of the Rhodes teachers, related to the difficulty of the task. The Ferris staff, however, did not express a lack of agency or belief in their capacity. They also did not attribute their collective success or failures to their building leadership but to their efforts as a team that persists even when faced with challenges.

Academic Achievement

At Ferris, Principal Rhea and two of the teachers interviewed credited RtI initiatives currently being implemented with increases in student achievement. RtI was, however, just one of several key factors leading to their increases in student performance on state testing. Lynn Dennis, a veteran with more than 20 years of service at Ferris, attributed the school's success to a number of initiatives, including guided reading, RtI, staff development and a staff that "really works and complements each other and keeps plugging away." Deb Johnson echoed Lynn's sentiment when asked to explain the reasons behind their success. She also brought to light a unique architectural feature, an open school concept that facilitates the team work she extolled. "Being in the type of building that we're in, we're kind of forced to collaborate even though none of us are against it. It's just a good atmosphere and you sort of have to bounce things off of each other. It's contagious, if you will." At Ferris, the majority of classrooms are open, with only partitions or bookcases defining the classrooms. As a result, teachers and students hear each other teaching throughout the day. In some cases, teachers are able to see into each other's rooms and solicit opinions when necessary.

The students and staff at Ferris also benefitted from Reading First, a federal reading grant that provided professional development, staff and resources to improve early literacy, specifically targeting grades K-3. Lynn Dennis echoed the important of quality reading instruction and discussed the following reading intervention programming.

I would call it more of a guided reading; however, it was specific materials that was geared at least two grade levels below, working on the same skills as you were working on in the regular reading series so it complemented that. If you were working on inference you would work on inference in small group as well plus we also then continued with all of our other things including guided reading and stuff. Reading all the time.

The Reading First grant was a substantial endeavor that provided reading and literacy coaches at every building in the district. This coaching approach afforded teachers ongoing professional development as well as resources to support their daily literacy instruction. Deb Johnson shared the different ways that the reading and literacy coaches supported teachers. For example, the coaches would serve as resource persons for teachers to ask questions about fluency strategies or comprehension assessments. Additionally, each school received a resource room with materials that could be checked out for use in the classroom. If needed, coaches would come into the classroom and model new strategies, using scaffolding to aid the teachers as they tried new methods of teaching reading. Johnson did speak to the limitations of the Reading First grant as well, noting that the emphasis was primarily on grades K-2 with 3rd grade getting minimal attention. Johnson also expressed “frustration because there are still students that are from the Reading First era that . . . are still struggling despite that extensive early literacy focus.”

RtI continued to emerge in the conversation with all of the Ferris interviewees. Lynn Dennis explained their approach to intervention,

This year with RtI we’ve implemented quite a few other interventions so some kids could be in three interventions. I mean some people may say that we overdid the interventions but if we saw a need and the teacher saw a need and if we had the personnel to do it. So

there are still the same interventions we did last year but there's also a comprehension kit. We have some programs that work on phonemic skills. A lot of it is focused at 3-6 because that's the test-scoring time but there are also some pilots.

Principal Rhea focused on the importance of RtI at Ferris Elementary, noting that their school began implementing RtI before the district incorporated the initiative. Using standardized testing data, Rhea and her teams “pinpointed where needy kids were and gave them intervention services.” Initial efforts utilized the reading series and then “everybody got an extra dose of reading.” To support these efforts, paraprofessionals were teaching alongside the teachers within the same classrooms, “so there could be 12 kids getting intervention services and the rest of the kids were given an activity,” while the teachers and paraprofessionals worked with the children on reading programming. Because scripted programs had been adopted, none of the interviewees seemed to question the use of paraprofessionals to teach the students with the greatest needs.

Dee Carter confirmed the narrowing of the curriculum to improve test scores. To support classroom instruction, Carter highlighted “the Wilson Reading Program,” which she and three other teachers were trained to deliver. Two Wilson teachers were assigned at the primary level and two were assigned to the intermediate grade level. Dee explained the implementation of Wilson, “Some of us pull out in smaller groups. Some of us go in and do it with the whole class.” Principal Rhea verified Carter's perception by saying, “Everything is all about reading. All day long and trying to incorporate reading into science and social studies, as well as in the daily reading.” While the curriculum has been considerably narrowed, Ferris students continue to make adequate yearly progress on state testing.

Staff Development

Bandura (1997) identified mastery experience and vicarious experiences as two key sources for building collective efficacy. To investigate the nature of collective efficacy in the

identified schools, staff members were asked to discuss staff development at their respective schools. One of Dee Carter's first responses to the question about what the school has done to raise achievement was, "I know as teachers we've gone to a lot more in-service training." At Ferris Elementary School, staff development opportunities were available but limited, and appeared to focus on reading. In previous years, a substantial amount of professional development was available to K-3 teachers through the Reading First grant. That limited focus on reading instruction seemed ironically directly linked to their improved performance on the ISAT. Dr. Rhea, the building principal explained,

Professional development . . . they don't have a lot of opportunities to go out and do that because our money is limited right now. It seems like in the past when the district was not performing as well we had more state money. Once the district started turning themselves around there was less state money. So with less school improvement money, we've had less opportunity to allow our teachers to go out to in-services or professional development in the outside realm.

The other interviews did return repeatedly to the importance of the Reading First grant they were awarded to address their poor student performance. Ironically, when student achievement on the ISAT was not adequate, the district was eligible for substantial funds to provide programming and training. Once student achievement began to improve, those funds were no longer available and sustainability fell to the district. Deb Johnson saw the Reading First grant as a key factor in increasing student achievement district wide,

Our district got the Reading First grant, so we took it very seriously and we received a lot of professional development, particularly in the primary grades. It sort of altered the way we were teaching reading. A lot of the stuff we were doing already but it kind of gave us a purpose for doing that so we were incorporating the same things in every classroom so I think there's just a lot better focus on our reading instruction. Again I think a lot of it just has to do with the different staff and how we're all here to help the students. There isn't a negativity and you know we're trying things and if you notice your co-workers doing it and it works, we do that. But I think specifically in primary, Reading First was a big.

What Deb Johnson was describing was vicarious experience, a source of collective efficacy that is developed when people witness the success of another person in circumstances similar to theirs. Lynn Dennis also explained the importance of the staff development opportunities available under the Reading First grant and seemed discouraged by their continuing efforts to address the needs of their students without that support, “We’ve really tried . . . we’ve changed reading programs. This is our second year in a new reading series, and so I think that we’ve looked at when we did Reading First a while back, everyone was trained in that.” Still at Ferris, staff did have a number of staff development opportunities related to reading instruction and intervention. Principal Rhea provided an example that “We had people from Macmillan come in and train the teachers.” She also explained that she meets with teacher teams to review data and discuss student progress, an on the job training approach.

Lynn Dennis gave additional examples of staff development opportunities that focused on RtI and reading instruction, “We continued with RTI and all the other things. It’s a smattering of things and I think our staff does a nice job even though it’s small. Probably not the kind of in-service you’d like to have. We kind of take it to heart and kind of go with it explained.” This is a staff, according to all of the interviewees that take initiative when provided with an opportunity and training. Dee Carter overviewed the different intervention programs that are available and that staff are being trained with, “We’re doing a lot of Read Naturally. . . . A lot of the teachers, even our gym teacher, is trying to do Read Naturally. We also do Earobics. We have Compass, too, which all of us are trained in.” Carter, a special education teacher, provided additional insight into the different training and programming available to specialists. In contrast to the Rhodes’ teachers, the Ferris staff readily discussed several school wide initiatives and reviewed

specific programming efforts at the school. Each teacher confirmed what her colleagues had discussed and a clear picture of school improvement initiatives emerged.

Impact of ISAT Testing

The primary reason for narrowing the curricular focus to emphasize reading was to increase student performance on the ISAT. While Dee Carter was discussing a decline in staff morale, she recognized the role of high stakes testing, explaining that teachers do not have “enough teaching time” and instead “feel that we are teaching to the ISAT instead of making things fun and exciting.” Lynn Dennis shared Dee Carter’s sense of restriction, “I think we have let a lot of things fall by the wayside that you might have done. We’ve left excitement or fun out of school . . . at the door because you have to reading.” Both explained that test preparation requirements mandated strict adherence to a timeline, “If you don’t get through . . . even the math. If we don’t get through this, this, and this, they won’t be ready and you only have until March” when ISAT will be administered. For low income, minority children, this limited scope of instruction that excludes critical thinking and creativity is unsettling in its good intentions that are disadvantaging the students, who most need a quality education.

Many of the RtI initiatives were aimed at improving test scores and underscored the impact of high stakes testing. Lynn Dennis discussed the heavy emphasis on intervention programming,

This year with RtI, we’ve implemented quite a few other interventions so some kids could be in three interventions. Some people may say that we overdid the interventions but if we saw a need and the teacher saw and need and if we had the personnel to do it, we did . . . a lot of it is focused at 3rd-6th grades because that’s the test-scoring time.

Throughout the discussion of RtI programming, only Dee Carter questioned the efficacy of such intensive intervention and the burden placed on the teachers to coordinate these programs. Dee commented on teacher perceptions of the continually revolving programming,

saying, “Everything is thrown at us. We have to do this. We have to change this. We have to accommodate. We have to take this program . . . We have students who are in seven different programs.” Dee further identified this use of multiple interventions as ineffective since teachers cannot determine which intervention is responsible for the student progress or lack thereof. Dee attributed the need to increase ISAT scores with the decision to use prescriptive programming and, in many cases, to implement multiple programs with one student.

Deb Johnson also perceived the need to improve ISAT performance as the critical determinant of resource allocation, with teachers having to take a triage approach to meeting student needs. For example, Deb discussed the use of funding for afterschool tutoring, “I just think offering the tutoring that we offer is ISAT tutoring so it’s the ISAT kids who benefit. There obviously would be students that might benefit from tutoring that aren’t taking the ISAT.” Not only are some students excluded from additional programming, Deb Johnson discussed the lack of resources for students who are performing at level or above level. Each of the interviewees shared their concern that students no longer receive enrichment because all of the school’s limited resources are targeted to increasing test scores.

In addition to the loss of programming for high performing students, teachers expressed frustrations about the restrictions in scheduling and instructional delivery. Deb explained,

I think you feel restricted because there seems to be so much that you are mandated to do . . . you’re supposed to do things a certain way during a certain time and so scheduling is always an issue to some of the things like social studies and science.

Because core instruction in reading and math take precedence, teachers shared that they are expected to integrate social studies and science material into their reading blocks so that additional time can be spent on literacy development. Lynn Dennis addressed the loss of quality instruction as a result of high stakes testing,

We used to do projects. We did research. We did how do you find information if you don't know how to do it. Now it's all about can they read and understand this? It's not using that . . . I don't think. I think that in the long run, yeah, they may do great on the test but I'm not sure that we're creating the kind of student we want.

Staff Beliefs and Attitudes

In general, the staff communicated a sense of collegiality and commitment to student learning. While teachers did acknowledge considerable frustration dealing with the rapid and often overwhelming series of initiatives being implemented, they did convey a belief that their efforts are not in vain. Again and again, the interviewed talked about their sense of team. Lynn Dennis shared that she thinks that:

all of the teachers here . . . we work as a team. We really work and complement each other and keep plugging away. We just don't give up. I mean there may be days we feel like we're not going to be able to make it but we work as hard as we can.

This sense of persistence despite the difficulty of the task demonstrates an efficacious orientation. Typically, individuals and organizations with low efficacy resign themselves to the difficulties at hand. The Ferris staff did not seem resigned but did acknowledge the reality of an intervention-based approach to teaching and learning. All three teachers discussed the loss of creativity and professional freedom.

Of the three teachers interviewed, Dee Carter spoke most candidly about her frustration with the current system. She did discuss perceived changes in administrative support,

We used to have administrators who supported us in discipline problems, called parents and told them to come pick up their kids and don't bring them back until they're going to follow our rules. We've had administrators support us if a child . . . the rule was if they failed two quarters out of the four, they are retained immediately. Now it's like we still have that policy but nobody follows it. Now we get directives that nobody is going to fail. Well, even though we have all of these programs in place and even though we have the student working three years below their grade level, if they're still not accepting the responsibility, how can you pass somebody?

Lynn Dennis discussed a similar sense of concern, “I just look at how hard it is and sometimes how much is expected of us.” Like many teachers, Dennis has experienced firsthand the rapidly changing context of public education and the increased demands for teachers to make “somebody else perform their best without too many consequences for the students.” When asked if she was proud of her school being recognized by the Illinois Honor Roll, Lynn’s response was telling. She replied, “I think it’s a relief. I don’t know about proud.” Lynn explained that she, like other teachers, just hope they’ve accomplished what needed to be done “because there’s been punishment attached to not making itwho wants to get punished?” The contemporary high stakes accountability system was addressed by several of the interviewees but Lynn Dennis summarized it pointedly,

I guess you’re proud. The whole ISAT thing . . . keeps going and gets you soured on it . . . how much is it really helping? Have you really achieved something that you can be proud of or is it that you’ve just done enough to get by, so no one slaps you on the hand.

Despite the frustrations, Ferris teachers continued to discuss their commitment to serving their students and improving their craft. Working together, the teachers serve as instructional leaders in the building, serving on school improvement teams, providing professional development to each other and building a professional community. That sense of professional teamwork has been pivotal to school wide improvement initiatives. Lynn Dennis highlighted staff beliefs about ownership,

I think that because we have a school improvement team that consists of quite a few teachers, we try to make sure that if the teachers are presenting it and they’ve spent the time on it because of the kind of community we are here, that other teachers will kind of buy into that. Usually that’s the caseI think we work well, if I could say anything about why we do what we do well is because we work as a team. If we didn’t work as a team, if we didn’t like working with each other, I think it would be harder because then there would be blame to go around.

Parent Support

Ferris teachers openly discussed their perceptions about the lack of parent support and involvement. Families were perceived as deficient by the staff who critiqued both their capacity and will to support their students. From the main office to the classroom, the parent narrative was a story of perceived inadequacy and deficit. Principal Rhea, overviewed the issues facing the parent community.

We have 70% low income . . . a lot of our families seem to have some unemployment problems right now and they seem to move a little bit here and there and they get up and move and leave and they don't work with their children so that seems to be a big issue.

Dee Carter shared Rhea's concern and further critiqued the Ferris parent community,

I think it's a lot of the parents . . . nothing is being done at home any more. I know family is kind of a unique word but regardless I think you can still support the school, you can still get on your kid and you can still have high expectations. I don't see that anymore with parents and I have said that I have a feeling we're going to become a glorified babysitter. This day and age there are a lot of students out there that have where we're glorified babysitters.

As with Rhodes, teachers embraced a certain nostalgia when discussing how supportive the parent community was in the past. Examples of parent support included attendance at PTO meetings, open house attendance and parent-teacher conferences. Rather than consider redefining parent involvement, teachers seemed to hold firmly to traditional notions of parent involvement typical of middle class or affluent families. Changes in school demographics were mentioned when discussing the limitations of the parent community. When discussing changing demographics at Ferris, Lynn Dennis noted that she felt achievement had decline as a result. She further explained:

Well because you might not always have . . . the kids don't have the background. Before I think we thought they had more background knowledge. They come in. You got to assume they don't know anything and just work from there and continue to review.

Several of the teachers did discuss student academic achievement in terms of the students' limited family supports, and Lynn Dennis went so far as to place the onus for school failure on the students as a result. She explained, "If you get a kid in your class you might say, how did he get here and not know this? We know that it wasn't for lack of so and so not teaching it it's just who the kid is. No reason to lay blame." Without realizing it, blame was being laid on the student and his family. The assumption that children bring no knowledge or experience from home is shortsighted at best, disrespectful at its worst. Dee Carter's comments spoke directly to a deficit model of thinking when she shared,

I think really just giving them all of these programs that we have available to us. And a lot of these minority kids are lower functioning kids because they don't have that academic teaching from home. They don't have that cultural experience of going to a zoo and things like that so we give them a lot of these programs that might introduce them to things they don't get that you and I would have had as we grew up.

While few, if any teachers, agreed with the survey statement that "America is a white, middle-class society, and children need to learn those rules in order to be successful," their perceptions of parent support and student's lived experiences seem to contrast those results.

On Those Advantaged and/or Disadvantaged

Each teacher was asked to think about who was advantaged or disadvantaged by school improvement initiatives. The three teachers all shared a belief that their students benefitted from their school wide initiatives. Lynn Dennis asserted that the staff as a whole works to keep the students as their primary focus when deciding to move forward with an instructional initiative. Deb Johnson paused before responding and stated that she hope that all of the kids were being advantaged by their efforts but clarified, "definitely the most high risk children for sure . . . because we have so many interventions. And I would say those that are on the cusp as well."

A common refrain among the teachers was heard when asked who was disadvantaged. Both teachers and administrators expressed concerns that high performing students were not benefitting in the current system. In response to the question of who had benefitted the least, Deb Johnson replied, “The exceptional children. The ones that some might term gifted because there is such a focus on RtI . . . because we seem to have so many that are at risk or on the cusp there’s not a lot of programming to challenge them in their learning.”

According to Dee Carter, students “who are falling through the cracks have benefitted because . . . the percentage of low students and special education students have gotten better.” When asked if there are kids who aren’t getting some things they should, Lynn Dennis, explained,

I would say so. We kind of let those kids who are doing okay . . . we just kind of let them do okay and not necessarily push them. I think that we fall short because our focus has to be on always making sure that one more year you’ve got to add five more percent making it.

While discussing students who have been either advantaged or disadvantaged, Deb Johnson brought an interesting perspective to the discussion. When asked how the system is benefitting minority children, Deb discussed changing expectations that seemed to accompany changing demographics.

I think you just start working with kids and you realize that you need to make something work and over the time you just change. Sometimes it’s changing expectations. I don’t know that we lower expectations . . . I think you just look at what kids have and what they don’t have . . . You just kind of change with what’s there. You know what your expectations were and to be honest I don’t think I’m teaching to the level I was 20 years ago.

Summary

At Ferris Elementary School, a common narrative was offered that worked to unify the view from the principal’s office with the view from the classroom. Those interviewed shared

their changed daily reality that mandated strict adherence to standardized test preparation, an emphasis on intervention programming and an increasingly narrow curriculum. Like Rhodes Elementary, Ferris engaged in pathologizing practices based on deficit paradigms, but they also articulated a sense of common purpose. The interviewees all spoke to school wide initiatives and the staff development that supported those efforts. Additionally, the staff at Ferris did not seem despondent or resigned to the task at hand. Instead they shared examples of staff collaboration and cohesion that included their building principal. Despite facing a higher percentage of low income, minority and ELL students, Ferris demonstrated a slightly higher level of collective efficacy than Rhodes School. Additionally, Ferris students performed at or above the level of students at Rhodes. As suggested earlier, the existence of contrasting narratives despite similar collective efficacy scores supports a more considered, qualitative approach to understanding belief systems in schools.

Conclusion

This section addresses the third research question, what are the underlying belief systems and tacit assumptions about students on which collective efficacy is based? Both schools are comprised of minority-majority student populations with a significant percentage of low income students. Additionally, staff demographics are largely homogenous with white, middle-class female teachers in the majority. The six teachers interviewed in this phase of the study were representative of that majority—all white, middle-class women.

Given this lack of racial and ethnic diversity among the staff and the significant racial, ethnic and class gaps between the students and the staff, attention to cultural competence and diversity training was notably absent. In fact, both survey and interview data confirm that those

differences and the beliefs about those differences remain unquestioned and unexamined. While the two schools that participated in the study did share adherence to the deficit thinking model, with programming designed to address the deficiencies in their student populations, there were significant differences in their “stories.” Both sets of teachers acknowledged that programming, both educational and social, seemed mechanistic and embraced the current conventional wisdom of implementing “scientifically-based” interventions. Without realizing it, schools were embracing pathologizing practices driven by state and federal mandates to perform on standardized tests. It is critical to note that the interventions are designed to assist the flawed students and place the onus for achievement on the student. Minimal attention seemed to be paid to the improvement of instruction.

The story of Rhodes Elementary School was characterized by low efficacy, an external locus of control, limited opportunities for staff development and a continuum of pathologizing practices. The four sources of efficacy did not appear to be present at Rhodes Elementary School. Ferris Elementary School, on the other hand, expressed stronger efficacy, an internal locus of control and ongoing opportunities for staff development despite an overreliance on standardized testing and intervention program typical of pathologizing practices. Ferris demonstrates varying levels of the four sources of efficacy. Despite having nearly identical collective efficacy scores, the stories of Ferris and Rhodes revealed a different reality behind those scores.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the previous chapters, I presented the background and purpose of this study, an overview of the existing literature, the research design and conceptual framework, and the findings of both the survey data and interview data of educators in the identified schools. In this chapter, I provide a summary of my findings as guided by collective efficacy as a theoretical framework. In addition to a discussion of the findings, I conclude by identifying implications of this study and offering recommendations for further research.

Overview of the Study

My primary purpose in this study was to examine the nature of collective efficacy as well as the underlying belief systems and tacit assumptions in eight minority-majority schools serving low income students in three Illinois school districts. This study was guided by three research questions designed to explore the extent to which selected schools demonstrate collective efficacy and to gain an understanding of the underlying belief systems and tacit assumptions of educators in those schools. The following are the research questions I investigated:

1. To what extent do selected Illinois Honor Roll schools demonstrate collective efficacy?
2. What is the nature of collective efficacy present in the selected schools and to what extent is it present?
3. What are the underlying belief systems and tacit assumptions about students on which collective efficacy is based?

In the first chapter, I introduced the study and discussed the background of the study, focusing specifically on the persistence of the academic achievement gap for low income and minority children. In Chapter 2, I reviewed the existing literature on the evolution of collective efficacy theory as well as an overview of the deficit thinking model. In this chapter I identified

gaps in the existing literature which this study sought to address. My particular emphasis was on identifying practical applications for schools seeking to better serve low income, minority children without relying on current pathologizing practices associated with high stakes testing. In Chapter 3, I outlined my research design, described the site and participant selection processes, outlined data collection sources, reviewed my data analyses and discussed ethical considerations. Through the administration of a survey instrument and a series of interviews, I examined my research questions. A mixed methods approach was used to examine not only the nature of collective efficacy and to investigate existing underlying belief systems such as deficit thinking.

In Chapter 4, I reported phase one results of the survey data and the resulting statistical analysis. Collective efficacy scores for the eight selected sites confirmed previous research on collective efficacy, student achievement and poverty. Perhaps surprisingly, the eight selected schools demonstrated similar levels of collective efficacy with no significant variance among them. I initially expected to find a wide range of collective efficacy scores among the eight schools selected for this phase of the research. Given differences in student enrollment, academic performance as measured by state testing and district resources, I expected several schools to exhibit below average levels of collective efficacy with scores ranging into average.

Unexpectedly, all eight schools scored in the average range. While these results presented an additional challenge in site selection for phase two and phase three, they also underscored the importance of using a mixed methods approach to better understanding the nature of collective efficacy in schools serving low income, minority children.

In Chapter 5, I presented the qualitative data from phase two, the semi-structured interviews of school administrators in four identified sites. Through a series of semi-structured interviews with school administrators, I further examined the level of collective efficacy in the

four identified schools as well as the nature of collective efficacy demonstrated at each site. Common themes emerged at each of the sites with administrators describing the present state of education in public schools serving low income, minority children. Similar accounts of narrowed curricular aims, adherence to test preparation practices, a heavy reliance on RtI and the resulting identification of cultural and economic deficits among students were provided. Deficit thinking governed much of the administrative mindset and appeared to inform practice. Only one of the administrators interviewed questioned the status quo and articulated an understanding of culturally responsive practices. In general, the educational leaders demonstrated and articulated a commitment to the scientific management of schooling.

In Chapter 6, I presented the interview data from phase three of the study, telling the story of two schools through the narratives of teachers from each school. My respondents came from two different school districts serving small urban areas in northern Illinois. The teachers interviewed at each school presented distinctly different narratives. Each school had its own story despite sharing a common collective efficacy score. Teachers at Rhodes Elementary School shared a common and, at times, overwhelming sense of frustration and futility that was largely influenced by deficit thinking and perceived antagonism with their building principal. The Ferris staff articulated an understanding of their challenges yet they seemed motivated by staff collegiality and support in the form of staff development and available resources. While their individual stories revealed beliefs and practices steeped in deficit thinking, they expressed a commitment to raising expectations for their students and themselves.

Through the series of interviews, I examined the nature of collective efficacy in the selected schools, investigating existing sources of collective efficacy and seeking to understand underlying belief systems and tacit assumptions. The interviews with building administrators

revealed school reform initiatives that are harsh, punitive and inadequate for low income, minority children. The narratives of both teachers and administrators illustrate how the high stakes testing climate of NCLB has resulted in many schools narrowing their instructional focus and taking a scientific management approach to teaching and learning that is harmful to students and our system of education. In this chapter, I review my research questions and discuss my findings. Based on the discussion of my findings, I offer insights about what I learned and make recommendations for both collective efficacy and deficit thinking as well as suggestions for further research and practical applications.

The Promise of Collective Efficacy for School Improvement

In Goddard et al.(2000), collective teacher efficacy is defined as “an emergent group-level attribute, the product of the interactive dynamics of the group members” (p. 482). The emergent nature of the attribute is more than a sum of individual group members. Bandura identifies “the groups’ shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment” (Bandura, 1997, p. 477). After a decade of scientifically-based instructional programming and mechanistic approaches to public education, particularly for low income, minority students, the achievement gap for poor and minority students remains a reality with little promise of remedy.

For educational leaders, another approach to school improvement may be warranted. Without an examination of the beliefs and attitudes of educators serving in schools serving low income, minority students, deficit thinking is likely to remain a dominant paradigm. Bandura’s theory of collective efficacy offers promise for educational leaders seeking to understand agency. The emerging research combined with an existing body of literature on efficacy may contribute

to new ways of thinking about school reform. Critiquing a flawed system may seem like heady work, but I continue to look for ways that we can immediately realize our human agency to improve achievement for low income and minority students, those most disadvantaged by the current system. In asking and answering difficult questions that interrogate advantage and disadvantage, belief systems, tacit assumptions and pathologizing practices, I would argue that educators must embrace their individual and collective sense of agency to create a more just social order that cannot be realized by maintaining the status quo. A more informed model of collective efficacy has the potential to begin addressing these issues in more comprehensive, coherent and meaningful ways for schools.

Commonalities of Schools Serving Low Income, Minority Children

The schools selected for this study not only serve low income, minority students, they have much in common in their approaches to educating those children. Their stories are stories of redefined educational aims, narrowed curricular approaches that rely on academic intervention and the strong presence of deficit thinking. Educators serving in the minority-majority schools studied were predominantly white, middle class, and female. This cultural divide remains wide and little was done to develop cultural competence and an understanding of the diversity within the schools. Glass (2007) asserts that public schools need to embrace democratic education to secure the development of an educated, engaged and critical citizenry that is prepared to participate in and maintain a healthy, pluralistic democracy.

By asking and answering a seemingly benign question—”what kind of citizen is developed through schooling?” (p. 105), Glass provides a lens through which school leaders should view their respective schools. The critical responses to his questions are less than benign,

however, and offer an indictment of the current system that is largely predicated on dominant ideologies. He asserts that schools have a long history of creating the haves and have-nots by positioning blame for school failure in the individual student. The schools included in this study seemed to reinforce these notions, raising questions about the types of citizens we are creating. After identifying the types of citizenship we are currently fostering, Glass argues that “education requires a different kind of somebody to be formed through the process of schooling” (2007, p. 106). To shift the existing dominant hegemonic practices of public schooling, educational leaders need to be better equipped to identify these hegemonic practices by examining the underlying beliefs and tacit assumptions of their fellow educators.

Underlying Beliefs and Tacit Assumptions

Perhaps the most concerning underlying assumption that persisted in this study was the notion that adequate performance on ISAT is an appropriate educational aim. This reductionist view of education for low income and minority children is negligent at best, harmful at worst. The refusal to see race and ethnicity as pressing issues was short-sighted and present in the schools studies. Harris (1999) more clearly makes the case that the aims of education “are contextual, political, normative, dynamic and *contested* (p. 3). Harris (1999) also argues that given the “role of the state in legitimating and de-legitimizing knowledge,” understanding that education is an extension of the state is critical (p. 11). As the state is a historically dynamic entity, education is “always being structured and positioned, and restructured and repositioned, to the state’s . . . strategic needs of conservation and capital accumulation” (p. 10). Only with this knowledge can we think critically about whose interests are represented by educational aims of the day. In the first phase of this study, all eight schools demonstrated collective efficacy scores

within the average range. There is a need to examine organizational expectations that may lead to inflated collective efficacy scores based on differing educational aims. In this current era of high-stakes testing and increased public scrutiny, persistent achievement gaps do not go unnoticed. How those gaps are explained will be critical to the success of students in those subgroups

While the survey data affirmed previous research on collective efficacy, providing researchers with seemingly simple, straight-forward scores measuring their collective efficacy. The interview data provided a complexity and problematic understanding of that simplified score. For the two schools, Ferris Elementary and Rhodes Elementary, with nearly identical collective efficacy scores, teacher and administrator narratives provided sharp contrasts in their belief systems. Additionally, typically unspoken assumptions were disclosed during discussions of programming and interventions. These tacit assumptions seemed to work in direct opposition to the promise of collective efficacy as a framework for improving schools.

Another belief system positioned the blame for school failure on the students the organization purports to serve. Tozer et al. concisely and effectively argue that we cannot respond to social and educational inequalities unless we understand them. To foster a greater understanding of those factors, Tozer et al. (2004) provide an in-depth overview of the following theories: genetic inferiority theory, cultural deficit theory, and cultural subordination theory. By positioning the three theories in their respective social and historical contexts, Tozer et al. effectively introduce and discuss the salient characteristics of each theory. As a school administrator in a minority-majority elementary school, I have heard each of these three theories offered, at one time or another in a variety of contexts.

In their review of Jean Anyon's study of five elementary schools in New Jersey, Tozer, Senese and Violas (2004) provide a practical application of cultural subordination theory,

demonstrating that the beliefs, attitudes and tacit assumptions present in schools serving students from different socioeconomic statuses yield unequal results. Anyon's study makes a convincing argument that these disparities in schooling are antithetical to the notion that education is "the great equalizer" in our society. This discussion strengthened the argument that the status quo must be challenged and challenged by educators who have an understanding of the factors leading to educational inequality, if we are truly committed to socially just and democratic education. As American schools become increasingly diverse, educators will need to better understand the theories discussed. The schools selected for study all scored within the average range of collective efficacy despite the challenges addressed by the teachers and administrators in those schools. Critiques of changing demographics, minimal parent support and capacity, and perceived student deficits dominated the conversation as educators shared their stories.

Recommendations Related to Collective Efficacy

1. A more expansive understanding of the sources of collective efficacy is needed for effective integration of the theoretical framework in staff development and school improvement planning. Goddard's (2000) simplified model of collective efficacy needs to consider the expressed goal of an organization. If the goal driving organizational agency is lessened due to deficit thinking and pathologizing practices, then collective efficacy is not an effective determinant of success.
2. A more comprehensive discussion of the sources of collective efficacy and a measurement instrument of those sources is needed to better understand ways to develop stronger collective efficacy in schools.
3. Measures of collective efficacy need to more closely examine the aims of education. Collective efficacy as an organizational groups' shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment.

Recommendations Related to Deficit Thinking

1. Given the possibility that collective efficacy may co-exist or even be founded on the deficit thinking model, a measure of deficit thinking would be useful for educational

leaders seeking to create more equitable and social just schools for low income, minority children.

2. Educational leaders need to increase their awareness and understanding of deficit thinking and the pathologizing practices that often accompany it.
3. To better serve low income, minority children, school leaders need to recognize the prevalence and power of deficit thinking in order to move to a more culturally competent approach to teaching and learning.

Recommendations for a More Informed Model

1. To better inform a more balanced model of collective efficacy in an educational context, deficit thinking should be represented as counterproductive to building collective efficacy.
2. A model of collective efficacy is needed that clearly identifies and measures stated and unstated organizational goals.
3. The measurement of collective efficacy needs to include and weigh organizational goals.
4. Educators need to be cautious about embracing simplified theoretical models without closely examining the intended and unintended consequences of doing so.

Implications for Further Research

From 1998-2009, more than 218 studies of teacher and collective efficacy were conducted (Klassen et al., 2011). This study attempted to fill an identified gap in the literature for more diverse methodologies. Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy and Hoy (1998) reported that qualitative research on teacher efficacy was lacking and necessary to provide a deeper understanding of teacher belief systems. While this study explored the nature of collective efficacy in low income, minority schools that earned Illinois Honor Roll recognition, additional research is needed to better understand the sources of collective efficacy as well as the practical application of these sources.

Additional research is also needed to better understand the interplay between collective efficacy and deficit thinking. In the schools studies, a clear deficit thinking paradigm was evident despite the schools demonstrating average ranges of collective efficacy. As an educational practitioner interested in collective efficacy theory as a means of informing school improvement processes, a measure of deficit thinking is needed to understand the relationship between stated and implied belief systems that may successfully coexist with efficacious thinking.

Concluding Comments

Glanz (2007) championed a call to action as an imperative for school leaders. With mounting public hostility towards public schools and the educators who serve in them, school leaders must be equipped to support and protect teachers while meeting the needs of a changing student population.

Unless . . . school administrators and other practitioners who supervise teachers, are ready, willing and able to assert responsibilities for best practice in supervision through transformational leadership the educational landscape will remain in its transitory and vulnerable state, inconsequential at best, destructive at worst. (p. 115)

Hoff, Yoder and Hoff (2006) also found that educational leaders are not adequately prepared to lead schools to change the social order. They studied prospective school leaders, current teachers, and found that they claim little responsibility for promoting social justice, especially when social change may challenge local norms. Responses indicated that their “perspective is not broad enough to understand fully the social responsibility Counts advocated” (p. 239).

This study is yet another affirmation that school leaders need to be prepared to embrace their individual and organizational agency. After a decade of focusing on mechanistic, intervention-based approaches to teaching low income, minority children, a new approach is needed. As a school principal who has worked diligently to implement, with fidelity, this

intervention-based, technical model, I understand its limitations and its implications. As a result, I have begun to look more closely at the belief systems that inform our decision making in schools. Collective efficacy, or an organization's belief in its capacity to enact change, offers promise for improving our schools but it is not realizing that promise at this time. Using a mixed methodology to explore the extent to which the selected schools demonstrate collective efficacy as well as the nature of collective efficacy present in those schools provided me with unexpected insights about underlying belief systems and tacit assumptions about students on which that efficacy is based.

Prior to this study, I believed that schools, particularly schools serving low income, minority-majority student populations, would only increase their collective efficacy if they worked to dismantle deficit thinking and made concerted efforts to challenge preconceived notions about the students they served. I expected to find specific, school wide initiatives that addressed issues of race and class in this subset of schools. On all accounts, I was mistaken. Instead I discovered that not only did these schools have remarkably similar collective efficacy scores in the average range, they did so while engaging in pathologizing practices guided by deficit thinking. Although I was initially disappointed to realize that average levels of collective efficacy could coexist with theories of inequality as manifested by deficit thinking, I have come to understand the importance of continuing this research, working toward a more balanced model of collective efficacy that accounts for underlying beliefs and tacit assumptions about students, a model that serves to dismantle deficit thinking and expose pathologizing practices. Difficult questions need to be asked and answered before adopting collective efficacy theory as a framework for school improvement.

To better understand collective efficacy as a theoretical framework for school improvement, it is critical to thoroughly interrogate the courses of action teachers in a given school enact to improve student achievement, especially as they relate to pervasive deficit views of the students they serve. Equally important is a more thorough and critical examination of the goals teachers establish for their students. In the case of deficit thinking, the resulting goals and instructional practices are often pathologizing and reductionist. For example, in the schools studied pathologizing practices included a narrowed curriculum, lowered academic expectations and an almost exclusive focus on state testing.

That collective teacher efficacy can coexist with deficit thinking is problematic for school improvement efforts based on collective efficacy theory. The utility of collective efficacy as a framework for school improvement is questionable for school leaders working to realize a socially just education and to understand the issues confronting schools serving diverse populations. A deeper interrogation and a measurement of deficit thinking needs to be conducted to better articulate the relationship between collective efficacy and deficit thinking in elementary schools serving increasing diverse student populations. My future research efforts will focus on developing such a model that can be further contextualized to provide school leaders with practical, useful applications for staff development and school improvement.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Original Goddard et al. 21-Item Collective Efficacy Scale (Goddard, 2002, p. 102)

| Number | Item | GC+ | GC- | TA+ | TA- |
|--------|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| CTE1 | Teachers in this school have what it takes to get the children to learn. | X | | | |
| CTE2 | Teachers in this school are able to get through to difficult students. | X | | | |
| CTE3 | If a child doesn't learn something the first time teachers will try another way. | X | | | |
| CTE4 | Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their students. | X | | | |
| CTE5 | Teachers in this school really believe every child can learn. | X | | | |
| CTE6 | If a child doesn't want to learn teachers here give up. | | X | | |
| CTE7 | Teachers here need more training to know how to deal with these students. | | X | | |
| CTE8 | Teachers in this school think there are some students that no one can reach. | | X | | |
| CTE9 | Teachers here don't have the skills needed to produce meaningful student learning. | | X | | |
| CTE10 | Teachers here fail to reach some students because of poor teaching methods. | | X | | |
| CTE11 | These students come to school ready to learn. | | | X | |
| CTE12 | Homelife provides so many advantages the students here are bound to learn. | | | X | |
| CTE13 | The lack of instructional materials and supplies makes teaching very difficult. | | | | X |
| CTE14 | Students here just aren't motivated to learn. | | | | X |
| CTE15 | The quality of school facilities here really facilitates the teaching and learning process. | | | X | |
| CTE16 | The opportunities in this community help ensure that these students will learn. | | | X | |
| CTE17 | Teachers here are well-prepared to teach the subjects they are assigned to teach. | X | | | |
| CTE18 | Teachers in this school are skilled in various methods of teaching. | X | | | |
| CTE19 | Learning is more difficult at this school because students are worried about their safety. | | | | X |
| CTE20 | Drug and alcohol abuse in the community make learning difficult for students here. | | | | X |
| CTE21 | Teachers in this school do not have the skills to deal with student disciplinary problems. | | X | | |

Note. GC = group competence; TA = task analysis.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

School Context

1. Tell me about your school. (probes: size, demographics, socioeconomics, academic performance, etc.)
2. Discuss your professional experience. (probes: demographic contexts, socioeconomic contexts, previous experiences, etc.)

Task Analysis

3. What are the challenges you face as a teacher and as a school? (probes: changing demographics, NCLB pressure, high stakes testing, parent support, administrative support, resources, etc.)
4. What impact has NCLB and high-stakes testing had on your job as a teacher?
5. How would you characterize parent involvement at your school?
6. How would you characterize community support at your school?
7. How would you describe student readiness to learn at your school?

Group Competence

8. To what do you attribute your school's success earning recognition on the Illinois Honor Roll? (probes: instructional programming, staff development, etc.)
9. Talk about how you believe these changes are implemented school wide and to what extent these are shared beliefs or practices.
10. Talk about how you implement these changes with your students.

Mastery and Vicarious Experience

11. What school improvement initiatives have been implemented to improve academic achievement?
12. What types of staff development are available to staff at your school?

Affective States and Social Persuasion

13. What frustrations do you or your colleagues experience in the school improvement process?
14. How do the teachers in this school get through difficult situations?
15. How would you describe staff morale?
16. Discuss the ways teachers here get through difficult situations and realize academic success.

Tacit Assumptions and Underlying Belief Systems

17. Whom do you believe has been advantaged by the school improvement initiatives that contributed to your Illinois Honor Roll recognition?

18. Whom do you believe has been disadvantaged by the school improvement initiatives that contributed to your Illinois Honor Roll recognition?
19. How have your beliefs and attitudes changed over the past 5-10 years?
20. What do you think are the most significant factors in promoting the success of minority students? (probes: character education, disciplinary interventions, community building, RTI, test preparation, tutoring, etc.)
21. Discuss the strategies this school uses to motivate the students.