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Independently innovative: Teachers and change in successful schools

Mary Halpin Carter

University of New Hampshire, Durham

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INDEPENDENTLY INNOVATIVE:
TEACHERS AND CHANGE IN SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

BY

MARY HALPIN CARTER
B.A., Dartmouth College, 1987
Ed.M. Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1990

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

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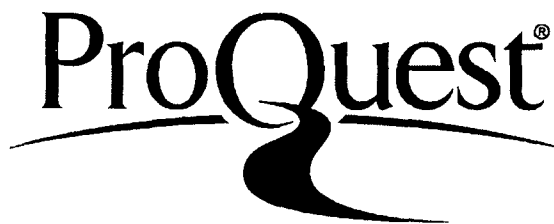
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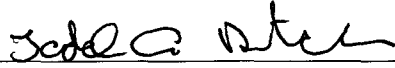
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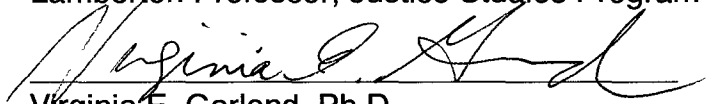
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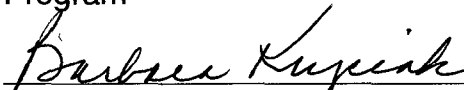
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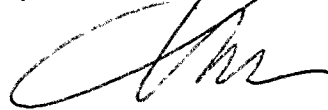
Todd A. DeMitchell, Ed.D.-Director
Professor & Chair, Department of Education
Lamberton Professor, Justice Studies Program



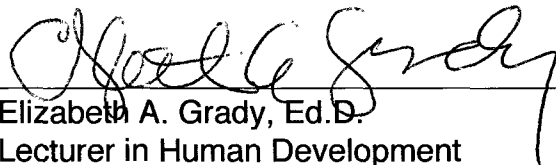
Virginia E. Garland, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Department of Education
Coordinator, Administration & Supervision
Program



Barbara Krysiak, Ed. D.
Associate Professor Emeritus
Department of Education



Charles A. Ott, Ed.D.
Retired Superintendent of Schools,
SAU #56
Adjunct Professor, Administration &
Supervision



Elizabeth A. Grady, Ed.D.
Lecturer in Human Development
Harvard University Extension School

June 14, 2011
June 2011

DEDICATION

If this were my autobiography, I would entitle it *Too Much of a Good Thing*. My family is the part that is never in excess. This work is dedicated to my loving husband, Chris, my parents, Pat and Tom, other mother, Jill, and wonderful children, Lulu, Polly and Martin. These individuals walked this path with me and cheered and supported the whole way. Love, patience, and humor make all things possible.

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I owe a debt of gratitude to the anonymous teachers and administrators at “Davis Academy.” Ten teachers participated in the study. Almost every eligible teacher was willing to participate. Administrators shared their time with me, explaining and sharing statistics and reports.

I hope that the insights generated by this study will enable the participants to find new meaning in their teaching, and will help educators elsewhere create better schools for children.

ABSTRACT

INDEPENDENTLY INNOVATIVE: TEACHERS AND CHANGE IN SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

by

Mary Halpin Carter

University of New Hampshire, September 2011

This study explores teachers' perceptions of school change and leadership. The study is guided by the question: In an innovative independent school, how do teachers perceive deliberate change efforts and relate to the leaders who lead them. Other issues considered are the role of school culture, professional development and institutional goals in an effective change process. This research is distinctive in that it examines school change from the teachers' perspective and was conducted in a school that had previously demonstrated positive growth. The result is a qualitative, case study of one exemplary, independent school.

In the summer and fall of 2010, the researcher gathered artifacts and conducted two focus groups and two follow up interviews with teacher-participants. From each focus group one participant was chosen by lottery to be interviewed. Participants discussed the change process they experienced at their school. Data was tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for categories and themes. The researcher compared this data to existing literature, drew inferences, and generated theory.

Findings include an overarching theme and three sub-themes pertaining to leadership and school change. The overarching theme demonstrated that when leaders address teachers' personal and professional needs, they set the stage for positive school

change. The first sub-theme was the importance of faculty and leaders working together to identify both vexing problems to solve and worthy goals to accomplish. A second sub-theme illuminates the leaders built the faculty by helping teachers to improve, by hiring well, and by firing when improvement could not occur. The third sub-theme reinforces the idea that teachers are motivated to change because of the relationships they and the leaders share. Teachers are motivated to accept school initiatives that reflect a commitment to the school's mission and philosophy.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview

A school leader who successfully improves teaching and learning in a school accomplishes a difficult feat. The prospect of change in any professional setting often meets with strong resistance as a result of the human tendency to seek continuity and avoid the unknown. Schools can be particularly difficult places to effectuate change. Since teachers traditionally have remained at the same school for their entire careers, faculties consist of many people with deeply engrained habits and long institutional memories. These teachers exert a strong influence over the organizational culture. They impart their habits and memories to new teachers, and in this manner a common workplace culture develops from a shared sense of what is right and effective. Schein (2004) wrote that change initiatives challenge that culture by calling into question a group's assumptions about how to do work properly.

Good to Great Schools

School change initiatives can have a disruptive effect on school culture. The deeper the change, the deeper the potential disruption of the status quo. Sarason (1990) wrote:

Like almost all other complex traditional social organizations, the schools will accommodate in ways that require little or no change...The strength of the status quo – its underlying axioms, its pattern of power relationships, its sense of tradition and therefore what seems right, natural, and proper-almost automatically rules out options for change (in Evans, 1996, p. 40).

Leaders seeking to effect change without the support of a school's faculty may face difficulty. Though they introduce initiatives, the teachers may resist implementing them or changing their practice. The fact is that teachers have great control within their classrooms. Lortie (1975) wrote that teaching is a largely solitary act that ordinarily occurs behind closed doors, unobserved by colleagues. The teachers working behind those doors often share a long-standing school culture that outlives and outlasts the principal or head of school. For a number of reasons, the threat of being sanctioned for ignoring or resisting innovation does not loom over teaching as it does in other fields. Thus in some mediocre schools, the status quo goes unchallenged or initiatives fail.

The job of making change in good schools presents an even greater challenge. Change efforts stall for many reasons. Deal and Peterson (1999) wrote that some good schools develop cultures that define success in ways that do not result in achievement for all students. For example, faculty members may come to assume that some students learn well and others do not, and that some students will have a satisfying school experience while others may not. This shared assumption works against change that may challenge the status quo.

Because teachers in good schools have succeeded in educating many students well, change initiatives are often poorly received or ignored. Teaching success with some students can lead to a sense of complacency with respect to improvement. As Jim Collins (2001) wrote:

Good is the enemy of great. And that is one of the key reasons so little that we have becomes great. We don't have great schools, principally because we have good ones . . . Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life. The vast majority of companies never become great, precisely because the vast majority become quite good—and that is their main problem (p. 1).

While companies are not schools, Collins' studies of companies that went from good to great are instructive. Collins found that most companies are good, but few are great; of those that are great, most have always been so. Few companies experience a transformation in quality. Collins thought it was important to understand the underlying variables that distinguished the companies that changed from good to great. In his monograph *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, Collins (2005) discussed how individuals can think about greatness for non-business organizations like schools, and defined excellence in terms of an organization's resilience and ability to consistently produce strong results. A great organization can "deliver exceptional results over a long period of time, beyond any single leader, great idea, market cycle, or well-funded program" (p. 8). Collins did not speak of greatness as a destination, but more as a dynamic condition.

Most great schools have, since their founding, possessed a dynamic, progressive school culture that embraces professional learning and new research. But what about the few schools that have been able to improve from good to great without having a dynamic, progressive culture? How did these schools implement the cultural shift necessary to improve? This research project studied one such school.

I seek to understand the key, underlying variables that make true school change possible. Each independent school has a mission or a statement of its goals and values. A great school finds ways to make its mission current and fully informed by modern resources and knowledge in order to deliver the best education it can to students. Dufour and Eaker (1998) wrote that for sustained school improvement, the best strategy is to

develop the ability of the personnel to continuously learn and collaborate in order to reach common goals.

Teachers are the key to school change. Teachers' interactions with students form the basis of students' school experience. As Susan Moore Johnson (1990) was correct when she wrote "Who teaches matters" (p. xiii). In a recent e-mail, DeMitchell (2011) wrote "No reform plan, no matter how well conceived, can hope to improve the education of students if we do not consistently place quality teachers in our classrooms. The teacher stands at the crossroads of the path of all meaningful reform." As DeMitchell and Fossey (1997) have argued, "There is no magic in programs, there is only magic in people" (p. 52). Understanding how teachers perceive intentional, successful school change will provide valuable insight.

My research project focused on a single independent school that was able to change from good to great. This research is significant, because it provides insight into how one good school's culture developed into a change oriented one. By studying an exemplary case, I focused on how teachers experienced the transition from good to great in an independent school now committed to continual improvement.

Independent Schools

Independent schools, indeed all secondary schools, have been urged to change in order to prepare students for work and citizenship in the twenty-first century. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) consistently encourages schools to innovate so as to be global, technological and environmentally sustainable. As the NAIS website states:

The NAIS vision foresees a future where independent school graduates will make good choices for themselves, their communities, and the world, capitalizing upon

those values and skills that won't change and acquiring those new skills and values a 21st Century marketplace and global commons will demand. We see

NAIS's role as leading and serving schools as the center of a network of ideas that propel good schools toward becoming great schools, characterized by demographic, environmental, global, programmatic, and financial sustainability. (<http://www.nais.org/>)

Despite this message, many independent schools have difficulty staying current with best practices in the field of teaching. They teach students who are skilled and strong enough to thrive even if taught by outmoded methods. They possess an inherent conservatism and revere their traditions. Their school cultures resist change. Independent day schools have additional obstacles to change. They are independent from the government and do not have to comply with mandated federal or state school reforms. NAIS is a voluntary professional organization that has influence over independent schools, but lacks the power to require change. Independent schools do not have governing bodies directing reform and feel little external pressure to update curriculum and pedagogy. As NAIS stated on its web site:

NAIS mission is rooted in the core values of independence, interdependence, inclusivity, and innovation. We believe the freedoms derived from independence and self-determination are deserving of preservation, worthy of emulation, and a source of the success of independent schools in preparing students to contribute effectively toward a peaceful, prosperous, just, and equitable world. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) exists to represent and sustain schools that are self-determining in mission and program, free from government control, and governed by independent boards. NAIS serves independent schools, adjusting focus as emerging issues dictate. NAIS is a hub of resources and expertise on matters relating to schools. We embrace innovation, powered by creativity; networking; and energy around valuing, sustaining, and growing independent schools. (<http://www.nais.org/>)

The drive to change comes from forces within the independent school itself, rather than lawmakers or government regulators. Attempting to introduce change without an understanding of school culture can result in a head of school losing the support of the

faculty, the student body and the alumni who cherish the school's traditions and culture. Heads of school who have been forced to resign under such circumstances often leave in the wake of such comments as: "She had no respect for the fine traditions of our school," and "He was turning this school into a place that I don't recognize."

Independent schools differ from other non-public schools, like parochial and proprietorship schools, in their governance and cost. Independent schools are not-for-profit institutions governed by voluntary trustees. They possess a specific mission, and tend to be among the most expensive educational choices due to their low student-faculty ratio and array of extracurricular activities for all students.

The high cost of an independent school education makes such schools vulnerable to market forces in ways that public schools are not. Parents who have made a significant financial investment in an independent school are likely to approach the school like a consumer to a business. They expect their children to be happy, to gain skills and knowledge, and to gain access to highly competitive colleges, and they assume the school will provide these things. Paradoxically, parents are also attracted to long-standing school cultures and traditions, so while parents demand results for their children, they may be resistant to reform and change. Faculty and staff may interpret a full enrollment comprised of children of those parents as an endorsement of the status quo.

Some specific types of schools differ significantly from independent schools and this research ought not be applied to them. For example, military schools tend to draw parents who seek a hierarchical, highly disciplined and structured program that emphasizes student obedience to authority. Roman Catholic and other church schools offer a religious, structured education. Proprietorships, non-public schools governed by

an actual owner, have a different dynamic than independent schools in that all teachers understand that they report to the owner who employs them at will. Military, religious and proprietor-led schools have enough differences from independent schools that this research should not be used to understand them.

Because this research will take the form of a qualitative case study, use of the findings to analyze or generalize to other independent schools must be done with caution. Independent schools vary widely. An individual or group with a specific mission and core values founded each. One cannot assume that what worked at one independent school will work at all. Still, the lessons learned from this research will be useful to understand change in independent schools. Researchers will gain valuable insight into how leaders might plan, communicate and execute school improvement by studying the findings from one “good to great” school.

Research Aims

Research Question

The following research question guided this research study of one exemplary independent school: In an innovative independent school, how do teachers perceive deliberate change efforts and relate to the leaders who lead them?

The aim of this research was to study how independent school teachers experienced a successful change process in order to understand the underlying variables that inspired faculty to change their practices. An understanding of this issue will contribute to research on school leadership and improvement. The underlying questions were:

- How did the school's culture shift so that its practices resulted in a great school?
- Of the underlying variables, which made the most difference? Did the leader extend the carrot, the stick, or incentives? Was intrinsic drive the motivator?
- Was the change the result of inspiration or practical guidance that helped the teachers through the change period?
- Was the experience personal or relational in nature?
- Was the change the result of the influence of the leader or the peers?

The teachers' perceptions of these factors comprised the data. By understanding the key variables in a successful change process, this project will contribute to scholarship on school improvement.

Research Methods

The research product is an exploration of teachers' perceptions of their exemplary school's change from good to great. A small, independent, New England, coeducational, independent day school serving grades 6-12 was selected as the case study. The description centers on the teachers' experience with change in school culture. Data comes from artifacts, focus groups and interviews.

Significance of the Study

This research will contribute to research on school change, providing a perspective on school improvement that is little understood: change from the teachers' view. Understanding why teachers joined with administrators to improve their school is valuable knowledge. The teachers' view is important because teachers are the front line of school change. The major work of schools happens in the classrooms, and the

classroom is the teacher's domain. Change efforts can only be accomplished and sustained if teachers embrace them.

Validity Issues

A major threat to validity is the way that the researcher handles her presence in a qualitative study. The researcher brings bias, and if she is careless, then she sees the data through a lens warped by bias. The key is to listen to what the participants say, and to be aware of one's bias up front. As Creswell (2003) wrote: "Clarify the bias the researcher brings to the study. This self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative" (p. 196).

Internal validity strategies such as triangulation, member checks and peer examination combat bias. Triangulation occurred in this study which was not based upon one participant's account, but rather, on a number of participants' recollections of the same historical period. Member checks were done throughout the study; I checked my interpretations with participants from the focus groups. I worked with my advisor, Todd DeMitchell, and my peers, Glenn Pierce and Diane Tabor, and sought their comments on findings as they emerged.

Another potential validity threat is to disregard discrepant data. I wrote about discrepant data in order to ensure that my results were valid. In addition, artifact analysis helped to validate conclusions drawn from the focus groups and in-depth interviews.

Reliability

Reliability is traditionally understood to be the notion that a study is more valid if it is repeated multiple times. Achieving reliability according to this definition is unlikely in qualitative educational research, because it is inherently particular and contextual. Schwandt (2001) wrote that some researchers establish "dependability—an analog to

reliability—through careful documentation of procedures for generating and interpreting data. Here, reliability is a matter of assembling dependable evidence, and the methods used to assemble this evident matter” (p. 226-7). Merriam (1998) advised that the researcher explain his or her assumptions about the subject, the participants and the school and that explanation can be found in Chapter Three. Merriam (1998) also advised triangulation, the practice of collecting and analyzing multiple types of data. I followed this advice by using data from focus groups, interviews, and artifacts.

Limitations of the Study

A qualitative case study of a single, exemplary case is not generalizable in the traditional sense. Merriam (1998) commented that a case study is often used not because a given case is typical, but because the case is special and the researcher wants to understand it in depth. Instead, a researcher should write such a rich description of the case that others could accurately compare it to their own situation, look for parallels, and draw conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The aim of this research is to study independent school teachers' experience with school improvement and to identify and understand the key variables that inspired them to change their practice. An understanding of this issue will contribute to research on school leadership and improvement. This project seeks to answer the research question: In an innovative independent school, how do teachers perceive deliberate change efforts and relate to the leaders who lead them?

To understand the research data, one must understand the existing literature related to the topic. This literature review explores scholarship on change oriented leaders, professional learning and change, teachers and change efforts, and culture in innovative schools.

Literature on Change Oriented Leaders; Professional Learning and Change; Teachers and Change Efforts; and Culture in Innovative Schools

Change Oriented Leaders

To understand how teachers relate to change oriented leaders, one must review the literature on change leadership, understand the various nuances of it, and analyze how such leaders exercise different kinds of power. The leadership theories that fit with a change orientation are the “good to great” model, the “transformational” model, and the “learning team” model. The “good to great” leadership model emphasizes skillful staff

development, efficacious team building, and deliberate vision development. The “transformational” leadership model centers on the leader’s ability to use the organization’s enduring values to frame a meaningful vision of the future, and to motivate colleagues by meeting their practical needs. The “learning” team leadership model views the modern era as a time of rapidly changing, interconnected, complex conditions. In such an environment, the successful organization must emphasize employee leadership and learning so as to remain adaptable. These three models fit with this research project because they combine research on leadership with research on successful change efforts. They inform this study of teachers’ perceptions of intentional change and the leaders who lead them.

Good to Great Model

The “good to great” model, based upon the research of Collins (2001) focuses on the leader’s ability to build a talented, hardworking team and to develop a vision with the team that takes advantage of economic opportunities and builds upon organizational strengths. The “good to great” model describes the change leader as pivotal to organizational improvement. Collins’ leader is humble, unrelenting and driven toward organizational improvement over time.

For the research explicated in *Good to Great* (2001), Collins researched over 1,400 Fortune 500 companies. The companies were required to meet a number of quantitative indicators, determined by the researchers, to demonstrate that they had made a change from good to great. The group was reduced through four layers of analysis down to eleven companies selected for the good to great group. The good to great group of companies was so successful that their average cumulative stock returns “were 6.9

times the general market in the fifteen years following the transition points” (p. 3). The companies in the good to great group were compared to a control group of companies that were good, but had not become great.

Multiple leadership types are profiled in *Good to Great*. These types include: the level 1 highly capable individual who “makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills and good work habits”; the level 2 contributing team member who “contributes individual capabilities to the achievement of group objectives and works effectively with others in a group setting”; the level 3 “competent manager” who “organizes people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives”; and the level 4 “effective leader” who “catalyzes commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, stimulating higher performance standards” (p. 20). All of the leaders who led their companies from good to great were level 5 leaders. Collins writes that these leaders possess relentless “professional will” and “personal humility” (p. 36). They build “enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will” (p. 20).

Level 5 leaders are distinctive in their “ferocious resolve, an almost stoic determination to do whatever needs to be done to make the company great” (Collins, 2001, p. 30). “Level 5 leaders are fanatically driven, infected with an incurable need to produce results” (p. 30). Such leaders set a standard of excellence. They embrace “the standard of building an enduring great company; [they] will settle for nothing less” (p. 36). The good to great leaders are driven for their companies’ success, are unafraid to make hard decisions, and work consistently over many years to help their companies improve (Collins p. 36). Collins wrote, “The quiet, dogged nature of Level 5 leaders

showed up not only in the big decisions . . . but also in a personal style of sheer workmanlike diligence” (p. 33).

Surprisingly, Collins (2001) found that these leaders are consistently humble people. “Level 5 leaders display a compelling modesty, are self-effacing and understated” (p. 39). They seek results, but are not concerned with claiming credit for those results. Rather, they are more likely to “attribute success to factors other than themselves” (p. 39). They are highly responsible, slow to blame and quick to accept problems and fix them. Collins writes of such leaders, “When things go poorly, however, they look in the mirror and blame themselves, taking full responsibility” (p. 39). These leaders are “ambitious, to be sure, but ambitious first and foremost for the company, not themselves” (p. 39). Collins’ good to great leaders are humble and driven for organizational success.

Collins (2001) also found that these leaders understand the importance of excellent colleagues. Using the metaphor of a bus to describe the organization moving from good to great, he asserts that successful change leaders know that:

If you have the right people on the bus, the problem of how to motivate them goes away. The right people don’t need to be tightly managed or fired up; they will be self-motivated by the inner drive to produce the best results and to be part of creating something great . . . if you have the wrong people, it doesn’t matter whether you discover the right direction; you still won’t have a great company. Great vision without great people is irrelevant. (Collins, p. 42)

Removing the “wrong people” (p. 42) is part of the personnel strategy of all level 5 leaders. The leaders remove employees who are not willing or able to keep pace with the new level of change. Collins writes, “It might take time to know for certain if someone is simply in the wrong seat or whether he needs to get off the bus altogether.

Nonetheless, when the good-to-great leaders knew they had to make a people change, they would act” (p. 58).

The question of who would work at the organization came before the vision, strategy and other initiatives (Collins, p. 45). Dick Cooley and David Maxwell, two executives interviewed for the study, remembered thinking: “I don’t know where we should take this company, but I do know that if I start with the right people, ask them the right questions, and engage them in vigorous debate, we will find a way to make this company great” (Collins, p. 45). Once the right people are in place, the good-to-great leader works with those people to generate the vision and goals (Collins, 2001).

Once the successful leaders have “the right people on the bus” (p. 41), they create a vision and goals for the organization using the wisdom of those people (Collins, 2001). Collins states that level 5 leaders “lead with questions, not answers” and “engage in dialogue and debate, not coercion” (p. 88). Collins (2001) and his team generated an idea called the “Hedgehog Concept” to describe the way the successful leaders went about setting goals for their organizations, “[a] Hedgehog Concept is not a goal to be the best . . . It is an understanding of what you can be the best at” (p. 98). This idea means that the goals are the intersection of what the organization does well and actual business opportunity in the economic environment. Collins states: “The good-to-great companies understood that doing what you are good at will only make you good; focusing on what you can potentially do better than any other organization is the only path to greatness” (p. 100). The Hedgehog Concept is based upon an essay by Isaiah Berlin, which is “based upon the ancient Greek parable: ‘The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing’” (p. 90). The good to great companies, like the hedgehog, are “simple,

dowdy creatures that know ‘one big thing’ and stick to it” (p. 119), and thus dominate their wedge of the market. The comparison companies are like the fox, they “know many things yet lack consistency” (p. 119), and thus do not achieve greatness. Good-to-great leaders know what their organizations can do better than any other and use that knowledge to “produce truly superior economic returns” (p. 119).

Another common practice of the level 5 leaders is that they confront “the brutal facts of reality” (p. 83), while retaining absolute faith that the organization will succeed (p. 87). This ability to seek, confront and solve problems set the good to great leaders apart from those in Collins’ control group. Collins (2001) writes:

It didn’t matter how bleak the situation or how stultifying their mediocrity, they all maintained unwavering faith that they would not just survive, but prevail as a great company. And yet, at the same time, they became relentlessly disciplined at confronting the most brutal facts of their current reality (p. 87).

Understanding the mediocrity was part of planning for improvement, according to Collings (2001).

Transformational Leadership

Burns (1978) divides leaders into two types: transformational and transactional. The “transformational” leadership model explains change as a product of the leader’s ability to bring out the best in people, based on shared values within the organization, and is the highest form of leadership. Burns writes extensively on this type of change-oriented leader. He believes, “The ultimate goal of practical leadership is the realization of intended real change that meets people’s enduring needs” (p. 461). The transformational leader gives voice to a meaningful vision for the organization that unites “people in pursuit of higher goals” (p. 425). Burns asserts, “that people can be lifted to their better selves is the secret of transforming leadership” (p. 462). The transformation is

reciprocal; the leaders and followers raise each other to higher levels of morality and motivation through their relationship with one another. Burns cites Gandhi, Lincoln and Martin Luther King as examples of this type of change leader.

Burns (1978) also discusses the “transactional” leader: a lesser form of leadership than the transformational model. He describes the interdependent relationship between leader and follower as “transactional” (p. 425). The leader asks for performance from the follower and meets the follower’s needs, be they monetary or psychological (i.e., inspiration or personal recognition). In response, the follower gives loyalty to the leader. Transactional leadership is expedient and progress can be made in an incremental way; however, it is at heart a form of “bargaining” and “beyond this the relationship does not go. The bargainers have no enduring purpose that holds them together. . . . A leadership act took place, but it was not one that binds leader and follower together in a mutual and continuing pursuit of a higher purpose” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). This form of leadership is less effective because it depends upon what the leader can provide for the follower on a continuing basis, rather than the follower’s inner drive to do what is right or excellent or just. The transformational leader connects to higher purposes and is the fuel driving the follower’s willingness to follow.

Central to the “transformational” model is the notion that the leader’s power lies in his or her relationship with the follower. Burns (1978) states that the highest form of change leadership is “transforming in spirit and posture, transactional in process and results” (p. 200). He asserts that a transforming leader understands the organization’s culture and taps into it as a source of power. A transformational school leader cites the school’s mission, core values and history to unite teachers and motivate them to meet

challenges. A narrative of the school's past reinforces norms of performance and success (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Such a leader makes change by inspiring teachers and meeting their needs.

Bolman and Deal (2008) also discuss change leaders as meeting employees' spiritual and practical needs (see Appendix). The researchers analyzed organizational structure and determined that it could be seen through four frames. These frames are the human resource frame, which meets employees' need to be cared about and to belong; the political frame, which meets employees' need for fairness and for a voice in decision-making; the structural frame, which meets the employees' need to be part of an organization that does excellent work; and the symbolic frame, which meets employees' desire to be part of a significant, meaningful endeavor. These frames correspond to organizational and employee needs. The successful leader has "rapid cognition" of the organization's condition, and can thus look at a needy organization through the right frame (p. 11). The leader then plans his or her actions accordingly. In Bolman and Deal's research, leaders considered successful by their followers used more frames than leaders considered less successful.

The frames relevant to transformational leadership are the symbolic and human resources frames. Bolman and Deal write that the transformational leader understands that change leadership requires inspiration and that "team building at its heart is a spiritual undertaking. It is both a search for the spirit within and creation of a community of believers united by shared faith and shared culture" (p. 292). They state, "Values characterize what an organization stands for, qualities worthy of esteem or commitment. Unlike goals, values are intangible and define a unique distinguishing character" (p. 255).

Bolman and Deal (2008) write that the transformational leader shapes the organizational vision using the school's mission and values. They state, "Vision turns an organization's core ideology, or sense of purpose, into an image of the future" (p. 255). Bolman and Deal (2008) continue, "Vision is seen as vital in contemporary organizations" (p. 256). The symbolic frame relates to the leader's ability to connect a change vision with the school's culture and to use the school's sense of purpose as a source of power for change.

Learning Team Leadership

The third leadership concept that fits my research study is the "learning team" leadership model. The successful learning organization, in Senge's (2006) view, is agile and adaptable. In this model the leader makes change by continually training employees so that they are informed by new ideas in the field. The leader empowers those informed employees to make independent decisions. Senge's (2006) change leader shares power with knowledgeable colleagues. Senge writes,

As the world becomes more interconnected . . . work must become more "learningful." It is no longer sufficient to have one person learning for the organization . . . It's just not possible any longer to figure it out from the top, and have everyone else following the orders of the "grand strategist.

The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization. (2006, p. 4)

When all employees possess knowledge based upon current research, then the organization is better able to adapt and thrive. As organizations grow, says Senge, employees at many levels in the organization need to shape the growth. Elements of the organization's environment change with such rapidity that tight central control is impractical and counter-productive. Senge (2006) writes that an organization needs to

become a learning organization (which he defines as a place where employees continually redefine their reality). Hirsh and Killion (2009) echo Senge when they observe that leadership “requires replacing the ‘hero leader’ with leadership communities. The notion of communities of leaders elevates the importance of building leaders as an important aspect of leadership” (p. 446).

Senge et al. (1999) define leadership as the capacity of a human community to shape its future through systems of change. Leaders develop leadership in others who then take the initiative to make change. The organization is a biological, not mechanized system. According to the researchers, as organizations grow, that growth needs shaping by employees at many levels in the organization. Therefore, employee learning is vital, requiring leaders to act like gardeners shaping and pruning an orchard (Senge et al., 1999). This concept explains why the researchers find employee learning to be vital. The greater the employees’ “capacity,” the more informed and knowledgeable the organization’s growth (Senge et al., 1999).

In Senge’s et al. (1999) view, the leader must help the staff to study, reflect and disseminate best practices. The leader helps develop ways to disseminate knowledge by grouping people into networks that facilitate communication inside and outside of the organization. Also, the leader’s responsibilities include continual assessment and reflection about the organization’s performance. This assessment data should direct growth, inform decision-making and enable people to see progress.

Senge’s et al. (1999) theories align with ideas about professional teacher learning and student assessment that are prevalent in the research of Dufour (1998), Reeves (2007) and Fullan (2005). Reeves states: “Leaders are the architects of individual and

organizational improvement” (2006, p. 27). The leader must group teachers into teams that can analyze test data, diagnose individual student needs, then prescribe and deliver remediation. Reeves believes that school change leaders should: (1) embrace “holistic accountability” – his term for a system in which adults monitor and react to student test scores with intervention and instruction (p. 83); (2) include consistent nonfiction writing assessments in every subject; (3) use frequent common assessments so that students can be compared across grade levels; (4) swiftly intervene if a child has performance problems; and (5) evaluate performance class by class and teacher by teacher, so the students benefit as quickly as possible. Reeves’ argument is for accountability reinforced by leadership.

Like Reeves, Fullan asserts that effective, modern education produces lifelong learners and centers on professional learning and innovation based on data. In *Leadership and Sustainability*, Fullan (2005) writes that strong leaders innovate using student achievement data. By judging success on measureable outcomes, he states, educational equity and achievement can be accomplished. New economic conditions require workers with high level skills and knowledge (Fullan, 2006). Data-driven leaders help teachers develop skills and knowledge in students. The data identifies students’ weaknesses, thus enabling remediation on a case-by-case basis.

Teachers and Professional Learning Related to Change

Professional Development

The literature consistently connects teachers’ professional learning with improvement efforts. Research on teachers and successful change efforts shows that professional learning is vital to school change. Professional development is especially

effective when aligned with the school's goals, mission and values. According to Schein (2004), teachers must be motivated to unlearn old ways. Elmore (2005) believes that a key aspect of school improvement is professional development, because teachers with enhanced skills and knowledge produced better student outcomes. He notes that professional development ought to be highly focused on content and ways to teach it. Elmore (2005) writes that school restructuring is usually unnecessary, advising that schools that succeed in changing classroom practice first improve teaching, then consider changing structures to support the instructional efforts. "Policymakers and administrators should base their decisions on the smallest unit—the classroom, the school—and let their organizational and policy decisions vary in response to the demands of the work at that level" (Elmore, 2005, p. 5).

Educating a modern workforce requires flexibility and inventiveness. As Pink (2006) states in *A Whole New Mind*: "We've progressed from a society of farmers to a society of factory workers to a society of knowledge workers. And now we are progressing yet again—to a society of creators and empathizers, of pattern recognizers and meaning makers" (p. 50). To prepare students for careers as thinkers and creators, teachers have to individualize and improve education. DuFour (1998) asserts that educators need high, clear expectations for all students. He states that students should receive accurate, timely feedback on their work; teachers should analyze students' weaknesses, and adjust instruction to correct them. Reeves (2007) writes that "try it, test it, improve it" (p. 245) should be common practice for teachers. Assessments, he asserts, should be related to instructional goals, not high stakes tests, and should be followed with "high quality corrective instruction" (2007, p. 21).

Teachers who collaborate are likely to produce better work than those who toil alone. Hirsh and Killion (2009) state:

When teachers collaborate to plan lessons and assessments, students in the same course benefit from the collective expertise of all the teachers of that course. In schools where collaboration among educators is routine, great teaching becomes a reality for every student in every classroom” (p. 469).

Collaboration helps to minimize differences in teacher quality, because all the students used the assessments that the stronger teachers help to develop.

Evans (1996), Little and McLaughlin (1993), Reeves (2007), Hirsh and Killion (2009), Hord et al. (2004) researched how teachers develop over the course of their careers. Their work supports the notion that change is promoted through collaborative work, professional development and a focus on student performance data.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Change Efforts

Literature on teachers and the change process is important to understanding teachers’ perceptions of school change. Evans (1996) writes that researchers know an “unprecedented amount about school change, yet there remain two large gaps in our knowledge: training and implementation” (p. 4). Reeves (2007) believes that the key factor in change is how teachers perceive it. That factor determines whether an improvement initiative is greeted with resistance or enthusiasm. Teachers are the essential players in school improvement efforts because, as Susan Moore Johnson (1990) asserts, “Who teaches matters” (p. viii).

An examination of research points to the notion that teachers want to know how a change process will unfold and that they will receive communication and mentoring throughout the process. This communication includes expectations for their participation, a timeline of implementation, and clear school goals. In their book, *Taking Charge of*

Change, Hord, et al. (2004) agree with Evans that teachers are the most important part of the change process. They assert that the success of innovation depends upon the support and training with which teachers are provided during the change process: “the real meaning of change lies in its human, not its material, component” (pp. 6-7). Hord et al. (2004) found that teachers experienced predictable stages of concern during a period of change, and that “effective change facilitators work with people in an adaptive and systemic way, designing interventions for clients’ needs” (7). Their observations are consistent with Bolman and Deal’s (2008) human resources frame.

The Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) identifies stages of concern through which teachers encountering a change initiative move. When teachers first become aware of an innovation, they are likely to have “self-concerns” (Hord et al., 2004, p. 31), and want information about the innovation and how it may affect them. They want to know how the innovation is similar or different from what they already do. They want to know whether they will receive training and preparation, as well as “the source of the new program, who is endorsing it and why, and how it is supposed to work” (Hord et al., p. 31). “Teachers may also be concerned about their ability to execute the new program as expected and about making mistakes that would make them look foolish” (Hord, et al., p. 31).

The next stage is the “task” or “management” (Hord et al., 2004, p. 31) phase, during which the actual use of the innovation is at issue. Teachers’ concerns may be “related to the management of time” (p. 31). Teachers worry about performing well with the new innovation during this phase.

The “impact” level is the point at which the teachers are most concerned with the “effects of an innovation on students and what can be done to improve the effectiveness of the program” (Hord et al., 2004, p. 32). The stages at this level are consequence or how the innovation is effecting students, collaboration or working with colleagues on the innovation, and refocusing or tweaking the innovation so that it is more effective using the teacher’s own ideas (Hord et al., 2004). At this last stage, teachers are interested in how the change affects students. They seek collaboration with colleagues in order to align and coordinate the innovation to better serve students. They work to make the change cohesive. Also, they seek to customize and improve the innovation based on their own knowledge and experience (Hord et al., 2004).

In the researchers’ view, change agents must be available to assist teachers as they move through the stages of concern. Principals, other administrators or other change agents must provide support if the innovation is to be successfully adopted by faculty. “The key to successful facilitation is to personalize one’s interventions by focusing attention on the concerns of those engaged in the change process and accepting those concerns as legitimate reflections of changes in progress” (Hord et al., 2004, p. 90). This model emphasizes support for professional learning as a key to successful innovation as well as the importance of the change agent.

The Process of Successful Change

Pace and Implementation

Fullan (2007) observes that while training, planning and facilitating by a change agent are important, “what happens during the process of change” (p. 68) is more important. The change process is comprised of three stages: initiation, implementation

and institutionalization. The key is to get into the implementation stage as soon as major problems and fundamental conditions are worked out. Fullan (2007) states that many leaders make the mistake of spending too much time planning and speaking of the new initiative in general, abstract terms. Instead, the leader should have a flexible plan. Once key problems begin to be rectified, a school should adapt the plan as needed to implement more change. Fullan (2007) observes that successful schools move back and forth between discussing implementation and planning, knowing that goals will be modified throughout the implementation phase. Reform becomes an iterative process.

Fullan (1991) writes that the leader initiating the change will never know exactly what shape implementation will take. Initiation, he states, requires relevance, readiness, and resources. Initiation requires that the change agents understand relevance, because teachers will ask questions about whether change is needed in their school. Initiation requires readiness, because teachers ought to believe that they are sufficiently trained and supported to initiate it. Also, it requires resources such as time, materials and space are required in order to start making change. To begin the change process, a school community needs a sense of the relevance of the change, the readiness for the change, and the resources to get started.

Real change engenders disharmony and conflict, because schools are not mechanical places. As a result, Fullan states, the implementation phase is likely to be bumpy. Successful implementation requires continual adjustments to the plan. While planned professional development is important, Fullan (2007) noted, teachers learn through action as well as through study. Fullan's idea of the basic plan is similar to a set of goals, and numerous scholars including Hirsh and Killion (2009), Little and

McLaughlin (1993), Peters and Watchman in Rosenholtz (1989) have written about goals being a key to school change.

Schein (2004) states that the leader has to set the conditions for change. He listed eight steps that “must be taken almost simultaneously” (p. 332) in order to create psychological safety for an employee who is learning significantly new skills, and “the change leader must be prepared to implement all of them” (p. 332):

1. provide “a compelling vision” of the future;
2. receive “formal training”;
3. vigorously involve the learner in the training;
4. train “relevant ‘family’ groups and teams” around the employee;
5. provide the employee with “practice fields, coaches, and feedback” to help him or her learn and “make mistakes without disrupting the organization”;
6. provide “positive role models”;
7. arrange “support groups in which learning problems can be aired and discussed”;
8. create “a reward and discipline system and organizational structures that are consistent with the new way of thinking and working” (pp. 332-333).

Schein (2004) writes, “most transformational change programs fail because they do not create the eight conditions outlined above” (p. 333). Furthermore, he states that the change goal ought to be defined as a specific problem that the employees are trying to fix. By making the problem concrete, employees’ energy is better used to make a change.

Clear Goals

Clear goals, aligned to the school’s mission and values, are important in motivating teachers to change. (Hirsch & Killion, 2009; Little &McLaughlin, 1993;

Peters & Watchman in Rosenholtz, 1989.) In innovative schools, teachers unite to accomplish goals that are nested in the mission and values. Peters and Watchman (in Rosenholtz, 1989) stated:

If there is a center to the mystery of schools' success, mediocrity, or failure, it lies deep within the structure of organizational goals: whether or not they exist, how they are defined and manifested, the extent to which they are mutually shared. Indeed, the hallmark of any successful organization is a shared sense among its members about what they are trying to accomplish" (p. 13).

In innovative schools, teacher evaluation and goals are aligned and clear. Rosenholtz (1989) describes how faculty and staff are "attentive to instructional goals, to evaluative criteria that gauged their success, and to high standards" (p. 206). A major indicator of institutional effectiveness, according to Rosenholtz, is the "school's problem-solving and renewal capabilities, defined as teachers' opportunities to learn" (1989, p. 2). Teacher evaluation and professional development help teachers to reach the school's goals.

Goals ought to align with the school's mission, values and teacher evaluation. Zimmerman (2006) writes that once common goals have been established, the leader should encourage teachers to achieve the goals by praising constructive behaviors and celebrating small successes. Professional learning groups help to make innovation permanent by providing support and knowledge to teachers. In one exemplary school, teachers disregarded usual independence and collaborated to support students (Little & McLaughlin, 1993). The school's core values inspired teachers to be flexible and think about the "big picture" for each student. The researchers found that the key to school improvement is to focus on improving school culture: "One cannot manage or command but can only cultivate and support the values and norms compatible with truly successful school environments" (Little & McLaughlin, 1993, p. 189).

Another key to school change is the selection of inspiring goals. As Hirsh and Killion (2009) write:

Throughout history, great leaders have relied on the motivational power of BHAGs (big, hairy, audacious goals) to stimulate individual creativity, commitment, and expertise to achieve what had not been previously viewed as possible. We're convinced that if districts embraced larger goals and the new actions required to achieve them, they would produce remarkable results (p. 467).

The reverse is true as well. In schools with murky goals, some teachers make incorrect assumptions about teaching and learning. For example, they may “assume that students learn best when the teacher works without interruption” among other misconceptions (Lortie, 1978, p. 211). When goals are unclear and teacher evaluation criteria are vague, then teachers are often insecure about their practice and are isolated. Some leaders make the mistake of choosing too many goals or goals that do not address major problems or embody the aspirations of the community. When this happens, the goals fail to ignite a united effort to support them.

Resistance to Change

In order to implement successful change, a leader must overcome the inherent resistance to change that exists in most institutions. This can be accomplished by decreasing the fear of trying and increasing the fear of not trying. As observed by Schein (2004), one of the leaders' tasks is to unfreeze people who have trouble adapting.

Perceptions

Evans (1996) provides additional insight, commenting that some teachers view change as challenging to their competence and confidence. He suggests that this reaction stems from deeply rooted patterns of attachment and understanding (p. 28). When these patterns are disrupted, then bereavement results (p. 28). According to Bolman and Deal

(2008), this condition ultimately causes confusion or hostility that lead to conflict. An effective leader takes into account emotional response when planning for change and seeks to reduce distress and confusion during the implementation period (Fullan, 2007).

Resistance to change has also been attributed to the fact that school leaders and teachers sometimes view change differently. As Jellison writes: “Leaders focus on the future and all the benefits that are to flow to them and the organization. The rank and file locks into the present, focusing on the costs rather than the rewards of change” (in Fullan, 2007, p. 42). This view of change as costly can lead some teachers to resist it.

Teacher Consent

Teachers have power through their resistance. Zimmerman states: “The power of reformers is, it seems, illusory. The real power in schools is the power of teacher consent” (p. 207). Effective leaders are aware of the need to earn teacher consent for school reform. Leaders who overcome resistance to change need a variety of strategies. These strategies include “creating a sense of urgency, developing and operationalizing a vision, rewarding constructive behaviors, aiming for short-term successes, and creating a professional learning community” (p. 244). Sharing data among faculty can lead to agreement regarding problems that need to be fixed.

Once common goals have been established, the leader can encourage teachers to achieve the goals by praising constructive behaviors and celebrating small successes. Teacher study groups help to make innovations permanent by sharing knowledge among teachers. In addition, Zimmerman adds, “the core principles of professional learning communities include embracing learning rather than teaching, collaborating to help all

pupils and adults learn, using data and focusing on results to foster continuous improvement” (pp. 245-46).

School Culture

In order to improve learning, leaders must work with the school’s culture. One definition of school culture borrows from Deal and Peterson (1999). Culture is “the school’s own unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectations that seem to permeate everything” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, pp. 2-3). Like a human being’s character, culture is an unconscious, unseen and defining force governing interactions, reactions and decision-making. Schein (2004) theorized that culture is revealed in the artifacts, espoused beliefs, values and underlying assumptions that people share. The leader’s job is to decode the culture: “We’ll know the culture when we know ‘why certain proposals are never bought, why change is so difficult, why certain people leave’” (p. 222). Culture is like an invisible force field that arrests innovation if not handled mindfully. If a leader persists in an innovation that bumps against an invisible cultural norm, then he or she may be unable to make change.

Culture in Innovative Schools

In order to understand why Davis Academy’s culture supported change, one needs to understand the literature on culture in innovative schools and organizations. Schein (2004) writes that shaping culture is a difficult but essential duty of any leader. One way to shape culture is to support innovative teachers and praise them for performing consistently with the school’s mission and values (Evans, 1996). Evans cautions that cultural change is gradual and involves group learning over time. According to Schein (2004) and Evans (1996), a change leader school should guide the school’s culture

before, during and after introducing improvement initiatives. The leader should adopt a tenacious attitude, supporting teachers through the change experience. By meeting teachers' needs, the leader shapes the culture.

According to Evans (1996), "Changing a school's culture . . . is a huge and daunting task" (p. 5). If past innovation efforts were unsuccessful, then the culture may be cynical about reform initiatives. To overcome this, the leader may need to illuminate the disparity between the school's mission or core values and student performance data. Such truth telling may generate denial and resistance among teachers; the leader must present change as an attractive, preferable alternative to the status quo (Evans, 1996).

One way to accomplish culture change is to support innovative teachers and acknowledge them as performing consistently with the school's mission and values. The leader may need to illuminate the disparity between the school's mission or core values and data about student performance.

Evans (1996) states that "collaborative vision building" (p. 211) is another way for a leader to change school culture. "The principal may begin by asserting that the status quo must be altered and outcomes improved; then he seeks to engage the faculty in deciding how to accomplish this. This is a longer, slower approach that can potentially lead to a stronger consensus" and is "in keeping with the educational trend toward empowerment and participation" (p. 211) for teachers. Evans comments that a motto is a helpful cultural change tool: "At its most effective, a motto serves not as a blueprint but as a touchstone. It becomes part of a school's culture and rituals" (p. 212). He is not suggesting a motto take the place of vision, but rather that mottos help schools to "express their fundamental purpose and values" (p. 212).

Schein (2004) writes that transformative change involves changing the culture. He states, “culture change inevitably involves unlearning as well as relearning . . . If new learning occurs, it usually reflects cognitive redefinition, which consists of learning new concepts and new meanings for old concepts and adopting new standards of evaluation” (pp. 335-6). Schein (2004) asserts:

The change process starts with disconfirmation, which produces survival anxiety or guilt – the feeling that one must change—but the learning anxiety associated with having to change one’s competencies, one’s role or power position, one’s identity elements . . . causes denial and resistance to change . . . The only way to reduce resistance is to reduce the learning anxiety by making the learner feel psychologically safe” (p. 336).

Burns (1978) claims that transformational leaders understand the organization’s culture and tap into it as a source of strength. Ignorance of school culture, including engrained problems that hinder performance, jeopardize improvement efforts. A narrative of the past can be used by the leader to reinforce norms of performance and success (Deal & Peterson, 1999). A change leader may cite the school’s history to unite staff and inspire them to meet current challenges.

According to Schein (2004) and Evans (1996), the wise leader massages and manages the school’s culture before, during and after introducing improvement initiatives. He or she adopts a tenacious attitude and supports teachers through the change experience. By meeting teachers’ needs, the leader shapes the culture.

Teacher Development

Current research supports the idea that change is promoted through collaborative work, professional development and a focus on student performance data. Historically, teacher development research has shown that teacher isolation has been the norm. In his study of American teachers, Dan Lortie (1975) stated: “conservatism, individualism, and

presentism are significant components in the ethos of American classroom teachers” (p. 212). Although reformers have pushed collaboration for many years, it has only recently become a common goal in schools.

In less unified schools, few extrinsic awards exist to recognize teacher merit or effort. In such schools, few celebrations of team accomplishment exist. As Lortie (1975) observed, “psychic rewards and teacher sentiments rotate around classroom events and relationships with students” and relationships with adults are secondary to those with students (p. 187). Metz’s research (in Little & McLaughlin, 1993) on teacher attitudes toward their work found that cynicism and disillusionment often emerge when teachers encounter students who do not apply themselves to their schoolwork. When a teacher fails to engage a student in learning, the teacher sometimes responds with anger, despite the fact that the student’s disengagement was a product of larger social patterns.

The Lortie study was replicated by Kottkamp, Cohn and Provenzo (1986), who found that teacher satisfaction with work had declined. They found that teachers were less willing to work with creative, intellectually demanding students who required extra effort. Similarly, teachers “discriminate their sense of professional efficacy on a period-by-period basis” (Little & McLaughlin, 1993, p. 81). This reliance on students for reward leaves teachers vulnerable to frustration. Students create the workplace context for teachers.

One reason teachers grow isolated is when the goals for improving classroom performance are unclear. As Rosenholtz (1989) states:

Goal multiformity encourages norms of self-reliance and, at the same time, as a consequence, professional isolation from colleagues. The absence of professional interaction of substantive dialogue about their work, carries profound implications: individuals may come to perceive that comparatively few colleagues

suffer similar uncertainties about teaching, that they endure fewer instructional problems, and that if others experience few problems, there is, embarrassment in admitting one's own. (p. 6)

When principals set clear goals, then teachers are more motivated. Lack of specificity is quite common, however, as is an absence of distinct criteria for teacher evaluation. Teachers are often insecure about their practice. Teacher individualism is “not cocky and self-assured; it is hesitant and uneasy” (Lortie, p. 120). Many teachers judge their effectiveness by looking to reactions from colleagues, their supervisors and student test scores. Updated research by Kottkamp, Provenzo and Cohn suggests that more teachers seek affirmation from outside of themselves now than in the Lortie study.

Some schools have embraced a more collaborative workplace. In a case study of an exemplary school, “Constructing a Schoolwide Professional Community: The Negotiated Order of a Performing Arts School,” the researcher studied how and why teachers disregarded usual independence. She found that the school's core values inspired teachers to be flexible and think about the “big picture” for each student. The researcher concluded that the key to school improvement is to focus on improving school culture: “One cannot manage or command but can only cultivate and support the values and norms compatible with truly successful school environments” (Little & McLaughlin, 1993, p. 189).

In effective schools, the leaders hold high expectations for students and teachers, emphasizing skill development and frequently monitoring student progress. They “devote more time to coordination and control of instruction, observe teachers' work closely, and discuss instructional problems more frequently with their staff” than those at less effective schools (Little & McLaughlin, p. 37). Goals align with the school mission,

values and goals in strong schools. Policy “helps to challenge constraints on teachers’ professional lives while orchestrating conditions that enable individuals to learn and succeed in a new vision” (p. 183). When teachers have substantive interaction, “Collaborative norms undergird achievement-oriented groups, they bring new ideas, fresh ways of looking at things, and a stock of collective knowledge that is more fruitful than any one person’s working alone” (p. 41).

Michael Fullan (2008) writes that to position teachers to be more successful, one must: “recognize that capacity building linked to results must be the main driver” (p. 280). Fullan writes that in improving schools, teachers study student test results, then focus professional development on areas that will affect the students’ areas of weakness. In the article, “Results without rancor or ranking: Ontario’s success story,” Fullan, Levin and Glaze (2008) examined the factors that enabled Ontario’s school system to make large-scale change. The researchers found that the Ontario process showed real respect for teachers as professionals in contrast to “punitive forms of teacher accountability and teacher-proof curricula” (p. 273). Teacher workload, prep time and staffing increased despite a declining student population. Teacher training opportunities were expanded at all levels as well, so teachers could avail themselves of the successful methods.

In effective schools, teacher development is a priority. Rosenholtz describes how faculty and staff are “attentive to instructional goals, to evaluative criteria that gauged their success, and to high standards” (p. 206). A major indicator of institutional effectiveness, according to Rosenholtz, was the “school’s problem-solving and renewal capabilities” defined as teachers’ opportunities to learn (p. 2). As for new teachers, they “culled and socialized the brightest or best educated novices with all the wholeness and

harmony of group solidarity” (p. 207). Teacher evaluation and professional development helped teachers to reach the school’s goals. Teacher development provides problem-solving training and renews teachers’ skills.

Professional Learning Communities

Many scholars view professional learning communities as the best strategy for sustained school improvement. Professional learning communities represent a planned team approach to teacher development. Teachers form research groups in order to adapt policies and techniques to meet the needs of individual students. In this model, educators operate in a network. They continually interact to analyze student data and use it to make decisions about teaching. These communities also serve as a means for continuing professional development and discussion of educational innovation. Features of this results-oriented, student-centered approach appear in the work of Dufour (1998), Reeves (2006), and Senge (2006).

Professional learning communities are safe, supportive places marked by camaraderie and shared vision. Teachers in professional learning communities act as members of a large study group, reading and discussing articles in their fields. When teachers form study groups, they acquire a means of discussing educational innovation. Many scholars view professional learning communities as the best strategy for sustained teacher learning and school improvement. Reeves (2006) writes that professional learning communities provide the best hope for initiating and sustaining change. DuFour (1998) and Senge (2006) describe a professional learning community as a safe haven where a teacher can grow and try out dreams, confident in colleagues’ emotional support. In a professional learning community, it is understood that mastery is not a destination, but a

continual quest. Teachers in professional learning communities learn from one another and from outside trainers. When teachers collaborate and share knowledge about students and teaching, they build their capacity to teach different students well. Reeves (2006) asserts that professional learning communities provide the best hope for initiating and sustaining change.

Both Wheatley (1999) and Senge et al. (1999) liken such groups to organic systems that exist in the natural world. Wheatley writes:

The new science keeps reminding us that in this participative universe, nothing living lives alone. Everything comes into form because of relationship. We are constantly called to be in relationship—to information, people, events, ideas, life... If we are interested in effecting change, it is crucial to remember that we are working with these webs of relations, not with machines. Once we recognize that organizations are webs, there is much we can learn about organizational change just from contemplating spider webs...If a system is in trouble, it can be restored to health by connecting it to more of itself. To make system stronger, we need to create stronger relationships. (p. 145)

In a professional learning community, the leader connects colleagues to the mission, then works with them to develop the vision. Also, the leader cultivates sub-leaders on the faculty. DePree (1989) encourages leaders to trust in “the strengths of others, being vulnerable to what others can do better than we can” (p. 78). Pink (2009) writes, in *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*, that autonomy is critical for professional and organizational success. By giving teachers autonomy, commitment to improvement is likely to increase.

Professional learning communities are results oriented. Teachers question the status quo, asking questions like: What kind of school are we trying to create? What attitudes, behaviors and commitments must we demonstrate in order to create such a school? Collaborative use of data is critical to improving curriculum, instruction, and

assessment. Ideally, a group of teachers analyzes the data, develops new strategies for achieving learning objectives, and monitors the results of the new strategies.

Summary

The literature reveals that improvement efforts must inspire and support teachers. by connecting clear, worthy goals to the school's mission and values. Fullan writes, "change is a process, not an event" (2007, p. 68). Steady persistence, therefore, is a key trait in change leaders. Leadership, professional development and a school culture that supports innovation are all critical elements in conducting and sustaining successful school change.

The literature points to a culture where innovation, continual learning, and competence are measured and rewarded for fostering improvement. The "good to great" leadership model asserts that team building, deliberate vision identification, and teacher development are essential factors in change. The "transformational" model describes a leader who uses the organization's enduring values to frame a vision of the future. That leader motivates teachers by appealing to their better selves and also meeting their practical needs. The "learning teams" model emphasizes teacher leadership within an adaptable, learning culture.

The literature points to a number of leadership behaviors. An effective leader's style, at any given time, can be a prescription for what ails the organization. Bolman and Deal (1999) remind that different leadership styles are needed at different times. The leader's power, they assert, comes from matching goals and style to organizational needs. Research supports aligning goals, professional development and evaluation with the

school's mission and core values. Such alignment endows a school change effort with legitimacy.

The literature points to professional development as another key driver in successful school change. The way to infuse continual professional learning, according to the research, is to create a culture that is collaborative and research-oriented. Teachers with superior skills and knowledge about teaching produce better student outcomes. By design, many colleagues are knowledgeable, and power is shared in the learning community model. The leader's role is to cultivate a learning community in which outside trainers and colleagues share ideas and practices that contribute to successful change.

Another key factor is support for teachers through the change process. The literature identified that teachers experience predictable stages of concern, and change leaders must provide them support in a personalized way (Hord et al., 2004). The leader's job is to tap into the culture as a source of strength and to inspire teachers by explaining how the new change initiatives fit with the school's history and values. When professional development and teacher evaluation aim toward student-centered outcomes, then school improvement gains teacher support.

The literature does not comment on teachers' perceptions as an important factor in school change. Instead, the research focuses on the researchers' comprehensive view of the subject. My research will help to fill that gap in the literature.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This section identifies the method used to gather data in order to answer the research question: In an innovative independent school, how do teachers perceive deliberate change efforts and relate to the school leaders who lead them? Prior to conducting the research, the great unknown was which variables the teachers would identify as being critical to successful change at Davis Academy. Would those variables differ from those the researchers and theorists identified as most important?

In order to answer the research questions a qualitative study was designed. Two focus groups of five teachers each were convened. Each focus group met after school, on campus in a conference room for a two-hour discussion session led by the researcher. From each focus group, one participant was chosen by lottery to be interviewed. Each participant met after school with the researcher for a one-on-one interview. One interview took place in the teacher's classroom and the other in the faculty conference room.

A qualitative design suited the research aims because an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions was sought. The research captured the participants' voices by asking open-ended questions, and enabling them to express their opinions. Participants' memories were stimulated by the focus group dynamic in which the researcher's questions were answered, then those answers built upon or discussed among participants.

A case study design fit the aim of investigating an exemplary school in detail. Data analysis included sorting participant responses by themes and categories. Theoretical explanations from literature were then considered. Participant responses were then analyzed to compare teacher responses by gender, academic discipline and division (middle or upper school). A thick, rich description of the school, the change period, and teachers' perceptions resulted.

Qualitative Design

Qualitative research methods were used because the study focused on a process, the process of change in an exemplary school. The goal was to gain an understanding of the meaning that teachers drew from their lived, professional experiences. The answers to the research questions were both unknown and highly individualized. In this study, the qualitative approach allowed teachers to explain their point of view about a period of their school's history. As Seidman (2006) wrote:

Social abstractions like 'education' are best understood through the experiences of the individuals whose work and lives are the stuff upon which the abstractions are built (Ferroti, 1981). So much research is done on schooling in the United States; yet so little of it is based on studies involving the perspective of the students, teachers, administrators...whose individual and collective experience constitutes schooling. (p. 10)

Since language is the way that people make meaning from lived experience, the method of collecting information was revealed "through dialogue and reflection" (Schram, 2006, p. 99). Data analysis was done in conjunction with data collection, and one influenced the other.

Case Study

The term “case study” can refer to methodology or the finished product. In this case, case study methodology was used because it helps to make sense out of processes and to understand the situational details that make a program or process happen as it did (Sanders, 1981, in Merriam, 1998). The research aims focused upon how independent school teachers experienced a successful change process. The study identified underlying variables that persuaded faculty in those schools to change their practice. Merriam (1998) wrote that case studies are particularly applicable to school change processes and to understanding a phenomenon that occurred over a period of time. Case studies present a detailed, complete account of an historical experience. Merriam (1998) pointed out that historical case studies are descriptive and use direct observation and systematic interviewing in order to produce a detailed account of the phenomenon under study. They chronicle a period of time, making them well suited to studying innovation. The insights offered are particular to the case, yet shed light on real-life experiences. According to Merriam (1998), case studies help researchers build the base of knowledge about how phenomena transpire.

The resulting product, the case study, has a descriptive, narrative tone, rather than a scientific one, because it reflects a qualitative paradigm (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative case study enables the researcher to identify teachers’ perceptions in a way that a quantitative study with its more bounded form of inquiry would not (Merriam, 1998). This tradition recognizes that the study is of a single case and is not conclusive, but instead, is illuminating in the way that a single, first hand account can be (Merriam, 1998).

In this research study, the unit of analysis is one exemplary independent school. The description centers upon the teachers' experience with the transition as those teachers experienced it. As Shenton and Hay-Gibson (2009) stated in their article "Dilemmas and Further Debates in Qualitative Research," the benefit of qualitative research is to see the social world from the participant's frame of reference and perspective. This study seeks an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of school improvement as teachers experienced it over a period of time. The research question is: In an innovative independent school, how do teachers perceive deliberate change efforts and relate to the school leaders who lead them? The question seeks the teachers' point of view from their frame of reference; thus the case study technique suits this study.

In Chapter Four, the school will be described in detail: its physical plant, neighborhood and location. The academic and extra curricular offerings, college placement, graduation requirements and culture will also be depicted, as well as information about the students' socio-economic and racial demographics. In addition, the indicators that have earned the school the "good to great" designation will be examined.

Focus Groups: Sampling, Selection and Techniques

Focus groups enable participants to share their lived experience and perceptions. Stake (1995) observed: "For the most part, the cases of interest in education and social service are people and programs . . . We are interested in them for both their uniqueness and commonality. We seek to understand them. We would like to hear their stories" (p. 1). Focus groups provide the opportunity for a group of teachers to tell their stories.

The sampling method in this study is to interview teachers in two focus groups. The technique is purposeful, criterion-based selection to gain representation from

different academic disciplines and genders. To participate, a teacher is required by the study design to have worked at the school before and through the change period (1997-2010). The researcher had a notion of the change period from a visit to Davis Academy in the fall of 2009, when administrators referred to changes that had occurred since the arrival of a new head of school in 1997. Artifacts showing marked improvement in admission yields, college placement, fundraising, and facilities expansion verified 1997-2010 as the years of change. Joseph Maxwell (1996) described the type of participants needed for an historical case study: “people who are uniquely able to be informative because they are expert in an area or were privileged witnesses to an event” (p. 70). Teachers had to have shared that history to participate in the study.

The two focus groups were comprised of voluntary participants who witnessed the full change process at the school. The teachers were informed about the study through a written description of it. The description was read by a teacher to the faculty during a meeting, and was also posted on the faculty portion of the school website. Also, a letter was sent to each eligible teacher inviting him or her to participate. If the teacher’s role changed from full-time teacher to a combined teaching and administrative role, then the teacher was still eligible to serve in the focus group as long as the majority of his or her work remained in teaching. All willing, eligible teachers were admitted to the study as long as their schedule permitted them to attend one of the after school focus groups.

Of the 18 eligible teachers, ten participated. These participants represented about eight percent of the entire faculty. The focus groups included three male and seven female teachers. The focus groups had three representatives from the middle school and seven representatives from the upper school. These teachers taught English, History,

Language, Math, Science, Art, Music, Drama and coached athletic teams, so every department was represented.

A prepared list of structured, open-ended questions was used to generate descriptive, analytical responses from the teachers. These focus group questions were based upon several theories (Fullan, 1992, 2001, 2003; Hord, Rutherford, Hulling, Hall, 2004; Collins, 2001; Burns, 1978; Bolman & Deal, 2008.)

Interviews

In order to clarify focus group data, I conducted interviews as well. One interview subject was selected from each focus group by lottery. Maxwell (1996) said of interviewing it was “the only way, for events that took place in the past (or ones to which you cannot gain observational access) of gaining a description of actions and events” (p. 76). Interviewees were asked questions designed to clarify and deepen the focus group data. They described their perceptions of events that took place during their time at Davis Academy.

Artifacts

In the fall of 2010, school artifacts from the change period were collected during meetings with the director of admissions, the director of advancement, and the director of college counseling. The business manager was contacted via e-mail. School administrators provided documents pertaining to enrollment, college placement and fundraising. This data helped illuminate the school’s condition before and during the change period. The artifacts clarified and corroborated data generated in the focus groups and interviews.

Role of the Researcher

I came to the role of researcher as an independent school administrator and teacher whose job was to innovate and make change. My bias, therefore, was to see the research from the perspective of the leaders rather than the teachers. Indeed, that was the intention of the study: to illuminate teachers' views on school change.

Prior to the research project, my knowledge of Davis Academy was limited. I first heard about the school and the improvement that it had made in the summer of 2009. My friend, who is a parent at the school, complimented the school's ability to individualize the program to her daughter. She encouraged me to visit Davis to see how flexible its course sign up systems were, and how the school provided each student with a program to match his or her needs. My friend also spoke of its rising competitiveness among schools in the area. Davis was competing for students with the most competitive day schools in the area, and that had not been true in the past.

In the fall of 2009, I led a team of four colleagues from my school, Derryfield School, to spend a day observing and meeting with administrators at Davis Academy. During that visit, I saw the data showing the great strides the school had made in the areas of curriculum development, program, admission, fundraising, and college placement. My friend's observations as a parent were supported by data provided by administrators.

When it came time to select a school for this case study, I knew that this was the school that would provide insight into improvement and teachers because Davis Academy had improved so much and so rapidly. I received permission to study the

school in the spring of 2010 and worked with the Head of the Upper School's assistant to arrange the logistics of the focus group meetings.

I knew only one participant from an outside context, LA, as she is called in the study. She was the substitute teacher for me when I went on maternity leave 15 years ago from a public school in New England. Coincidentally, she also served with me on a New England Association of Schools and Colleges evaluation team in the spring of 2010. That friendly relationship did not skew the data in any way; LA served as a participant similar to the others.

The qualitative researcher's role is to be involved and responsive to events while researching. I brought structured questions to the focus group and interview meetings and adapted questions in the moment based upon the responses given. The researcher's bias was in my expectations. I expected that the head of the school and a few teachers (who were leaders) would be identified as the change agents. I thought their inspiration would be critical to the success of school improvement. I expected teachers to identify many of the steps that Jim Collins (2001) wrote about in *Good to Great* including getting the wrong people out of the school and the right people in, focusing intently on a niche product that the school could do better than competitors, removing obstacles that blocked teachers from performing at their best, and personalizing education to challenge and support each students.

Data Collection

All data was collected during the summer and fall of 2010. Artifacts were gathered and focus groups and interviews were held during this period. Each focus group centered on the following questions.

The Beginning of the Change Process

The Initiation Phase

[based upon Fullan's work]

1. What were the change initiatives that the school undertook?
 - A. Who proposed the initiatives?
 - B. What was the process by which you learned about the initiatives?
 - C. Did you think the changes were needed and practical?
2. Looking back, do you think the school had the resources to make the proposed changes?
3. Do you think that the changes were relevant to the school's needs at the time?
 - A. Were they relevant to you and the faculty?
 - B. Do you think the school was ready to make the changes when they were introduced? Were multiple changes introduced at once?
4. What was the quality of the school and the education it provided:
 - A. Before the changes?
 - B. After the changes?
5. Did you personally feel ready for the changes?
 - A. Did you possess the skills and knowledge to follow through with them?
 - B. If not, did you receive time and training to prepare you for the change?

The Impact Phase

[based upon the work of Hord, et al.]

6. When you first learned of the change or innovation, how did you feel about it? What were your concerns?
7. Did you think that there would be sufficient:
 - A. Personnel for the changes?
 - B. Space or facilities to implement the changes?
 - C. Time to implement the changes?
 - D. Funding to implement the changes?
8. Were you concerned about how the change would affect you or your work?

The Middle of the Change Process

[based upon the work of Little & McLaughlin; Hord et al.; Rosenholtz]

9. When you adopted the innovation or change, how did it affect your workload? Did it affect it as much, more or less than you anticipated?

10. Did the way that teachers viewed students change in any way?

The End of the Change Process
[based upon the work of Hord et al. and Little & McLaughlin]

11. After you had grown accustomed to the change or initiative, what were some of the thoughts that you had about the changes?

12. Did you choose to work with other teachers or did you work alone?

13. Did you adapt to the changes as they were presented or did you further adapt or refine the changes?

14. Would you describe your school as a united faculty or are teachers in enclaves by academic discipline or division?

Leadership and Change
[based upon the research of Burns and Bolman & Deal]

15. Were there particular events that were critical to accelerating or decelerating the rate of change? Did the school become great because of the planned changes or due to other factors?

16. What role did the head of school or other school leader play in persuading the teachers to change teaching or school practices?

A. Did the your relationship with the head of school or other school leaders play a role in your experience with change process?

B. How did leaders motivate teachers to change?

17. What ideas were important in persuading you to participate in the school change?

A. Did those ideas connect to the school's mission statement?

B. To your personal philosophy of education?

Data Analysis

During interviews, participants were asked follow-up questions that clarified and deepened the focus group data. The focus group and interview data was tape recorded, transcribed and downloaded into NVivo software. Each response was coded as a separate bit of data and the responses sorted by theme. Merriam (1999) advised that the next level

of analysis was naming the categories that connected the themes. The categories aligned to the research questions and answered them. The categories were few in number, but covered all the data that was deemed important. Identifying themes and categories was largely intuitive.

The NVivo program and content analysis method (which is often used in qualitative research) helped with data analysis. Responses that did not fit the themes or categories will be examined and noted. Later, theory was broadened to account for such responses.

After coding for themes and categories, the participants were analyzed. I looked for commonalities among those participants whose statements were similar to see whether those teachers had qualities in common such as gender, teaching in either the upper or middle school, or teaching in a given department. The focus group's composition and dynamics were described. Whether minority opinions surfaced or were silenced, how the participants interacted and changes in the atmosphere (from relaxed to tense) as topics were discussed.

At this point, data were compared by category to the literature on school change and the way that teachers perceive change. This level of analysis involved the development of theory. At this level, cross analysis was important. The analysis moved from the empirical data to the realm of making inferences and to generating theory.

Validity

Internal Validity

In qualitative research a major validity threat is the way that the researcher handles her presence in the study. As Kemmis (in Merriam, 1998) commented, the

observer's presence is critical to the data's legitimacy. The researcher must be aware of her viewpoint; otherwise, she may view the data through that lens rather than listening to what the participants say. The key to validity is careful listening and identification of one's biases up front.

This project includes accepted internal validity strategies such as triangulation, member checks and peer examination. The triangulation occurs by using a number of participants' recollections of the same historical period. The member checks were done throughout the study; I checked interpretations with participants. The participants, in one-on-one interviews, were asked to check some interpretations. In addition, the entire participant group was consulted via e-mail. Also, Glenn Pierce and Diane Tabor, peer reviewers, examined the themes and the data.

Another threat to the validity of data is to disregard discrepant data. Discrepant data was evaluated for value and veracity.

Reliability

Reliability is traditionally understood to be the notion that replication of data means that that data is legitimate. Achieving reliability with this definition is unlikely because qualitative educational research is highly individualized and designed to be particular, not replicable. Merriam (1998) suggested a different perspective—that the data be compared with data from other participants to see if it aligns. By detailing the conditions in which data was collected, the researcher can provide adequate information for the reader to judge consistency and dependability. Merriam wrote that reliability is strengthened by triangulating multiple methods of data collection and analysis.

External Validity

The qualitative case study of a single, exemplary case is not generalizable in the traditional sense. Merriam (1998) wrote that in qualitative research, the single case or small nonrandom sample is chosen so that the researcher can understand the details in depth, not to generate a broad conclusion. Merriam (1998) suggested viewing the notion of external validity differently, such that the reader compares the findings of the case study to his or her own situation and draws insight from it depending on the fit between the case's context and his or her own context. An awareness of the particularities of the case and the comparison situation creates the validity.

Ethics

The role of ethics in the research approach constituted another validity consideration. Anonymity for the participants and the school were important safeguards for the participants' privacy. Creswell wrote,

Researchers . . . also need to anticipate the possibility of harmful information being disclosed during the data collection process . . . In these situations, the ethical code for researchers is to protect the privacy of the participants and to convey this protection to all individuals involved in a study. (p. 65)

I was prepared to have participants reveal information that may be upsetting to themselves or others, though that did not happen.

I was attuned to gathering data without influencing people, so as not to direct the answers of the participants. I tried to receive information and ask questions, rather than add information to the discussion. The same caution extended to analyzing that data. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) wrote,

The important thing is to recognize when either our own or the respondents' biases, assumptions, or beliefs are intruding into the analysis . . . The researcher must walk a fine line between getting into the hearts and minds of respondents, while at the same time keeping enough distance to be able to think clearly and analytically about what is being said or done. (p. 80-81)

Validity takes a different shape in qualitative research than in quantitative research. The researcher is unmonitored through much of the data gathering; it is up to him or her to be considerate and careful in interactions with participants. As Seidman (1991) advised, "Listen more, talk less . . . Avoid leading questions" (p. 84). He wrote that researchers "must have a genuine interest in other people. They must be deeply aware that other people's stories are of worth in and of themselves" (p. 94). The burden of validity lies with the researcher. He or she must collect data from people with different perspectives while constantly monitoring his or her own for bias.

Participant and Peer Checking

I checked the categories and themes with the participants via e-mail. This communication with the participants constituted a validity check. As Creswell (2003) wrote in *Research Design* "use member-checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking . . . specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate" (p. 196). The interviewees helped to clarify focus group statements, and enabled the researcher to check her understanding of data.

In addition, the researcher checked emergent findings with two peer reviewers. Creswell (2003) wrote, "Use peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the account. This process involves locating a person (a peer debriefer) who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the

researcher” (p. 196). Two professors served in the peer reviewer capacity for this study: Glenn Pierce and Diane Tabor. Glenn Pierce, Ph.D., is the Principal Research Scientist for the College of Criminal Justice and the Acting Director of the Institute for Security and Public Policy at Northeastern University. Diane Tabor, Ed.D., is a member of the faculty of the Harvard University Extension School, the Harvard Graduate School of Education summer faculty, and a presenter at the Harvard Graduate School of Design Programs in Executive Education. Dr. Tabor was Director of Curriculum and Secondary Education for the Lexington, MA, Public Schools from 1996-2002. I chose Dr. Pierce as my peer reviewer because of his expertise in research procedures, and Dr. Tabor because of her expertise in school innovation and change. Dr. Pierce and Dr. Tabor checked the inferences to see that they were consistent with the data.

Conclusion

In order to answer the research question, this study was designed as a case study. Qualitative research was used in order to understand the nuances of the participants’ perceptions of the change process and their relationships with their leaders. This design helped to reveal the uniqueness of the participants’ experiences by allowing them to tell stories from their memories of a past historical period. The value of qualitative research is that it enables the researcher to discover aspects of the subject through open-ended questioning. Internal validity strategies in this study included peer examination, member checking, and triangulation. The major burden of validity lay with me as the researcher. I constantly monitored myself for bias through the data collection and analysis periods.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Artifact Analysis: Davis Academy's Transition from Good to Great

Identifying an independent school like Davis Academy, which has improved from “good to great” can be done using a number of indicators. Measuring such a change requires an analysis of indicators that show people’s confidence in the school and the school’s success in educating students. More students applying and matriculating to the institution reflect an improving reputation. Improved student achievement, as measured by tests that matter to families like the S.A.T. and A.P. tests and students admitted to the most competitive American colleges, is also a measure of improvement. More parents donating money is a sign of people’s growing faith in the school. Taken together, these factors help to indicate the health, effectiveness, and prestige of an independent school.

This research studies Davis Academy’s change during the period of time between 1997-2010. Davis Academy showed distinct improvement in admission, student achievement and fundraising during that time. Though great schools are constantly changing and improving, a distinct period of change occurred when the current Head of School, Jim Peterson, started his tenure in 1997. The artifacts show significant change from that point forward, and the participants identify 1997-2010 as a time in which they perceived great progress. I met with the directors of advancement, admission, college counseling, and obtained the artifacts during those meetings. The artifacts included the

Admission Funnel Report (2010); Open Windows, Open Minds (1991) (a school history); Davis Academy 2003-04 Profile; Davis Academy 2009-10 Profile; Davis Academy 2010-11 Profile; a Head's letter to the Davis Academy community (May 2000), college placement report (2000), annual fund reports (1987-2010), electronic correspondence with the Admission Director, and The Davis Academy Vision and Strategic Goals (2007). In the study, the artifacts were used to describe the change that occurred, rather than to analyze it. Artifacts provided the details for the case study description.

In admission, the artifacts revealed that Davis Academy was better able to attract and enroll students at the end of the change period than at the beginning. The "Admissions Funnel Data" report (fall 2010), revealed that during the 1998-99 school year, 892 families called the Davis admission office for interview materials. By the 2010-11 school year, 1,388 families had inquired about the school. During the 1998-99 school year, 395 students were interviewed and of these, 313 submitted applications as compared with 646 interviews and 535 applications during the 2010-11 school year. Newly enrolled students increased, too, from 81 students in the 1998-99 school year to 105 in 2010-11 school year (Admission Funnel Data, fall 2010). Each full pay student's family contributed \$35,400 in tuition (2010-11 school year), so an increase of 24 students represents a dramatic increase in revenue for the school.

In student achievement, the school's performance improved significantly. The artifacts exhibiting this data are the Davis Academy 2003-04 Profile and Davis Academy 2009-10 Profile. These profiles were sent to college and university admission offices with student transcripts so that admission officers could better understand a Davis student's transcript. On the SAT I tests, the 2004 medians were 595 verbal and 590 math (Davis

Academy 2003-04 Profile). In 2010, the SAT medians were 665 critical reading, 680 writing, and 690 math (Davis Academy 2010-11 Profile). In 2004, 22 seniors took 35 A.P. examinations in six subject areas. Every student earned a score of 3 or above with 86 percent earning scores of 4 or 5 (Davis Academy 2003-04 Profile). In the class of 2010, 70 students took 143 examinations and 99 percent earned scores of 3 or above with 78 percent earning scores of 4 or 5 (Davis Academy 2010-11 Profile). Such increases in the number of students performing well on A.P. examinations could be attributed to an increase in the number of capable students as a percentage of the class, an increase in the number of A.P. courses offered, and/or better prepared students. All of these factors indicate improvement.

Another indication of improvement is better college placement. The school set a goal of placing 35 percent of its seniors in the top 50 colleges and universities in the country (Head's letter, May 2000). School leaders used *U.S. News and World Report* as the ranking authority. The Director of College Counseling said that their measure of the "top 50 schools" was not scientific, but more of a guideline. They wanted the goal to be a motivator for school improvement. They considered "the top 50" a valid measure of school improvement, because better college placement showed that the caliber of Davis students was improving in the judgment of colleges and universities. *U.S. News and World Report's* lists top 50 universities and colleges separately. Davis college counselors combined the lists, using the top 25 liberal arts colleges and 25 universities from each of the *U.S. News and World Report* lists. The *U.S. News and World Report's* lists use admission statistics, alumni giving, faculty salaries and other indicators of school health to rank schools.

The list of the top 50 schools, the Director of College Counseling stated, was a “moving target,” and a modest way to quantify student quality. The Davis college counselors adapted the list by omitting the service academies and schools to which few Davis students apply such as the California Institute of Technology. The counselors added schools like Tufts University, which they thought merited top 50 ranking.

According to the Director of College Counselor in 1999, the first year of working toward the goal, about 25 percent of graduates matriculated to top 50 liberal arts colleges and research universities. Within a few years, the school met its 35 percent goal. From the artifacts, I found that 22 percent of graduates from the class of 2000 attended the top 50 colleges and universities (Davis Class of 2000 college counseling report). For the years 2007-10, 38 percent of graduates attended such schools (Davis Academy 2009-10 Profile).

When that goal was reached, the school added the target that of those students in the top 50 schools, 15 percent would be in the top 20 (top 10 liberal arts colleges or top 10 research universities). This goal was more difficult to attain. Davis placed 8 percent of its class of 2000 graduates and 15 percent of its graduates for the years of 2007-10 in top 10 schools (The Davis School Profile, 2009-2010).

While college placement, admission success, and academic test performance all indicate school improvement, so does parental support. Independent schools depend upon donations to their annual funds to fully pay for their programs. To build and renovate facilities, they run capital campaigns targeted at parents, alumni, and foundations. These contributions are voluntary and represent investment in the school beyond the cost of tuition. At Davis Academy, the 2010-11 tuition (without books and fees) was \$35,400.

Considering the cost of tuition, annual and capital giving represents a great commitment by parents.

Donations to the school significantly increased since 1997 when the current head of school, Jim, was hired. Annual fund contributions totaled \$238,830 in 1997; however, by 2010 they had grown to \$1,053,129 (Total Annual Giving report for FY87-10). Capital giving increased from \$773,723 in 1997 to \$3,113,406 in 2010 with an unprecedented year in 2007 when \$4,544,108 was raised (Capital Giving report for FY87-10). According to the Director of Advancement, the majority of that growth came from current parents. In 2000 current parents gave 27 percent of total giving, but by 2010, that number had grown to 62 percent (Constituent Breakdown report FY 00-10). When the Director of Advancement gave me the data, she stated out that prior to 1997, only one donor had given a million dollar gift and that donor has since then significantly increased his gifts to the school. Since 1997, twelve donors have given gifts of one million dollars or more. Of the million dollar donors, all were parents or parents of graduates. Financial donations are a literal show of support for an institution, and donations to Davis Academy dramatically increased during the period of 1997-2010.

Davis Academy was a good independent school in 1997. It was able to attract students in a competitive market, educate them for placement in many competitive colleges and universities, and support itself through donations and tuition. A change occurred between 1997-2010, which is noticeable in data on student SAT and A.P. test scores, college placement results, admission statistics, and fundraising totals. That change represented a leap forward in key areas of school success and together indicates a change from a good to a great school. This change was supported in focus group data as well.

The participants supported the idea that Davis is a great school that has significantly increased the number of capable students, student performance, faculty quality and is a far more satisfying workplace than it was prior to 1997.

The Case: One Exemplary Independent School

For the purpose of this case study, one exemplary New England independent school was chosen. This school improved from a good school to great school between 1997-2011. The names of the school and the faculty members as well as the school's location have been changed for the purpose of anonymity.

Davis Academy is a small, independent, coeducational day school for bright, motivated students in grades 6-12. A member of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and the Association of Independent Schools of New England (AISNE), Davis has its own unique culture and mission, yet resembles many independent schools in its high academic standards, small classes, and preparation for advanced college or university study (Davis Academy website).

The tranquil, leafy campus is located at the end of a long road in a quiet suburban neighborhood. The site seems remote, yet the school is only ten minutes from a major U.S. highway and 20 minutes from a major American city. The school buildings include three classroom buildings (which house administrative offices as well), the library building (which houses the admission office and two classrooms). There are two gymnasiums, one of which includes space for six classrooms. An immense, attractive new field house/hockey building welcomes visitors as they enter campus. That building also houses a gymnasium and a conference room. Another large building is under construction: a student center which will house a cafeteria, a café, an assembly space for

the whole school community, the language department, eight classrooms, and the counseling, tutoring and community service offices. Two buildings house the music school: a large Victorian house and a barn-styled structure. These buildings provide space for an auditorium, practice rooms, ensemble space, and offices. The music buildings serve hundreds of students of all ages from both Davis Academy and the surrounding community.

In addition to instructional buildings, the school owns numerous other facilities on and adjacent to campus. An antique clapboard house provides the office space for the business and advancement departments. The school owns nine houses in the immediate neighborhood that are occupied by faculty and staff. The 14-acre campus boasts natural attributes including wooded areas, wetlands, a large pond, docks and sheds for swimming and kayaking equipment and four playing fields. The school owns and operates a camp across the pond that has a main cabin and several smaller cabins.

Davis evolved from a tiny boys' school to a small, coeducational institution during its 105-year history. Davis School was founded in 1915 by an educator, Fellowes Davis, on the advice of a group of physicians who advocated that the rugged environment of an open-air school would be good for boys' health. (At the time, many young people fell ill with polio and other diseases.) A merger with another boys' school, plus demands for playing fields and classrooms, inspired the trustees to move to a larger site, then a growing student body again demanded more space. Fifty years ago the trustees purchased the current site: a sprawling, multi-acre farm with a pond attached. Davis was a boys' school and remained one until the trustees voted to adopt coeducation in 1989 (Delinsky, 1991). The school has evolved into a place where a diverse student body is

educated by a program offering academics, athletics, service, and the arts. In addition, the school runs two summer day camps for area youth.

A Davis education has always been college preparatory. The school is proud of its history of developing young people's intellectual, artistic, athletic and personal strengths. Still, it was only in the last decade that the school was considered among the most competitive independent day schools in the area.

Davis has a mission, core values,

and motto that shape its decision-making. The mission statement is:

[Davis] challenges students to attain their highest levels of excellence in academics, arts, and athletics. We set high standards and expect students to participate actively in their learning. We cultivate a caring, respectful, and collaborative environment that encourages student performance, including demonstration of logical thought, informed and articulate voice, creative vision, and integrity. [Davis] is dedicated to preparing its students for leadership in a world that needs their talents, imagination, intellect, and compassion. (Davis Academy website)

The core values are those expressed in the school seal "Integritas et Sedulitas"

Integritas: Integrity. We value responsibility, honesty, compassion, diversity, and respect, acknowledging that our actions have a profound impact on ourselves, on others, on the environment, and on the community as a whole.
Sedulitas: Perseverance. We acknowledge that the diligent pursuit of intellectual, creative, physical and moral excellence is essential to one's strength of character.

The school motto is: "Excellence with humanity."

Davis' students come from 55-65 towns and cities. They range in age from 11 to 18 years old and represent a number of racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Many students are from affluent families and live in nearby, exclusive suburbs. Other students are from urban and suburban middle or working class families; they are able to attend due to the financial aid program. Financial aid allows 26 percent of students to

attend the school (electronic correspondence with the Director of Admission, 2010). Full annual tuition is \$35,400 plus additional fees. The student body is 86 percent white and 14 percent students of color (electronic correspondence with the Director of Admission, 2010). Students' goals are homogenous; 100 percent of students matriculate to colleges, universities or service academies each year. Indeed, a major reason that families are attracted to the school is for its record of preparing students to thrive in four-year colleges and universities. Davis students are prepared to apply to college as well, and college counseling is an important task of the school's administration. Davis students have a median SAT reading score of 665; math 690, and writing 680, and a median ACT score of 29 (Davis Academy 2010-11 Profile). Davis graduates of the class of 2010 are currently attending Cornell, Brown, Yale, Princeton, Duke, Georgetown, Davidson, Northwestern, Washington University, Wesleyan, Hamilton, Colby, Bates, Tufts, Middlebury, Boston College, Johns Hopkins, Emory, Wellesley, Carnegie-Mellon, New England Conservatory of Music and other colleges and universities (electronic correspondence with the Director of Admission, 2010). College placement has been an area of focus and improvement during the last 10-12 years (Davis Academy Class of 2000 college counseling report, Davis Academy 2003-04 Profile, Davis Academy 2009-2010 Profile, Davis Academy 2010-11 Profile).

Admission to Davis is selective. Prospective students and their families must interview and submit a written application, SSAT scores, grades and recommendations from their current schools. While admission standards have risen over the last decade, so too have the number of spaces available. Davis has grown from a school of 390 to 457 students (Davis School profile, 2003-04, Davis Academy website). According to the

Director of Admissions, special attention is paid to students with exceptional accomplishments in academics, athletics, or other areas.

The Davis program is designed to provide a well-rounded education for each student that includes required academic, artistic, service, and athletic experiences. The school's website states, "Through small classes and demanding courses, the program at [Davis] provides a challenging academic curriculum at ever increasing levels of expectation" (Davis Academy website). Upper school (grades 9-12) students must meet graduation requirements that include study in six disciplines. Art, music and drama classes are offered as full academic courses and students must fulfill the two-year art requirement to graduate. Many students avail themselves of 34 honors and Advanced Placement courses. Last year, 63 percent of eleventh and twelfth grade students took 205 Advanced Placement exams in 15 subjects. The results: 99 percent of scores were 3 and above, and 80 percent of scores were 4 and above (Davis Academy profile 2010-11 Profile). In addition, students must participate in co-curricular activities two seasons each year. These co-curricular activities include athletics, drama, community service, and publication editorships. Middle school students have had a similarly well-rounded program since 2003. Davis has offered a unique Conservatory Program that enables serious music students to be Davis students and pursue their music at a high level. In this program, students exchange athletics and other requirements for musical study (Davis Academy website).

Students achieve at a high level in the arts and in athletics. In studio art, 18 students received numerous honors in the 2010 state Scholastic Art Awards competition.

This annual, prestigious national competition is sponsored on the state level by a regional newspaper and the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers. Students in grades 7-12 submit artwork for the competition. The judges award Gold Keys [the highest award], Silver Keys (the next most prestigious), and honorable mention, and the winning pieces are shown at an art show in the state capital. The best Gold Key winning pieces compete for national honors. Davis Academy students won three Gold Keys, four Silver Keys, and 11 honorable mentions in 2010. In 2009, 21 students earned prizes at the Small Independent School Art League competition (six first prizes, four second prizes, three third prizes, and eight honorable mentions). In music, the Davis Big Band won the 2010 gold medal at the state Association for Jazz Education Big Band Competition. At the national level, the student band competed in the Charles Mingus Competition at the Manhattan School of Music and was named Best Big Band (Davis Academy 2009-2010 Profile, Davis Academy 2010-11 Profile).

Davis athletes have received accolades as well. Davis teams have won Independent School League (ISL) championships in football, tennis, basketball and track in the last two years. In 2010, the boys' tennis team won the New England Class "C" Championship, the boys' lacrosse team won a share of the league title with a 14-1 record, and the boys' football team won the Independent School League title. The girls' basketball team won the Davis Holiday Tournament and reached the finals of the regional Class B Tournament. In the last two years, Davis has had 26 athletes named to All-League teams, 11 to All-Scholastic teams, nine to regional All-Stars, six to All-Region teams, two to All-State teams, and three to All-American teams. These honors were earned in a variety of sports: football, basketball, lacrosse, soccer, cross country, baseball,

ski racing, hockey, field hockey, tennis and softball (Davis School 2010-11 Profile).

The school's atmosphere is friendly and informal. Like a small town, everyone seems to know and greet one other. Davis has a teacher-student ratio of 1:6, an average class size of 12 students, and an overall enrollment of 455 students in grades 6-12 (Davis Academy website). Every student is assigned or chooses a faculty advisor. The advisory system is designed to bond each student to an adult in the community. The role of the advisor is to provide each student with an adult mentor. This teacher or administrator meets one to two times per week with their group of advisees and with each advisee one-on-one as needed. In these groups, students discuss academic performance, social issues, adolescent life topics, or simply chat about the latest movies or current events.

The 85 Davis faculty members are well educated and experienced. Fifty teachers have master's degrees and seven have or are pursuing Ph.D. degrees. These teachers are graduates of some of the most competitive colleges and universities in the United States, including Yale, Dartmouth, Harvard, Brown, Boston College, Kenyon, and New England Conservatory of Music. In addition, these teachers are experienced in their fields; almost all have at least two years of teaching experience, and 18 have worked at Davis for 11 years or more (Davis Academy website).

Focus Groups

Focus Group Research

In order to investigate this change more deeply, I convened two focus groups of teachers at Davis Academy. The focus group "method is particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think, but how they think and why they think that way" (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 1), so the

approach fit research on teachers' perceptions of change. Focus groups enable participants to:

talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view. . . (focus groups can reveal) dimensions of understanding that often remain untapped by more conventional data collection techniques. . . Tapping into such interpersonal communication is also important because this can highlight (sub) cultural values and group norms. (Kitzinger)

As a means of delving into participants' memories and judgments about a subject, focus groups are a useful research tool.

Focus Groups at Davis Academy

The sole requirement for participation in this study's focus groups was to have teaching as a primary responsibility and to have started one's career at Davis in or before 1997. The change period seems to have officially begun when the current Head of School started in 1997; however, those teachers who began in 1998 and 1999 still witnessed the years of maximum change. By adding those two years to the participant profile, I was able to include more teachers' voices in the focus groups.

The two focus groups were organized around the teachers' schedules. The teachers were voluntary participants, and every volunteer was allowed to participate. Each was composed of men and women, middle and upper school teachers, and teachers from a variety of departments and disciplines. A few were department chairs; however, the majority of their responsibilities involved teaching. All the participants were involved in student life in some capacity outside of the classroom such as coaching or advising a service program.

The focus group members were asked the same set of questions. The questions

were:

1. What were the change initiatives that the school undertook?
 - A. Who proposed the new initiatives?
 - B. What was the process by which you learned about the new initiatives?
 - C. Did you think the changes were needed and practical?
2. Looking back, do you think the school had the resources to make the proposed changes?
3. Do you think that the changes were relevant to the school's needs at the time?
 - A. Were they relevant to you and the faculty?
 - B. Do you think the school was ready to make the changes when they were introduced?
 - C. Were multiple changes introduced at once?
4. What was the quality of the school and the education it provided:
 - A. Before the changes?
 - B. After the changes?
5. Did you personally feel ready for the changes? Did you possess the skills and knowledge to follow through with them? If not, how did you adapt?
6. When you first learned of the change or innovation, how did you feel about it? Were you concerned about how the change would affect you or your work?
7. Did you think that there would be sufficient:
 - A. Personnel for the changes?
 - B. Space or facilities to implement the changes?
 - C. Time to implement the changes?
 - D. Funding to implement the changes?
8. When you adopted the innovation or change, how did it affect your workload? Did it affect it as much, more or less than you anticipated?
9. Did the way that teachers viewed students change in any way?
10. After you had grown accustomed to the change or initiative, what were some of the thoughts that you had about the changes?
11. Did you choose to work with other teachers or did you work alone?
12. Did you adapt to the changes as they were presented or did you refine them?

13. Would you describe your school as a united faculty or are teachers in enclaves by academic discipline or division?
14. Were there particular events that were critical to the rate of change? Did the school become great because of the planned changes or due to other factors?
15. What role did the head of school or other school leader play in persuading the teachers to change teaching or school practices? Did the your relationship with the head of school or other school leaders play a role in your experience with change process?
16. What ideas were important in persuading you to participate in the school change? Did those ideas connect to the school's mission statement? To the your personal philosophy of education?

The group dynamic was such that the focus group members used the questions to tell a narrative about the history of the school during the change period. Focus group 1 (FG1) included: JE, an Upper School (US) English teacher, CA, a Middle School (MS) Language teacher, JI, a US math teacher, DA, a US Arts teacher, and TR, a MS Arts teacher. This group was highly unified and mutually reinforcing. When one participant spoke, the others frequently nodded their heads in agreement or verbally affirmed their colleague's statements by saying "yes" or "um hum." Sometimes a colleague would jump in and elaborate on a part of an answer begun by another participant. They told their school's story as a group, pausing as a particular colleague would share his or her individual experiences. When the person finished, the group affirmed that colleague's comments by verbally agreeing or nodding their heads. Their body language was relaxed throughout the focus group period.

The second focus group (FG2) was similarly unified and relaxed. The members of that group, FG2, were: SU, a female US music teacher, ME, a female US Language teacher, LA, a female, MS History teacher, EL, a female, US Spanish teacher, and DB, a male US History teacher. The dynamic in FG2 was similar to that in FG1: collegial and

congenial. Like FG1, the members of FG2 tried to tell me the history of their school cooperatively. My research questions challenged their memories and they sometimes checked their memories with each other to be sure they had their sequencing correct. They seemed delighted to be together and frequently side conversations emerged as colleagues shared a memory or laugh together.

Throughout the two-hour session, only one area of significant disagreement occurred and it was in FG2. This disagreement arose when a participant who had started in 1999 stated that the school had been struggling when the current Head of School arrived in 1997. Another member of the group, EL, who had taught at Davis twice as long as LA had, passionately opposed this statement. She said that the school was good in 1997. EL stated:

I will say that people in the community come up to me and say ‘Oh my God, Davis has changed so much, it’s turning into such a great school.’ I find myself being a little defensive about that, because as much as I agree, when I came here (25 years ago) it was a great school, a great faculty, great kids, and so I feel like it’s always been a great place so actually I tend to . . . play down when people say that . . . It bothers me that they think it was a crappy school.

When EL corrected her, LA did not attempt to defend her earlier statement, nor did members of the group members speak up on one side or the other. The group did not establish agreement on whether Davis was a good or a mediocre school at the start of the change process.

Confluence

The two focus groups were so similar in affect and in answers to the research questions, that they acted like one big group. The focus groups themselves seemed to have little impact on the answers to my research questions.

I cannot attribute the importance of a change variable to the amount of time it was

discussed in the focus groups. Some variables received minimal discussion because the group was in complete agreement and then swiftly moved on to a different topic. Other times, a group would discuss a variable at length because participants were working to piece together their memory about it and then worked out their analysis of it before moving on. Other times, they discussed a variable for a longer time, because they just had a lot of information to share. As a result, to “count” the number of times a variable was mentioned or to measure the length of time that it was discussed is not a reflection of the relative validity of a variable to the groups.

The Organizational Context for Change

Davis was ready for change when a new Head of School, Jim Peterson, was hired. Participants said that the school was stable or strong; however, the faculty and staff were ready if not eager for visionary leadership. As I2 said: “We were so ready for change.” Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) wrote that among the qualities that schools ready to initiate change possess are a belief in the practical need for and readiness to change. According to focus group members, Davis teachers saw both the relevance and readiness for change.

Among the issues requiring resolution was the level of athletic competitiveness of the teams. The year before Jim Peterson came, conversation circulated about whether Davis ought to leave the ISL, because its teams could not compete. Teachers talked about how demoralizing it was that teams lost so frequently. EL said, “There was a whole controversy of that prestige, lack of prestige if you’re not in the ISL, because there are dozens of schools that would give their right teeth to be in the ISL and that needed solving was: At what level of athletic competition was Davis going to compete?”

Another management issue was the relationship between the middle and upper schools. The middle school (grades 6-8) did not have a defined identity and philosophy that was distinct from the upper school (grades 9-12), nor were the upper and middle schools coordinated with one another. For example, teachers who had a middle school class before an upper school class would arrive at the upper school class five minutes late because the bell schedules were not aligned. The middle school program's identity was not defined or differentiated in 1997.

Faculty retention was a pressing concern. Salaries were considered low. Faculty members cut individual salary deals, and there was no sense of a career path at the school. During this time, a faculty affairs committee was formed to work on issues like salary, benefits, bonuses, and career paths. Participants stated that the committee reflected faculty discontent.

Inadequate facilities also illustrated a type of discontent with the status quo. The athletics staff struggled to run the program with inadequate space for the number of teams and students. The old music facility was an actual barn that made teaching and learning difficult. SU, a music teacher, shared that the air quality was bad and that she taught 35 middle school students in a room meant for 15 students.

I found the facilities issue extremely, extremely challenging and frustrating . . . I'm sure you'd hear similar things from somebody dealing with athletics that these changes had to happen and fortunately they did, and it's made us be able to concentrate on our craft in teaching it and sharing it with our students as opposed to 'oh man it's too hot in here' or 'we can't breathe', or 'where do we store anything', so that was a huge change here.

A number of teachers said that there was a lack of school identity and insecurity about the future in 1997. DB said some of the tension drove the formation of the faculty

affairs committee: “some of that was due to the fact that we didn’t have leadership and there were issues that were festering that weren’t getting resolved.” ME stated: “The faculty was dealing with discomfort, with fear and things like that just weren’t happy” and “in order to move forward in a positive direction we needed a pretty good shake up. The school was ready for change when Jim Peterson arrived in 1997.

Focus Groups’ Responses

Similarities Focus group 1 (FG1) and focus group 2 (FG2) had a many similar responses. Both groups identified low salaries as a critical problem prior to Jim Peterson’s tenure, and stated that the school had difficulty retaining teachers as a result. They viewed Jim’s ability to solve that problem as a key variable in the change process at Davis. EL said:

The prior head . . . many issues and I think it goes back to not being heard and actually hugely underpaid and people who’d been here for long, we saw top, top caliber colleagues have to leave the school if they had children. You just couldn’t keep them (due to the low salaries).

FG2 discussed salary more than FG1, and all of the responses agreed with FG1. The shared perception was that solving the salary problem was a building block in the school’s change from good to great.

Another area of agreement was the idea that one of Jim’s accomplishments was a “less is more” approach to faculty workloads. This paring down, the groups agreed, resulted in teachers getting paid an extra stipend for coaching and reducing the expected full-time teacher load. The result was that teachers teach four classes, advise students, and run an activity, whereas before the change, they each would have also coached two sports or the equivalent. ME stated.” DA concurred, “I agree with ME. It’s less work in some ways, but you’re probably doing more because you like what you’re doing.” Both

groups described the outcome of that change as the reality that Davis teachers do what they do with great dedication and enthusiasm because their responsibilities now match their strengths.

Personnel

On the subject of hiring, the focus groups' responses were identical. Both said that one of the Head of School's strengths was finding excellent new teachers who were well matched to the school. As a result, the teachers contributed to the school's effort to meet the strategic plan goals. As LA stated "Once the [new] people come they're provided with . . . he (Jim) just allowed them to grow, to be passionate about the things that they love and gives them training so they get better and better." The new people have brought knowledge and skills that fit with the strategic plan goals.

All agreed that Jim was hired to "shake things up," and that he was excited to take on the challenge of improving Davis Academy. They said that Jim likes to listen to the community's stories, and is an eloquent speaker. All agreed that Jim talks only about the students and learning. As SU said, "If we need a building . . . it's about kids and learning." This commitment to the mission helped to frame change in a way that justified it.

The groups were similar on the subject of teachers leaving the faculty as a necessary factor in the school's change. Both groups stated that when Jim came, some colleagues left. The situations were handled with discretion, so the participants did not know definitively who left because they were asked to leave and who chose to leave voluntarily. The politics were described as quiet, and there was no controversy about the notion that if a teacher was unhappy with the new head's vision, then he or she should

move on. ME explained “you know, because this is the program” which sounds like the cliché, “get with the program.” The participants were glad that Jim asked new colleagues to leave when they were unsuccessful. In one case, the faculty had been “very involved” in “a very lengthy year one process” to hire an upper school head. When that upper school head hire did not work out, the participants expressed satisfaction that the Head fired the administrator after one year. When a new teacher did not work out, Jim was decisive about moving that person out as well.

Participants in both groups expressed sadness over some non-renewed teachers, but no serious objection was raised to the idea that colleagues left or were asked to leave when Jim came. The only exception to this was that FG1 expressed that as CA said “there are some people who harbor some resentment” over the firing of one teacher, because a department head had too much influence in the matter.

Change in the effectiveness of leadership was another area of confluence. The leadership structure consists of department chairs, who gather opinions from faculty and who organize and coordinate the curriculum, and division heads and other administrators who work on the day-to-day operations and vision for the school. Both focus groups described department chairs and administrators as effective, accessible, open, and worthy of trust. In FG2, the consensus opinion was that though the faculty members have fewer meetings, their voices are heard through department chairs and e-mail. Both groups stated that they could meet with any administrator and that administrators were receptive to their ideas. DA stated that before Jim Peterson came, the faculty used to debate everything, and that he appreciated that the current leadership team makes small administrative decisions (with teacher input) that enable him to focus on teaching and not

spend too much time in meetings.

The groups discussed various aspects of the head's style. All participants were respectful and admiring of the Head, however, some people talked about different aspects of his style. FG1 described Jim as "very well prepared," hard working, and knowledgeable about the school. They identified his personality as authentic, private, reserved, focused, and serious with the faculty. "He's a plan guy. He likes to, he works tirelessly with his plans," said TR. The participants' perception was that he was physically present at most events and meetings.

The group members said that they were not personally close or "buddy-buddy" with Jim, but that that did not matter. His appeal was his ideas and effectiveness. DB stated that Jim was authoritative, but not authoritarian in his leadership style. Jim asks questions, talks with people, decides on the best course of action with faculty input, and then comes up with a plan for implementing it and implements it. "You know what has gone into it . . . that the ideas have been batted around at administrative meetings. You know that it's not, he's not flying by the seat of his pants." They were impressed by the caliber of Jim's scholarship and knowledge of his field. Another strength discussed in FG2 was Jim's management of personnel. He made wise hiring decisions and put key people in places where they were very good at their jobs.

Both groups saw Jim as a man of great integrity and honesty. Both focus groups mentioned his accessibility, commenting on his open door policy and that he was true to his word. The participants of FG2 were vociferous about Jim doing that traffic duty in the morning as evidence of his commitment.

Research and Planning

An area of agreement was that one of the key changes has been the role of research and planning at Davis Academy. FG1 and FG2 talked about how progressive views of education and brain science research, raised and introduced through professional development, continue to spark debate, reflection, and change in teaching. These ideas challenged existing teaching practices; however, the ideas gained traction organically. Teachers attended conferences (at the division heads' encouragement) and brought the ideas back to their classrooms. Participants talked about the new ideas and other teachers were encouraged to pursue the same high quality professional development offered through Teaching for Understanding at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the brain research conferences for teachers offered by M.I.T. and Harvard. TR, a member of FG1, went on to say that she thought the intellectual atmosphere for faculty and students had changed. She said that during lunch, teachers talk more about teaching ideas now. Similarly, more middle school students talk about what they are learning during their free time.

The focus groups were in agreement about the strategic plan goals. Jim conducted a dialogue with teachers and administrators when he arrived. He discussed every aspect of the school's program and culture. After a year of listening and probing, Jim created a strategic plan that was approved by the board of trustees. Because he had done so much research with the faculty and staff, the plan had grassroots support. FG2 went on to say that these plans were Jim's vision made into concrete terms, and that the goals were ambitious and quantifiable. In FG2, all agreed that the faculty perceived the goals as

practical and necessary when they were introduced. The whole focus group remembered being impressed that Jim would take the professional risk of proposing such challenging and measurable goals.

Facilities

The focus groups agreed that facilities construction and renovation were among the most significant improvements to the school. FG1 discussed the new athletics facility as making it possible for coaches to deliver a better athletic program. They identified that the visual arts and theater programs were still waiting for a facilities upgrade. FG2 spoke of the new music building and campus center (under construction) and how important they were to people's excitement and trust in change and in the leadership. FG2 also discussed how the middle school building, which was to be among the first construction projects, was never built, because it was an unfeasible project from a fundraising standpoint. No participant complained about this occurrence. In fact, they laughed about it saying that the middle school program successfully improved without it. The research of Bolman and Deal (2008) on the political frame might be informative on that phenomenon. Their idea of the "political frame" would usually imply that different parts of the organization would normally vie for resources (like new facilities). The middle school faculty accepts the reality that their building will not be built soon, because they feel that their program has received other resources (like Annie, the Head of the Middle School and extensive professional development) that have enabled it to change from good to great.

Professional Development and Change

Professional development and faculty enrichment were seen as important school

change variables. FG1 discussed how professional development challenged the faculty and lifted the level of teaching, while FG2 focused more on it as a benefit of working at Davis Academy. FG1 discussed how brain-based education, a 21st century learning group, on campus speakers, and off campus teacher retreats informed and challenged traditional teaching approaches. The division heads led this effort. FG2 marveled at the school's willingness to fund enriching course work, workshops, and travel for teachers, and linked it to salary as an example of how *Jim* improved the experience of teaching at Davis. Sometimes this support took the shape of flexibility in defining a teacher's role at the school. One participant from each group commented on how the school supports teachers as they grow and change through their careers, allowing them to work part or full time and to coach or not coach. They identified the idea of an individualized "career path" as a new development that originated under *Jim's* leadership.

The groups described how faculty were invited rather than compelled to change. FG1 stated that their leaders approached school improvement the right way; they had a vision and timeline, but let teachers come aboard naturally and let them tweak the new ideas and research as they learned it. This inviting attitude got teachers "on board" with the changes. The middle school division head got teachers studying an idea, then encouraged collaboration and supported the investigation with money for summer work or study. Teachers were not ordered to stop teaching the old way or to change.

Each focus group raised exceptions, but the participants did not recognize them to be situations in which teachers were required to change. In FG1, JE stated that her honors course had to become an AP course. She was not enthusiastic about that change, yet had to make it. In FG2, the group pointed out that teachers who were not in agreement with

the new philosophy left the school. Interestingly, the participants did not blame the administrators or accuse them of compelling change in either case.

Both focus groups spoke about administrators' great support of their programs for students. FG1 only discussed the visual arts program, making the point that although it did not have an updated facility, the school greatly supports the program as is evident in the two year graduation requirement, the many middle school visual art classes, and the substantial art faculty (seven teachers). A visual arts teacher commented that her colleagues at other independent schools marvel at the vibrancy of visual arts at Davis (though they were unsatisfied not to have an updated facility). FG2 spoke about all the arts having equal footing with academics and pointed to the conservatory program as a place where, according to SU, teachers feel "very, very supported to institute different programs, to try different things." The conservatory program was generated by teachers and unique to Davis Academy. FG2 discussed how Jim told the teachers not to worry about funding when they are dreaming up new programs, and none of the participants said they had been told that the school could not afford a program. FG2 members mentioned foreign study programs and new, innovative courses as examples of the support given to their program ideas. The administrators help teachers frame program creation within the school's larger goals. Administrators were not single-mindedly focused on the strategic plan goals and supported teachers' ideas for change as well.

Differences

Few real differences existed between the groups. On the contrary, they were in agreement on all the topics they discussed in common. The discussion in one group may

have taken a turn and covered a few different topics than the other, but on no topic did the groups disagree. For example, the issue of accountability as an aspect of school change was raised only in FG2. Participants agreed that the “less is more” change had reduced their duties; however, Jim and his administration challenged them to do their best work. LA said, “It’s so funny. I used to say when I left my old job at North Middle School, I went from 70 students to 24 [at Davis] . . . and I never worked harder in my life.” All participants agreed that though they have fewer duties now that coaching is not required, the standards are so much higher that they have more work. Jim recently encouraged character education, mentoring, and modeling. He asked teachers to model risk-taking, growth, and change to students. ME commented, “So we can’t, like there’s no one sitting around, you know, doing the same thing they’ve done for 15 years. That’s not happening.” Jim hired strong division heads, the participants agreed, who make teachers confront their practice with new research. They sensed that Jim enjoyed some conflict in the challenge of new ideas and old ways and believed that conflict over ideas is healthy.

Interviews

Interview Research

In order to clarify and deepen the focus group data, I conducted two follow-up interviews. Interview research is well suited to a case study, because it helps develop an “understanding of the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make from that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). In interviews, a researcher may ask about a participant’s feelings and opinions in open-ended questions. This approach is well suited to qualitative research in which “subjective understanding” (Schultz in Seidman, 2006,

p. 11) is sought. Interviewing provides a means of comprehending how “people involved in education make sense of their experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 11). For the researcher searching for insight into people’s ways of understanding experiences, interviewing is an effective tool.

Interviews at Davis Academy

The interviewees for the Davis Academy project were chosen by lottery: one from each group. Each of the participants chosen by lottery was willing to be interviewed and to answer follow-up questions by e-mail after the interview. The FG1 interviewee will be identified as I1 and the FG2 interviewee as I2. By chance, one interviewee was an upper school and one a middle school teacher. The interviews occurred after school and each was approximately two hours in length. The interviewees were asked the following questions:

1. Do you think that memory has changed teachers’ conceptions of how they felt during the change period?
2. What did teachers think of the strategic plan goals? How were decisions made at that time? Did you think it was ok that Jim made the strategic plan and you all were expected to follow it?
3. Was there resistance?
4. Did you think the school would be successful in achieving plan?
5. What was the role of technology in the change goals?
6. One participant described the school as a “community of learners.” To what do you attribute that description?
7. How did Jim pay for salary raises?
8. I’ve heard a participant say that when Jim came, we (teachers) all had to bring our A game to become a great school.

- a. Is that consistent with your experience? Do you think that teachers' individual performance improved?
 - b. What was the nature of the teachers' motivation: the desire for incentives, compulsion from the leaders, or intrinsic drive?
9. CA said that time was key—to give faculty time to talk over information and get used to ideas. Do you agree? Did you meet as a big full faculty or small groups to discuss the change?
 10. Did professional development change?
 11. There was a reference to three firings in a row. Could you comment on that?
 12. What exactly were the changes that were called for in the classroom?
 13. Are any of the completed changes still controversial now?
 14. Are teachers happy now? Why or why not?
 15. Is there change happening now?
 16. Do you think the leaders have intentionally shaped the school's culture in certain ways? Describe.
 17. One person mentioned the \$25 gift card as an affirmation. Were there other spirit boosters that encouraged teachers in the change process and helped teachers feel valued?
 18. DA said the school isn't burdened with 100 years of history and is open to new ideas and different lifestyles. Do you agree?

I1 and I2 were similar in that they had positive views of the change process and the school. Both affirmed that the school was solid when Jim came, and that the school needed strengthening and direction which he and his team provided. They also identified the great new hires as a major force for improvement. They were identical in saying that a side effect of the good to great development is that teachers need to bring their "A games" to school every day. They spoke of high motivation for personal excellence as a by-product of institutional excellence.

I1 and I2 differed in a couple of ways. Both viewed the new hires as great for the

school; however, I1 was told of them by Jim as a way to motivate her to want to stay at Davis. Jim conveyed that a strong team was being built around I1, and she, indeed, perceived that the strong new hires were a show of support for the excellent teachers at the school. By contrast, I2 stated that she did not think that she could be hired by Davis today, because the resumes of the new faculty are so impressive. Another difference is that I1 was largely uninformed about the politics of certain changes, while I2 was aware of why certain people left and other behind-the-scenes information about the school community. They are at different points in their careers: one is nearing retirement and the other at midlife and they talked in a way that was self-aware that their career stage had an influence on how they viewed the school and change.

Time and Discussion

Measuring the amount of time a variable was discussed during the interviews is not instructive because I shaped the discussion to fill gaps or deepen my understanding of what had been discussed in the focus groups. The data topics were entirely chosen by me as the researcher and as soon as a topic was clarified, I quickly moved on to another question. As a result, interview responses ought not to be counted or quantified.

Significant Themes

When analyzing qualitative data, researchers develop themes from the data. Corbin and Strauss wrote, “Theorizing is the act of constructing an explanatory scheme from data that systematically integrate concepts, their properties and dimensions, through statements of relationship” (2008, p. 64). Themes are the product of both the data and the researcher’s thinking about that data (p. 66). Themes are a natural outgrowth of individual or group interviewing. As Seidman (2006) asserted:

The researcher then searches for categories and for connections between various categories that might be called themes. . . the researcher, as part of his or her analysis of the material can then present and comment upon excerpts from the interviews thematically organized” (p. 125).

The themes, then, are high level concepts or ideas drawn from coded data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 159). Sub-themes encompassed the lower level concepts.

Across the focus groups and the interviews in this study, participants identified one overarching theme: Teachers perceived that the change efforts were successful, because the leaders focused on the faculty. Davis Academy’s change from good to great was a testament to the centrality of the faculty and staff. This research project indicates that by addressing people’s personal and professional needs, a leader sets the stage for real school improvement. These needs include: removing obstacles in their way, supporting their programmatic innovation, providing them with the proper space for their programs, and making them feel valued and secure. “The successful leader in this change was not only an architect of what could be, he was a builder and contractor of what needed to be done” (DeMitchell, e-mail correspondence April 2011). Davis Academy’s leaders needed to change the curriculum, the message, the physical facilities and the programs, and they accomplished change in those areas by starting with the faculty and staff.

Within that major theme, three lesser themes, or sub-themes, emerged. The first sub-theme attributed the successful change from good to great to the Head of School’s success in identifying problems, setting goals and solving them. Fullan (2005) wrote that “people find . . . well being by making progress on problems important to their peers and of benefit beyond themselves” (p. 104). The second theme pertains to building as well: the Head as builder of the faculty and staff. Change efforts were successful because the

leadership team used a people first strategy. They removed obstacles and provided professional development to enhance teachers' professional lives. The faculty was shaped to meet worthy goals. They motivated teachers to change, in part, because of their strong relationships with them.

Identification and Solution

Change efforts were successful because the Head of School worked with teachers to identify important problems and succeeded in solving those problems by establishing goals upon which the solution would focus. Identification of the critical problems grounded the change in the teachers' perceived reality at school. As an initial position, the identification of problems that the faculty saw as relevant to their work lives resonates with Fullan's and Stiegelbauer's (1991) research on the three Rs of the best beginnings for school change (Relevance, Readiness and Resources). From the initiation phase, the school leader developed goals that became accepted, shared and tied the solutions to meeting those goals.

At the beginning of his headship, Jim tackled the problems of salary and security. It is important to note he did not tackle curriculum, facilities, or a myriad of other concerns right away. He started with the faculty and staff, and in doing so, set the stage for them to energetically move the school from good to great. This "people first" strategy motivated them to cooperate with later change efforts. By addressing their basic needs, he unleashed their energy to fuel school change. Focus group participants identified low salaries as the fundamental problem at Davis Academy in 1997. A faculty affairs committee had been organized prior to his arrival. EL stated:

About the faculty affairs committee, it was needed at the time and we were there because we were underpaid, so every issue, be it facilities, be it schedule, be it curriculum, contract obligations, you had to teach 4 (courses), coach 2 (seasons), advise whatever it was, full-time equivalency, people were not happy and there was no where to take that. So the faculty affairs committee, while trying to take on broad issues of childcare provision and things like that, we really unfortunately evolved into a place of unhappiness.

In addition to salaries being low, the issue of equity was at stake as well. EL reported, “There was no reason to trust . . . everyone felt like they had to cut his or her own deals . . . there was no sense of equity. You just didn’t know what kinds of deals were being cut. If they liked you, the perception was you could go in and argue for more money.” When Jim came in and brought order and raised salaries, then teachers trusted him.

SU commented about the time prior to Jim’s arrival: “In order to stay teaching at a school like Davis you had to make serious decisions about how you need to live your life financially.” Jim solved the problem by raising salaries to be competitive with other ISL schools. Jim came and explained, according to EL:

I don’t want to nickel and dime you guys’ . . . the real issue is money in your paycheck and recognition for a job well done. That took care of a lot of complaining, honestly. You know because you were complaining because you weren’t happy because the job conditions weren’t good . . . People were unhappy, and he (Jim) fixed it.

LA remembered getting a note to meet with Jim and two other teachers when she’d only had five years’ experience. Jim announced that the board had voted to make sure salaries were at the top of the ISL’s stage scale. She and two colleagues of similar years experience were given a \$5,000 raise right then in order to boost them to the new

standard. LA laughed and said of Jim, “He loves those statistics, and he wanted to be at the top of the statistics list.” As LA told the story, she sounded as though she was in awe of that meeting when it happened. The idea of getting such a big raise in order to make the salary scale fairer and competitive seemed still to amaze her years later. The fairness and openness of the act still impressed her.

Security and status were other issues. As I1 said:

For me, Jim was, the change was huge, because there was the promise of more identity and security within this hugely competitive saturated private school market . . . I don’t normally think in terms of markets and things like that, but I know that early in my career I was sort of asking myself ‘I don’t know if Davis is the place I want to be forever’ and I saw a lot of insecurity . . . I wanted to work in a place that felt really good about who it was and that had an identity, and I think Jim pretty quickly made his, with his strategic plan, just wanted to put Davis on the map. . . once it was his time to set an agenda, he, you know, he really went after it.

Jim built Davis’ reputation and, in doing so, increased I1’s sense of job security.

“Putting Davis on the map” had an impact on some participants, like I1. Jim’s decision to address the salary problem definitively and early had a direct effect on other teachers’ motivation. I2 said that it helped establish a focus on the faculty:

Don’t let it be said that the changes [to program and other aspects of the school] happened without ripples, but the fact is that the trust has been established and has worked and it is clear that his vision was to care for the faculty and he celebrates that loudly by word and deed . . . he was able to . . . increase our professional development and things like that . . . It was just nearly hopeless because the faculty was dealing with discomfort, with fear and things like that that just weren’t happy.

By addressing the salary problem and increasing people’s sense of security, Jim increased the faculty and staff’s motivation to engage in school improvement efforts. Herzberg’s research on motivation identified factors in the workplace that are, in his words, “motivators” or “hygiene factors.” Problematic hygiene factors, like low pay,

cause dissatisfaction that can be an obstacle to an employee's motivation. Hertzberg (2003) identified salary and security as hygiene factors. By solving those problems, Jim cleared obstacles that could have inhibited teachers' motivation to make school change.

According to the participants, goal setting was an important part of the school's success in developing from good to great. JI stated that if he were to advise a new school leader, he would tell that leader to do just what Jim did in his first year: observe. DA agreed saying that what he appreciated was the way Jim did not just observe; he questioned everything asking about anything that could potentially change. He asked, "Is it essential at Davis?" and had a dialogue with faculty. There was a lot of "airing of the issues, the pros and cons, and Jim is extremely thorough, and I think people gained respect not just for the time he spent in the class observing you but in the sense that he was just questioning." ME said:

I think that one of the reasons that Jim has been so successful is before he presented the school with his plan for change, he spent a full year listening, you know talking to different groups across the faculty, across the community and just listening, and so I think the strategic plan arose out of his vision that he brought to the table and also what he learned from listening to these different focus groups.

Participants remembered having three perceptions at the time that the strategic plan goals were introduced. First, they agreed that the goals were practical, necessary and relevant (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). Second, they remember skepticism about whether the goals were achievable. As I2 said of the athletic goals: "We'd just been so hammered over the years . . . and we hadn't figured out that you can bring in two or three clutch players and a real good coach and have a championship team." Third, they were impressed by how specific the goals were. ME said:

I remember seeing those (goals) and thinking about the new guy who we had known for a year and a half and thinking, you know, wow, again this is the greatest man because those were all very quantifiable goals. They were his goals, his name was on that . . . They were really high . . . there was nothing ambiguous about those, they were clearly goals that one could evaluate and say well we definitely made it, or nope we didn't. And again, I think that inspires confidence of, with a head who just has the guts to do that.

Another participant commented at the wonder of watching the goals accomplished one after the other.

According to the participants, Jim did not have the resources to make the proposed changes initially. He had to find a way to overcome the resource issue at the initiation stage so that the school could move forward. Change that is starved of resources often has a reduced chance of success (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). The participants viewed resources as vitally important as well which is why they all agreed that Jill, the Director of Advancement, was one of Jim's best hires. They described her as extremely effective in raising money for the school. SU said, "I have to tell you, I was getting to the point of saying they're definitely never going to have a new music building," and then suddenly the builders were breaking ground on it. The biggest surprise, according to JE, was that the campus center, in the midst of the recession, was going to be built, because they had raised the money "right in the middle of the crash" according to SU and EL. That success fueled enthusiasm for the other goals, and increased the faculty's trust in the head.

Facilities construction was among the most worthy goals because new structures made teaching and learning better. In athletics, the new building improved the program

and made running the program easier for faculty. Similarly, the music building radically changed the teachers' ability to deliver an excellent program. After the 1999 strategic plan had been mostly accomplished, another was written in 2006. Again, Jim solicited ideas from the faculty through faculty meetings and committee meetings. Priorities were weighed in small group discussions. The latest set of goals included some addressing the issue of diversity, which was raised by the faculty. Goal setting and accomplishment is the method by which change was made at Davis.

The participants identified a key early change as the creation of a distinct, progressive middle school. This change was a 1999 strategic plan goal and included the construction of a new middle school building. An esteemed division head, Annie, was hired by Jim to develop her vision of a separate middle school informed by a holistic approach to young adolescent development. One middle school participant spoke of that hire as being one of the most important changes that Jim made, because she brought a "completely different view of the role of the middle school" and the fortitude to implement it despite opposition from some faculty members. Interestingly, the participants spoke of the middle school as a success, because it has its own faculty and child-centered schedule and program. Still, the middle school facility was never built because the advancement office did not believe donors would contribute for it. The participants perceive the middle school and the strategic plan a success even though every goal was not attained.

Building the Faculty

Change efforts were successful because the leadership team communicated high expectations for teachers and students, then removed obstacles and provided professional

development to help teachers reach those standards. This idea is consistent with the human resource frame that Bolman and Deal (2008) advocate for implementing a successful change. In addition to professional development efforts, the faculty was shaped through conscious hiring practices to meet new standards and visionary ideas. In addition, certain faculty who were not meeting the new expectations were asked to leave. These were people who, in the words of I1, “fit the dinosaur mold of just not wanting to, just not having the energy or freshness” to meet the new standards. Hiring, training and departures were used to build the faculty.

Professional development was repeatedly identified as both an engine for change and a benefit of working at Davis Academy. Division heads directed the focus on brain-based research and Teaching for Understanding. CA said that:

One of the biggest changes we’ve seen in the middle school is just that we’ve done a lot of research as a faculty in terms of . . . looking at brain research to see if it can improve our practice . . . that has been really professionally one of the best changes because it’s one of the most rewarding and I’ve seen the best changes in the students.

The administrators were viewed as supportive, not dictatorial about this change. JE said “it wasn’t presented as you have to change everything, it was here’s this research brainstorm how it will support what you’re doing so it was very, it was presented in a positive way . . . it was encouraged that you listen.”

Smaller committees met to study and reflect upon an aspect of professional development. For example, the curriculum committee focused on readings and held off-campus, four-hour retreats to provide time to think about the reading. Professional development also took the form of a study group that meets periodically. The 21st Century Learning Group is a reading and discussion circle about how the school will

meet the challenges of the outside world. One participant said that the findings of this group would probably appear in a future strategic plan. I1 said that the infusion of research-based ideas has raised expectations for teachers,

I'd say there's been a steady, a steady call for accountability and sharing of goals, essential questions, we were doing mapping for a while which was really having to document the path that your classes were taking so we could kind of see it from (grades) 6-12. So, I think there's been more accountability or more expectations for accountability.

The accountability is understood and explicit. I1 stated "I think a lot of us have been encouraged to go to Harvard's Project Zero and to really be applying brain, adolescent brain knowledge to our teaching." Numerous participants identified that when Annie became Head of the Middle School, her vision of a separate faculty and very different demands on middle school teachers became a requirement, and "made people confront their practice" as LA stated. The backlash against Annie's requirements made things "very hard for her" in her first years at Davis, according to LA. More recently, Jim has asked teachers to model leadership for students. As ME stated, "So we can't, like there's no one sitting around, you know, doing the same thing they've done for 15 years. That is not happening." Teachers' responsibilities have been streamlined and teachers have fewer mundane duties, but as ME commented "I think it's less work, but the standards are so much higher, that it is more work." DB stated that he agreed, and that people also do more because they like what they are doing so much that the accountability does not feel burdensome.

According to FG2, professional development efforts shaped the faculty and thus shaped the change at Davis Academy. For many teachers, the power of new ideas persuaded many of them to change. The change occurred incrementally as faculty learned

about the ideas, tried them, and discussed them, then more faculty experienced the same cycle of learning and implementation. The pattern the participants described is similar to the “stages of concern” described in the research of Hord, Rutherford, Huling and Hall (2004) in their book *Taking Charge of Change*. They stated that teachers are the most important part of a change process and that they experience a predictable sequence of emotions and reactions when they encounter a change initiative. The stages begin with concern over how the change will affect them and their work and ends with the teacher adapting the idea or new technique to his or her teaching practice.

At Davis, the administrators educated the teachers about new ideas and did not mandate change in a top down way. As a result, the teachers did not “shove them (the new initiatives) in a drawer” as CA said happened to some past mandated initiatives. The approach at Davis was to send a few teachers to a workshop promoting new research and ideas, then have those teachers come back and talk about the ideas, practice them and evaluate what works and does not work, then get a few more colleagues interested. CA described it:

It really happened organically - there was enough people like “this is great, this is great” . . . In some ways the younger faculty, we’ve got a critical mass of younger faculty, so she’s (Annie’s) hitting them at the beginning of their career in a way to open themselves up to some different resources.

Teachers were persuaded to change based on the validity of the research and their collaboration with colleagues. I2 said of the high quality professional development:

We were being challenged to consider recent research, and so when you bring in the top people in the fields of brain development, of interpersonal relations, I mean you’re sitting with some of the gurus in the country, and wow, and they present their stuff and make comparative arguments then you go, ‘ooh, I wouldn’t have to sell my soul to incorporate that, ok, here are the resources.’ So, we had some really, really powerful professional development and I think that helps change how you function . . . I don’t know if everyone’s changed everything, but

it's kind of 'ok, I'll think about that' and whether you unconsciously or subconsciously it was like 'ok, ok'. The bar just keeps getting raised and you see how hard other people are working.

All of FG2 agreed when LA stated: "The new ways of teaching was always. . . presented within the context of 'you are passionate and obviously you want to the best work you can do, right?'" They also pointed out that those teachers not enthusiastic about the new ideas left, yet insisted that no teacher was ever ordered to change his or her teaching style. This points to the leaders' subtle style: they shaped the culture to a point that those who did not want to join the change left of their own will. Others were counseled to leave the school.

Participants also described professional development and faculty enrichment as benefits that made working at the school more beneficial to the teachers. Their perception was that funding for conferences, workshops and graduate school study seemed generous to the point of unlimited. The increased availability of such funds came about due to a decision Jim made. DB said that when Jim arrived, he eliminated the tiny holiday bonus and replaced it with a gift card to a bookstore. He redirected the money into professional development, a move that was supported by all the participants. The summer travel grants received rave reviews. LA marveled "I don't want to actually admit how many wonderful grants I've received. I've traveled all over the world." As a result, the professional development opportunities are considered a great benefit to teaching at Davis.

Participants pointed to a reduction in duties as another key change. FG2 identified this change in workload as "the main thing" that helped Davis change from good to great. This change came with a "less is more" mantra regarding activities, teaching and

coaching. The idea was to focus on fewer activities and to do them at a high level of quality. Administrators pared down each teacher's tasks so that he or she was left with tasks that matched his or her strengths.

Coaching became the realm of knowledgeable coaches. The participants explained this change as having multiple aims: to reward coaches financially for the many hours that coaching demands, to improve the performance of the school's teams by improving coaching quality, and to make the teaching load more uniform and manageable by taking coaching out of the job description. ME said:

One of the things that Jim immediately did was he looked at who we are as professionals and what was the best and what we found most rewarding and he just pared away all the other garbage that independent school teachers were usually required to do. It was brilliant. When we're doing what it is we love to do, we're better at it, and the whole community gains from that and I think you can talk about facilities, you can talk about salaries, you can talk about all sorts of other things at Davis, but to me that has been the biggest change and that has been, to my way of thinking, what has done the most to bring about Davis' current success.

Other participants echoed ME's statement. LA said:

I think we're happy enough that we're willing to work really, really hard despite the fact that we're not coaching . . . All of us work a million trillion hours and we're constantly on call and we're constantly (writing) . . . the parents these incredibly long comment . . . We love the school, we love the job, we're devoted to the school.

SU said, "Less work which turned out to be more work, because we're more interested in doing the work thoroughly" to which ME added. "Yeah, more thoughtful and in depth."

The participants described a shift from administrators asking them to do many different tasks (teaching, coaching, advising, running activities, supervising lunch) to administrators asking them to do fewer duties more deeply and at a higher level.

When the change period started in 1997, some faculty members left or were asked to leave the school. While participants stated that some departures were sad occasions, they felt it was to be expected that some people would leave. ME stated:

When Jim first came, and it was a huge moment of change . . . there was a bit of housecleaning, and either you believed in this philosophy and (were) recharged and excited and on board with these changes and the new philosophy and where we were going educationally or you slowly (grew dissatisfied).

Then LA finished her thought: “Either through your choice, or I would say, I mean in a few cases it was obvious it was not a good match . . . and as hard as it is, that was appropriate.” Participants said that some colleagues left because they did not agree with the new direction the school was taking or they were not capable of changing. They praised Jim for having new hires leave when they were not a fit. They cited that as one of his strengths – acknowledging when a change or decision was not successful and addressing it. In the words of Collins (2001), Jim put the right people on the bus, and got the wrong people off it. A participant commented that some teachers felt fearful when the departure of a few teachers were announced in a row. The participants stated that it was not their business to know the reasons why a colleague was leaving, and that the administration was discrete in its handling of those situations.

Another personnel change that the participants thought Jim handled well was hiring. The decision of whom one brings into an organization is critical in building a faculty/staff that will move the school to a desired end. Focused hiring sends a strong message of what the organization stands for and the direction it is going to take. The new hires were seen as important to helping the school to reach its goals. TR said: “I think one thing is that also makes a very excellent school is that, maybe it goes back to Jim and the

department chairs doing a very good job at finding good matches for faculty.” Three participants noted that not only have excellent hires been made but that they have been allowed to grow through professional development. Not only does Jim effectively recruit and hire faculty, he retains and cultivates them through graduate study, travel, workshops and other forms of faculty enrichment. In Collins’ (2001) parlance, he gets the right people on the bus and he keeps them on it by cultivating them.

Relationships Among Leaders and Faculty Motivated Faculty Change

One of the reasons teachers were motivated to accept change was due to their relationships with members of the leadership team and the ideas they promoted. These respectful relationships were reciprocal; ideas flowed back and forth between administrators and teachers. The Head of School, Head of the Upper School, and Head of the Middle School comprised a leadership team that was highly endorsed by the participants. These relationships and the communication they encouraged were important in facilitating the change in systems and practice.

The division heads, May and Annie, had strong personal relationships with many teachers. The division heads were seen as having facilitated the professional development and research-based ideas that fueled changes in teaching. TR said: “I think May, as head of the upper school, has been really instrumental in offering things to people. I think she does very good, thoughtful professional development time. She doesn’t like to waste people’s time.” The sense that Annie and May brought and continue to bring current ideas to Davis and to encourage professional development is one reason they have strong support from the participants.

Annie, May and Jim did not mandate change in a top down way; rather, they

invited teachers to pursue new ideas. Their approach was to send a few teachers to a workshop, like at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, then have those teachers share and practice new ideas. Their sharing would spark the interest of a few colleagues encouraging them to pursue new ideas. Teachers were persuaded to change based on the validity of the research they studied and implemented, and their collaboration with their colleagues. EL said of the quality of the professional development:

We were being challenged to consider recent research, and so when you bring in the top people in the field of brain development, of interpersonal relations, I mean you're sitting with some of the gurus in the country, and, wow, and they present their stuff and make comparative arguments then you go, "ooh, I wouldn't have to sell my soul to incorporate that [into my teaching], ok here are the resources." So we had some really, really powerful professional development and I think that helps change how you function . . . I don't know if everyone's changed everything, but it's kind of 'ok, I'll think about that' and whether you unconsciously or subconsciously it was like 'ok, ok'. The bar just keeps getting raised and you see how hard other people are working.

The administrative team is seen as handling and creating the systems and policies that make school life run so that teachers may focus on teaching. CA stated:

People who are in administration are there to help create and craft the system and to keep the system moving, but they are also willing to do it with quite a lot of feedback from a lot of people. I feel like if I have an initiative they are supportive of that, but if they have an idea for me they have very good reason and explanation of why they want me to work on something."

This excellent administrative team stands in contrast to those of the past. As DA said:

One of the most frustrating things to me as a teacher back in the mid-90's is we had to debate everything. There are certain things, I want you to tell me if a kids is late 3 times to my class and you want me to give him a detention, great. Those are the kinds of decisions I want you to take out of my hands . . . let me focus on what's really important in the classroom and do some, take some of that nonsense away . . . he (Jim) gets our input, but I don't expect him to do what I want him to do. I expect him to talk to everybody and make what he thinks is the best decision, because he's the leader. That's what he gets paid to do and he does it.

Responsiveness is another theme that emerged when participants spoke about the leadership team. The participants, particularly those who teach in the arts, spoke of the support the administrators gave them. Two participants described how the division heads support them when there is a difficulty with a student or a parent. This support translated into trust between leaders and teachers. Kouzes and Posner (2002) wrote about the importance of mutual trust between leaders and followers and the Davis data was consistent with that concept.

The participants all felt that their voices were heard in decision-making at school. Interestingly, the upper school participants expressed their belief that they were heard even though they seldom meet with the Head of the Upper School or Head of School directly. Their opinions on issues are funneled through the department chairs, who pass them along to administrators. Still, the participants reported feeling heard, because of the perceived accessibility of the administrative team. As TR said:

I mean Annie literally has an open door, unless it's something that will be confidential. If she's having a meeting with someone the door is closed, but otherwise if she is just doing her every day work it is (open). Just like Jim . . . which is a huge, heaping load of work that never even gets close to being done she will always accommodate.

That sense that their voices are heard and welcomed, combined with the trust that they had in the leaders, resulted in the participants' contentment with their role in decision-making at the school.

The trust in the leadership team was tied to participants' sense of the integrity and competence of the leadership team as well. Participants described Jim as honest and "brilliant." As EL said:

Don't let it be said that the changes happened without ripples, but the fact is that the trust has been established and has worked and it is clear that his (Jim's) vision was to care for the faculty, and he celebrates that loudly by word and deed . . . to increase our professional development and things like that that have really grown in a very positive way to support us in a way that wasn't possible before.

ME echoed this statement when she said:

Some of the keys to positive change is a head who walks the walk . . . he is completely devoted to the school. He has all of the kids. He has us. I don't think I've ever been on campus any time of night or day or on a weekend when he wasn't here."

ME trusts in Jim's work ethic and commitment to the school.

The teachers' relationships with administrators and colleagues motivated them to support the change process. TR advised the researcher "personal relationships go a long way". She said that teachers felt that they could talk about the changes with Annie, May or Tom. JE said "I tend to [respond] to the relationship piece . . . having positive relationships [with leaders] just makes it easier to carry out that vision." LA commented:

Annie, I hang around with. And she actually challenges me more than Jim does. She is always poking me to change and grow, and . . . it's only because I know she loves me and I love her that I'm actually sometimes willing to listen when I'm really tired . . . You know, but she, because we're friends, so it is in the context of a relationship that I'm willing (or) more inclined.

DB talked about his respect for his colleagues making him more open to the change process, "I work with people that I just really adore and I can't imagine after all these years working with, working somewhere else with other people." FG2 all agreed with DB on the subject of their respect for their colleagues as professionals and as people.

A final motivator for teachers is the fact that they feel that their innovative ideas were supported. Change was a two-way affair, and teachers as well as administrators came forward with new program ideas and some were enacted. The conservatory

program, a program in Spain, and a student seminar on world hunger were examples of teacher-driven changes. Interestingly, the participants perceived no fiscal constraints on their curricular innovations. EL said, “In fact, Jim just came to me today about something else and says, ‘and don’t worry about the money.’” Participants said that leaders told them to dream up student programs and submit their ideas. Faculty members’ original ideas are often implemented. Participants said that if new courses or programs fit with school goals, then leaders supported them with opportunity and funding.

Conclusion

Davis Academy is an exemplary independent school that changed from good to great between 1997-2010. Significant improvement was made in the key areas of admissions, student achievement, college placement, and fundraising. Jim Anderson’s arrival at the school coincides with this change and participants credit Jim and his division heads, May and Annie, with leading the change.

Focus groups and interviews suited this case study, because they matched the research question. The question, *In an innovative independent school, how do teachers perceive deliberate change efforts and relate to the leaders who lead them?*, seeks teachers’ perceptions. The qualitative research approach is well matched to studying subtleties in people’s perceptions and understanding of events in their lives.

The focus groups and interviews may as well have been a single, large group, because their responses were so similar. The dynamics and messages were the same from both focus groups. They told the same story, though they sometimes mentioned different details. The same theme and sub-themes emerged in both groups. The interviewees clarified aspects of the focus groups’ comments without contradicting them or each other.

According to the participants, deliberate change efforts at Davis Academy were successful because the leaders focused on the faculty. First, the Head of School worked with teachers to identify important problems and solved those problems by setting the right goals. Second, the Head of School built the faculty and staff through professional development, faculty enrichment, strategic hiring, and departures (voluntary and involuntary). Finally, strong relationships among leaders and teachers set a climate of professionalism and trust. Leaders were responsive to teachers' needs and ideas and the teachers, in turn, were responsive to leaders' decisions regarding change. Davis Academy changed from good to great, because the leaders, especially the Head of School, put in place and cultivated a faculty that was talented, informed and content that their personal and professional needs were being met. As a result, the faculty members were motivated and able to lead students in a more effective and inspired manner.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Findings

This research project was designed to study the variables that teachers found most critical to successful change, and to compare them to those identified by scholars. This section answers the research question: *In an innovative independent school, how do teachers perceive deliberate change efforts and relate to the school leaders who lead them?* The participants identified one overarching theme: Teachers perceived that the change efforts were successful, because the leaders focused on the faculty. As DeMitchell and Fossey wrote, “There is no magic in programs, there is only magic in people” (1997, p. 52). Essentially, the leaders addressed people’s personal and professional needs, which set the stage for school improvement. They removed obstacles to excellence, supported programmatic innovation, provided the facility space needed for school programs, and treated faculty in a way that made them feel valued and secure.

The Three Sub-Themes

Identification and Solution

Three sub-themes arose from the focus group and interview data. The first theme, Identification and Solution, explains that change efforts were successful, because the head of school worked with teachers to identify important problems and worthy goals, then succeeded in solving those problems and reaching those goals. Participants repeatedly identified Jim’s practice of using teachers’ opinions to generate two strategic

plans: one in 1999 and another in 2006. For the first plan, Jim did not simply consult faculty, rather, he probed them. As DA stated: “There was a lot of airing of issues, the pros and cons, and Jim is extremely thorough, and I think people gained respect not just for the time he spent in the classes observing you, but in the sense that he was just questioning.” He challenged existing norms at the school. The next strategic plan was developed using ideas from faculty committees as well as from Jim’s own studies during his sabbatical leave. The faculty involvement was vital, because it enabled Jim to choose the worthy goals to accomplish and vexing problems to solve. In doing so, Jim marshaled the school’s energy to focus on issues that mattered not just to a few people, but to the whole school community.

Participants viewed the goals Jim set as important, measurable, and audacious. For example, the school community was so accustomed to the sports teams losing that the strategic plan goal of athletic achievement seemed unattainable in 1999. As TR said, “We had teams that had done nothing but lose for years, and it was like ‘woo, whee’ you know, so there was, you know at least somebody [Jim] . . . was really caring enough to like to stop and make some goals.” The other goals, which pertained to college placement, the establishment of a premier music program, and, in the words of the strategic plan, “a middle school that is a model of innovation, challenge and collaboration” (1999 Strategic Plan) were also seen as significant. Not only did Jim choose the right goals, in the estimation of the faculty, they were goals that solved problems. As EL said, “very daring goals, we went ‘o.k.,’ good luck with that one, and he [Jim] pulled it off, he pulled it off. I think out of the five, I’d say he made 4.5 of them!” By meeting those early goals, Jim earned the faculty’s trust in his leadership ability.

Jim's strategic plans provided focus and unity to school life. Participants talked about a lack of vision in the leadership that preceded Jim, and said they felt insecure about Davis' future at that time. After listening to the faculty, Jim selected goals that built upon the institution's strengths (i.e., the music school) and recognized the demands of the independent school market (i.e., impressive college placement, a stellar middle school program). Collins (2001) wrote that great leaders lead change based on organizational strengths and the economic realities. By economic realities, Collins meant those goods and services that customers were interested in buying in quantity. Fullan (2001) wrote that effective leaders provide a coherent view of the future. Jim's goals established a vision and direction for the faculty.

The goals' outcomes were quantifiable, and Jim regularly referred to measures like A.P. test scores and ISL athletic rankings, in his discussion of progress toward goals. Fullan (2006) and Senge (1999) spoke of the importance of using data in school improvement efforts. Fullan (2001) advised that the greater the scope of a goal, the more likely it is to be achieved. Davis faculty members were inspired by these measurable goals, because the goals were both ambitious and worthy of effort. Jim chose difficult goals that addressed real school needs, and he took the risk of failing to achieve them. In the process, he earned the participants' respect.

One of the real school needs that Jim resolved was the salary problem. Within about two years of his arrival, Jim changed the pay structure so that teachers were paid more, and those who coached were compensated. Herzberg (in Chapman, 2003) wrote that low salaries and the dissatisfaction they bring, are a "hygiene problem": an obstacle to employee motivation. Jim wrapped another salary-booster in a goal that called for the

creation of a master teacher program. That program provided formal recognition of teachers and a raise. Collins (2001) wrote that excellent leaders remove obstacles as the first step to helping organizations become great. By removing that salary obstacle early, Jim increased faculty motivation.

Jim was a high level leader. Burns' (1978) described high level leaders as transformational and transactional with their followers, and Jim fit that description. His style was transactional in that he gave the faculty what they needed in the form of a salary scale that was competitive with other ISL schools, a career path that enabled change over the course of a career, job descriptions that matched tasks to teachers' skills and interests, and security by directing the school toward a worthy vision. In exchange, faculty members changed their teaching styles to be more collaborative, innovative and inclusive of current research.

Jim's style was transformational in that he inspired teachers via speeches and a consistent focus on the students and their learning. His work was rooted in the mission of the school. Burns (1978) wrote that transformational leaders tie change to the culture of the organization. Jim's school changes were consistent with the school's culture and core values. As EL stated about Jim's change proposals,

It wasn't Jim saying 'Well, you guys are going to do this because then I'm going to be the fanciest, best head of school around. It was all about the mission of the school, and I think it's easier to build a team when you're all focusing on the mission, not, it was never and I don't think it is ever about Jim as a person, ever, ever, ever.

Jim's focus on facts, tasks, communication, and the alignment of people's work toward worthy goals and problem-solving fit with Bolman and Deal's (2008) research. They wrote that schools in need of order respond to those who lead from the structural

frame. Davis teachers also needed to be led from the spiritual frame, because they needed inspiration. They needed trusting relationships with administrators. FG2 spoke at length about how Jim inspired them when he spoke. JE said of Jim:

I've been impressed by the caliber of his scholarship. The fact that he is an eloquent communicator, in his speeches to students, speeches to admissions open houses, and just the framing of some of those things and putting key people in places that have been really good at their job, his hiring decisions . . . I stand in some of those open house sessions, ok, we're waiting to get going and do our professional thing . . . and you're listening to him and you're going 'wow, that's where I work' and he's still able to engender that in me.

Jim provided the inspirational leadership the Davis teachers needed.

Building the Faculty

Another sub-theme generated by the data was that change efforts were successful because the leaders built the faculty. They communicated high expectations for teachers and students, and removed obstacles blocking performance. They provided professional development to help teachers reach those high standards. Division heads communicated a new approach to teaching that was based on research. Participants spoke about 'not resting on their laurels' saying that they were not recycling old material from years past. They said they worked hard to meet the demands of the new environment at Davis and were happy to do so.

Professional development informed the work of the Davis teachers and raised expectations. For example, the advisory system was a recent area of focus; I2 noted: "The advisor system has been given much more professional development and focus [and] formalized with much clearer expectations, greater time given to it, so that attention to the individual student has increased even as we've gotten busier and bigger." This notion fits Schein's (2004) and Evans' (1996) advice that leaders should exert pressure while

providing continuous training. Similarly Hord, Rutherford, Huling and Hall (2004) wrote that leaders and training were the key to successful change. While Lortie (1975) contended that many teachers believe that success with students is mysterious, professional development at Davis Academy sought to give teachers more guidance as to what is effective with students. For example, ME stated that a recent professional development focus was student leadership, “[Jim] turned his attention to character education, then he also asked us to turn our personal attention to character education and mentoring and modeling. So he’s [instructing the teachers] we ask all the kids to be risk takers, we ask them to grow and change, we ask them to dive deeply into what they’re doing and he says to us “and you have to show them how to do it.’ So we can’t, like there’s no one sitting around, you know, doing the same thing they’ve done for 15 years. That is not happening.” A group of teachers attended a student leadership institute, and brought back the idea of focusing on “teachable moments” to the whole faculty. JE was asked to teach an A.P. version of her course, and the school paid for her to attend an A.P. sponsored workshop to prepare for that change. The Davis teachers received support and training throughout the change process.

Building a powerful faculty involves helping faculty improve, hiring well and firing when improvement cannot occur. Schein (2004) and Evans (1996) advised that the leader must unfreeze people who are unable to evolve as the organization improves. Collins (2001) wrote of getting the right people on the bus and the wrong people off of it. Both focus groups praised Jim for hiring talented, new faculty. As TR remembered, “I was excited to have new colleagues that were, just sort of had a lot of energy and [sic. were] fresh, fresh look at things.” Talented new hires boosted faculty morale.

Participants thought that a sign of Jim's good leadership was that when a new hire was not a match, the leaders removed that faculty member. Some experienced teachers also left the school during the change period. TR said:

It always just felt discrete and, you know, I remember a couple of people, scratching my head and wondering 'huh, they're not back, I wonder', and some of them really . . . fit the dinosaur mold of just not wanting to, just not having the energy or freshness.

The circumstances of those departures were handled quietly, but often they were people who were not on board with new approaches or could not meet new demands.

Participants were divided over whether the departures at the beginning of Jim's headship represented an extensive housecleaning or not. Both groups commented that there was a period in which there were a couple of firings in a row. In both focus groups, people identified departures as healthy, especially when a teacher was philosophically opposed to the new initiatives. Training opportunities existed so that a teacher willing to change could try to change. A few teachers in FG1 expressed sadness that one teacher who tried to improve still had to leave. No participant argued that those teachers ought have been retained. A few participants in FG1 mentioned that in such cases, Jim's reserved style may have appeared insensitive. TR commented that she thought the Head ought to have been more empathetic in the way the news was conveyed. Overall, participants agreed that the administration showed discretion in handling departures from the faculty.

The administration's broad professional development efforts helped experienced teachers evolve with the times. Faculty bonuses were redirected to a faculty enrichment fund that supported travel and study. Participants expressed appreciation for this funding, describing it as a perquisite akin to salary increases. In addition to individual training,

Annie started sending groups of faculty members to workshops together. This practice helped accelerate the rate at which new ideas spread around the school. May brought renowned educational speakers to campus. These experts spoke about the same ideas that Annie was promoting through off campus workshops. Additionally, a 21st century education reading group institutionalized continuous professional learning. Dufour (1998) and Fullan (2001) wrote that 21st century organizations must be learning organizations to survive. Through its external and internal training opportunities, Davis became a learning organization.

Possibly as a result of Davis' evolution as a professional learning community, the intellectual culture changed. As CA said, "I think that it's a community of learners in that faculty are learning just as much as kids." TR agreed:

I think part of the change has been that ideas now are something that are really shared, like faculty to faculty, faculty to students, student to student. Where it used to be you would come into the middle school and the kids would be having a really good time, but they would be talking about absolutely nothing, it was all social . . . Now when kids are hanging out they are having a good time, but they are also, their banter is about ideas, and about learning and about it might be social, but it's also about some connection they made and I sometimes feel it's a big change with the teachers.

Fullan (2006) described the hallmarks of modern school excellence as personalization (to the student), precision (instruction based on assessment), and professionalism (teachers as lifelong learners). By Fullan's definition, Davis Academy became an excellent school.

Relationships Among Leaders and Faculty Motivated Faculty Change

The third sub-theme is that Relationships among Leaders and Faculty Motivated Faculty Change. The teachers respected the leaders and, thus, were open to the changes

they proposed. The changes sponsored by the leadership were consistent with the mission and values of the school. As a result, the change ideas were consistent with a philosophy of education that preceded 1997 and in which the faculty believed. That vision, of the school as a place of powerful academics, successful athletics, and an outstanding arts program, inspired many teachers.

Jim enlivened the school's mission by encapsulating it in the motto "Excellence with Humanity." In doing so, he reinterpreted the faculty's proud culture of caring about each individual student, and pointed the way to sustainability by recommitting the faculty to the students' and their own excellence. Little and McLaughlin (1993) wrote that effective policy aligns with a school's mission and values. Burns (1978) stated that transformational leaders tie change to the culture, so that the culture powers the innovation. Schein (2004) wrote that the primary job of the leader is to shape the culture so the organization can evolve and thrive in its environment. The Davis leadership team shaped the culture through the support it gave teachers, through its professional development and through its focus on ambitious, relevant goals. The only way to attain those goals was through innovation, so innovation became part of the school's culture.

Once the teams achieved the seemingly impossible athletic goals, then other challenging goals, like placing fifteen percent of students in the top ten most selective colleges and universities, seemed possible. While some teachers were inspired by the vision of excellence represented in the goals, others were inspired to act due to their relationships with the leaders.

Bolman and Deal's (2008) image of the symbolic frame of leadership applies to Davis' improvement. Some participants were inspired to change because of their

relationships with Jim, Annie, and May. They talked about how their friendships with the leaders made them more open to the changes at the school. Others said that they were in dialogue with the leaders as they tried new teaching techniques. Il spoke about the loyalty that younger middle school teachers had for Annie. One such teacher commented, “I would do anything for Annie.” TR said that Annie has sometimes “scary” high expectations for the faculty and that no one wanted to disappoint her because she was so supportive. May was also “highly, highly respected” so teachers wished to please her as well. Fullan (2001) wrote that such relationships are the key to change efforts.

Davis’ head of school, Jim, possessed many of the qualities of the “good to great” leaders described by Collins (2001). Every participant respected Jim and his leadership. They praised his ability to put the right people in the right positions, to find excellent people and to develop strategy and vision with his outstanding leadership team. The decision to build the conservatory program, for example, was seen as ingenious, because it brought bright, motivated students who enlivened the classrooms, infused music into assemblies and the school life, and improved the college placement results. Jim was not described as a gregarious person. None said that they were close to him. Generally, the participants accepted that Jim was not a “touchy-feely” person, yet they discussed moments when he showed particular care for someone or showed his emotions.

Some participants spoke of Jim’s little decisions as reflecting his care and competence. Some little decisions removed obstacles to the school’s progress. Others just made life nicer at the school. A participant credited Jim with arranging breakfast service for students who make the early and long commute to Davis from the city. Faculty members, too, are provided with coffee and baked goods in the morning. LA said,

“There’s [a] lot of little details being taken care of.” Overall, the quality of cafeteria food rose, and the participants credited Jim for that improvement. In his attention to little things, Jim was fulfilling the “with humanity” portion of the school motto, inspiring faculty and students to fulfill the “excellence” portion. This idea was supported in the literature by Gladwell (in Fullan, 2005, p. 17) who wrote, “The power of context says that what really matters is the little things,” and to change people’s behavior, a leader has to “create a community around them, where these new beliefs could be practical, expressed and nurtured.” At Davis, a general sense of care and competence supported the school’s efforts to live its motto.

One could assume that this research paints too rosy a picture to be accurate or replicable; however, negative comments were made. Participants from one department complained that they were unhappy that they had not received a new or renovated facility. They were fully supportive of all the change efforts and supported in other ways, but frustrated that they were left behind in the building campaigns. The focus group members could quickly list those departments that had not yet reaped the rewards of facilities improvement. This concept was not in the literature on change. The notion that once change efforts were successful, some participants would be impatient for their turn for change is a new concept.

Conclusions

The way that Davis teachers experienced change was consistent with the literature. While the scholars wrote about change in public schools or companies, their ideas aligned with the experience at Davis Academy. The existing change research seems to be transferable to an independent school.

Particularly, the good to great principles that were generated by Collins' (2001) research on companies were consistent with this research. The overarching theme that emerged from the focus groups and interviews was that change efforts were successful because leaders focused on the faculty. They supported the faculty by meeting their personal needs, professional needs and facilities needs; and supported faculty members' innovative programs. Faculty members were treated in a way that made them feel valued and secure.

The sub-themes emanating from that theme included Identification and Solution: the idea that the Head worked with the faculty to identify problems and set goals leading the institution toward solving those problems. This goal setting focused the school's efforts. When goals were met, confidence in the change process grew.

A second sub-theme was Building the Faculty. The leadership team set high expectations for teachers and removed obstacles blocking their performance. They provided professional development and faculty enrichment to augment the faculty's efforts. They shaped the faculty through hiring and firing.

The third sub-theme generated by the participants was that Relationships among Leaders and Faculty Motivated Faculty Change. Change ideas and goals aligned with Davis Academy's long-standing mission and values, so the teachers viewed the new expectations as consistent with the school's philosophy.

The themes and sub-themes resonate with Collins' (2001) "good to great" theories. The overarching theme, that Jim and his team were successful because they focused on the faculty, matches Collins' statement that "'who questions' come before 'what' decisions—before vision, before strategy, before organization structure, before

tactics” (p. 63). Collins stated: “The good-to-great leaders began the transformation by first getting the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and then figured out where to drive it” (p. 63). Similarly the leaders at Davis shaped the faculty through hiring and firing, but “were rigorous, not ruthless, in people decisions. They did not rely on layoffs and restructuring as a primary strategy for improving performance” (p. 63). Collins advised leaders to get the wrong people “off the bus,” the right people on, then create a vision with that new team. This advice paralleled the way the Davis strategic plans were generated. Jim began his headship by questioning every member of the faculty in order to reveal the problems and strengths. The first strategic plan included problem-solving goals. This planning echoed Collins’ finding that “all good-to-great companies began the process of finding a path to greatness by confronting the brutal facts of their current reality” (p. 88). Collins’ research identified leadership practices that Jim exhibited: “lead with questions” and “engage in dialogue and debate, not coercion” (p. 88). Jim communicated optimism while at the same time addressing the school’s problems and setting audacious goals. In doing so, he retained followed Collins’ leadership advice to have “absolute faith that you (the organization) can prevail ... AND at the same time confront the most brutal facts of your (the organization’s) current reality” (p. 88).

By removing obstacles to teacher performance, Jim followed Collins’ tenet “If you have the right people, they will be self-motivated. The key is to not de-motivate them” (p. 89). As ME stated:

[Jim] would listen . . . had the courage to state the obvious . . . he’s listened to people and he has figured out what we need as teachers to do our jobs, and he has pared back a lot of facilities problems . . . (and) other issues. One of the things that Jim immediately did was he looked at who we are as professionals and what

was the best and what we found most rewarding and he just pared away all the other garbage that independent school teachers were usually required to do. It was brilliant. When we're doing what it is we love to do, we're better at it, and the whole community gains from that and I think you can talk about facilities, you can talk about salaries, you can talk about all sorts of other things at Davis, but to me that has been the biggest change and that has been, to my way of thinking, what has done the most to bring about Davis' current success.

Collins' (2001) ideas about organizational culture were echoed in the Davis Academy data. The school had a "culture of discipline" (p. 142). At Davis, teachers became focused on school goals and educational research. As Collins wrote: "A culture of discipline is not just about action. It is about getting disciplined people who engage in disciplined thought and who then take disciplined action" (p. 142). When one looks closely at good to great companies, said Collins, "they're full of people who display extreme diligence and a stunning intensity" (p. 142). This comment parallels participants' comments about the Davis faculty. LA said: "I think we're happy enough that we're willing to work really, really hard . . . All of us work a million trillion hours and we're constantly on call and we're constantly, we write these incredibly long (student) comments . . . We love the school, we love the job, we're devoted to the school." At the end of FG2's session, I asked if I had forgotten to ask anything, and DB said that I had not asked if they love their jobs after all the years they had worked at Davis. All of the members agreed that they did, and SU elaborated:

You know what, getting back to the relationships, what we all love is, we love these kids. We really love these kids. We can take what drives us: the people, our craft, our passion, our expertise which we all continue to develop. Nobody is sitting here, nobody at this group is not continuing to work on his or her craft and passions. And we share that with these kids who at their ages have that passion for whether it's a language, or another subject, music or visual arts, so we feel pretty lucky.

Other participants expressed respect for colleagues' "extreme diligence" and "stunning intensity" as well.

Collins' (2001) and this research identified identical traits in the top executive or head of school. Every "good to great" company was led by an individual who embodied a blend of personal humility and professional will. They were "ambitious, to be sure, but ambitious first and foremost for the company, not themselves" (p. 39). Like Collins' good to great leaders, Jim Anderson was "self-effacing and understated" (p. 39) and "fanatically driven, infected with an incurable need to produce sustained results" (p. 39). They "display a workmanlike diligence—more plow horse than show horse" (p. 39). The participants associated these qualities not just with Jim, but with May and Annie as well.

Other echoes of Collins' (2001) work included the notion that leaders of "good to great" businesses tended to be humble and dedicated to the success of the organization rather than personal acclaim or self-promotion. CA said: "He's a plan guy. He likes to—he works tirelessly with his plans." Participants commented on how competitive he was about the school's programs as compared to other ISL schools (i.e., the salary scale, the athletic team standings). Participants saw Jim was ambitious for the organization rather than himself. Collins' description was consistent with participants' comments about Jim who was perceived as possessing relentless professional will.

Fullan emphasized relationships as the key to successful public school change efforts. Fullan (2001) stated, "The litmus test of all leadership is whether it mobilizes people's commitment to putting the energy into actions designed to improve things" (p. 9). Leaders, he wrote, were central builders of relationships among diverse colleagues. In addition, he spoke of moral purpose being at the center of change leadership, a

sentiment echoed in the motto Jim introduced at Davis Academy: “Excellence with Humanity.”

The concerns-based adoption model (Hord et al., 2004) holds relatively true for Davis Academy’s change experience. When participants remembered the beginning of the change process, they recalled being interested in the new educational ideas, but unsure how to implement them. Then, with more training and support from administrators, the participants understood the ideas and, through trial and error, improved their practice. Some spoke of “tweaking” the new teaching ideas as they incorporated them into their practice. This description mirrors the stages of the concerns-based adoption model.

Little and McLaughlin’s (1993) writing about school change also fits with Davis’ recent history. The authors studied schools that became collaborative and student-centered. Little and McLaughlin (1993) observed that in such schools, the mission was enlivened, the core values were prominent, and the school policies aligned with the mission and values. These schools had high expectations for faculty and students, and teachers had a voice in decision-making. Davis shared many of the traits of such schools. The participants stated that they had a voice at Davis, and also that they collaborated on curriculum and student support. Similarly, Rosenholtz’ (1989) work, though researched at public schools, was consistent with the experience at Davis Academy. She wrote about the importance of clear goals and opportunities for training. According to Rosenholtz, successful leaders articulate what excellence looks like, and provide teacher evaluation and professional development to help teachers meet the school’s goals. At Davis,

participants had a clear sense of excellence and found professional development and evaluation to be available and effective.

Many of Bolman and Deal's (2008) findings fit the Davis change experience. For example, they described leadership as "a change-oriented process of visioning, networking and building relationships" (p. 343). The leader must provide the vision and then persuade people to meet targets. The leader must understand the followers' needs and meet them by fusing "thought, feeling and action" (p. 345). Bolman and Deal's (2008) concepts of the structural and symbolic frames describe the approach at Davis. Jim restored a sense of structural order by focusing on facts, planning, tasks, organization and coordination toward goals. He restored a sense of symbolic order by connecting the new vision with the existing mission and values of the school. Bolman and Deal's (2008) ideas resonated with this case study.

Finally, Burns' (1978) highest level leadership model matched the focus groups' descriptions of the leadership team. Burns (1978) described the best leaders as both transactional and transformational. The Davis leaders were transactional in that they provided for the teachers' needs: salary, program support, professional development, evaluation, and in exchange, earned faculty commitment to school improvement initiatives. A give-and-take existed between the leaders and the followers. The leadership team was transformational in that they inspired participants to be their best selves. Participants strove to reach leaders' high expectations. At Davis, the leaders and faculty listened to one another.

Though the change scholars wrote about organizations, companies, and public school systems, their ideas appear transferable to an independent school setting. Davis

represented a different context from those studied, yet the data were consistent with scholars' change concepts.

Recommendations

Further Research Studies

This case study examined teachers' perspectives on a change experience at a small, independent day school. A valuable follow up study would focus on the Davis leadership team members and their memory of the change period. This study could focus on intentionality using the following research questions to ground the study and extend it beyond this study.

- How did the leaders accomplish the school improvement?
- How did the head pay for the changes, particularly the increased salaries?
- What was the leadership team's perception of change during this period?
- How did the trustees' demands and interests figure into Jim's choices, process, decision-making, and accomplishments? Who supported him during the change period?

An alternative study would focus on applying these findings to different types of good to great schools.

- Would a K-5 or K-12 independent school study produce similar findings?
- Would a public school study produce similar findings?

A Guide for Heads of Independent Schools

A follow up project could also develop professional development for independent school leaders. The researcher could use this study's data to write a practical leadership book. The findings of this research point to certain key actions and attitudes that teachers see as important to successful change leadership. Fullan (2001) wrote that the test of

leadership is whether it moves people to improve things and a leadership book could be useful in this regard.

The book could be practical and action-oriented. It could have four sections and 22 chapters. The sections could be entitled “Be,” “Plan,” “Manage,” and “Do.” In Section I, entitled “Be,” the chapters would include: “Be Physically Present and Accessible,” “Ask Probing Questions,” “Be Prepared and Knowledgeable,” “Show Your Scholarship and Thought,” “Don’t Worry about Your Personality,” “Show Emotions”.

In Section II, entitled “Plan,” the chapters would include: “Stick to the Mission and Values Like Glue,” “Solicit Faculty and Staff Opinions,” “Evaluate Market Forces”; “Take Care of the Basics Immediately,” “Develop Measurable Goals,” and “Create a Strategic Plan.”

In Section III, entitled “Manage,” the chapters would include: “Less is More,” “Get the Right People in the Right Jobs,” “Show Caring through Little Details,” and “Build Learning Into the Culture.”

In Section IV, entitled “Do,” the chapters would include: “Support Teachers’ Improvement Ideas,” “Compare Your Salary Scale,” “Invite Change, Don’t Mandate It,” “Hire People With Strong Vision,” “Take Care of Administrivia,” and “Treat Professional Development as a Perquisite.”

Epilogue

Davis teachers perceived change as a positive force because they were ready for visionary leadership, and the vision was developed in consultation with their wisdom and experience. As a result, the leadership team focused the community’s energy on reaching what were, in the eyes of the faculty, the right goals. The quality of the faculty was

improved through hiring, departures, and training. Constructive relationships between teachers and administrators grew because administrators met the teachers' professional needs and were seen as making decisions based on the best outcomes for students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form for Participants

Dear Participant,

I am conducting a research project to investigate teachers' views of school change in an independent school that underwent a period of improvement. I am writing to invite you to participate in this project.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group lasting no more than two hours. I plan to work with approximately 8-16 teachers in this study. One volunteer member will be chosen by lottery to be interviewed by me, and the interview will last no more than two hours. The focus groups and interviews will be audio recorded.

Participation in this study is expected to present minimal risk to you. Although you are not anticipated to receive any direct benefits from participating in this study, the benefits of the knowledge to scholarship are important. This study will contribute to scholarship in the following ways: by providing knowledge about teachers' views of school change and the connections among school culture, leadership and change in the context of this case study.

Participation is strictly voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no prejudice, penalty or loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled. If you agree to participate and then change your mind, you may withdraw at any time during the study without penalty.

In the data generated from the focus groups and interviews, the participants' names and the school's name will be replaced by pseudonyms for confidentiality's sake. The data will be reported using pseudonyms. Members of the focus groups may repeat responses outside of the focus group setting. I seek to maintain the confidentiality of all data and records associated with your participation in this research. You should understand, however, there are rare instances when I am required to share personally identifiable information (e.g. according to policy, contract, regulation). For example, in response to a complaint about the research, officials at the University of New Hampshire and/or regulatory and oversight government agencies may access research data. You should also understand that I am required by law to report certain information to government and/or law enforcement officials (e.g. child abuse, threatened violence against self or others, communicable diseases). Data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office; only my faculty advisor, Professor Todd DeMitchell, and I will have access to the data. The audio recordings and transcripts will be similarly stored. Once my dissertation

is accepted, the audio recordings will be erased and the transcripts, with identifying marks removed, will be safely stored.

The work will be conducted by me and the data will be peer reviewed by Diane Tabor, Ed.D., Instructor, Harvard University Extension School, and Glenn Pierce, Ph.D., Acting Director of the Institute for Security and Public Policy, Northeastern University. I am the Dean of Faculty and Academic Programs at the Derryfield School in Manchester, NH and a Ph.D. candidate at the University of New Hampshire.

If you have any questions about this research project or would like more information before, during, or after the study, you may contact me, Mary Halpin Carter at (603) 568-6829 or mhalpincarter@comcast.net or my advisor Todd DeMitchell, Professor and Chair of the Education Department at UNH at (603) 862-5043. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Julie Simpson, Ph.D. in the UNH Office of Sponsored Research at (603) 862-2003 or julie.simpson@unh.edu to discuss them.

I have enclosed two copies of this letter. Please sign one indicating your choice and return in the enclosed envelope. The other copy is for your records. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mary Halpin Carter
Ph.D. candidate, Department of Education, University of New Hampshire
Fairhaven Farm
743 Hopkinton Road
Hopkinton, NH 03229
(603) 568-6829

Yes, I _____ consent/agree to participate in this research project.

No, I _____ do not consent/agree to participate in this research project.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B
STAGES OF CONCERN

Stages of Concern	Expression of Concern
SELF	
0 Awareness	I am not concerned about it.
1 Informational	I would like to know more about it
2 Persona	How will using it affect me?
TASK	
3 Management	I seem to be spending all my time getting material ready
IMPACT	
4 Consequence	How is my use affecting kids?
5 Collaboration	I am concerned about relating what I am doing with what other instructors are doing.
6 Refocusing	I have some ideas about something that would work even better.

Hord, S. M., Rutherford, W.L., Huling-Austin, L., & Hall, G. E. (1987), *Taking charge of change*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

APPENDIX C
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

University of New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

15-Sep-2010

Carter, Mary Halpin
Education, Morrill Hall
Fairhaven Farm
743 Hopkinton Road
Hopkinton, NH 03229

IRB #: 4947

Study: Independently Innovative: Teachers and Change in Successful Schools

Approval Date: 10-Sep-2010

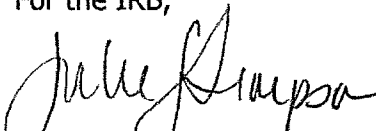
The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Expedited as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 110.

Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol for one year from the approval date above. At the end of the approval period, you will be asked to submit a report with regard to the involvement of human subjects in this study. If your study is still active, you may request an extension of IRB approval.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. (This document is also available at <http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html>.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,



Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
DeMitchell, Todd