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A CASE STUDY OF THE EVOLUTION  
OF A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS  
IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING

A Dissertation Presented

by

ELIZABETH A. BOSTROM

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1994

School of Education

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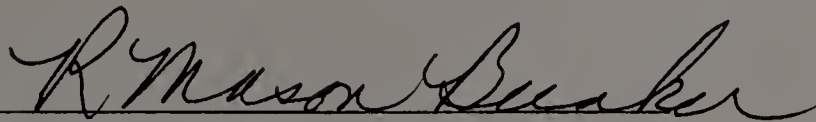
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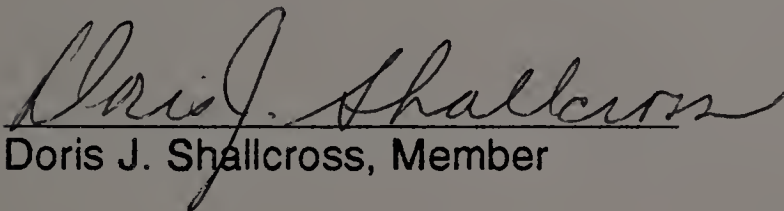
by

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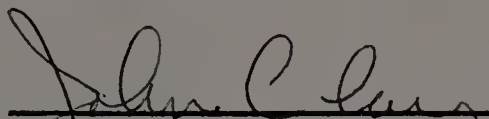
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## ABSTRACT

### A CASE STUDY OF THE EVOLUTION OF A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING

MAY 1994

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This study focused on a descriptive analysis and evaluation of a community of learners in an elementary school setting. The literature cited seems to indicate that if education reform is to be effective, it is essential that it involve the educators within the schools in the process. The premise is that students will learn, grow, develop, and achieve more meaningfully if they are educated in a community in which the adults are also learning. The current literature, however, tends to contain suggestions rather than concrete examples of a learning community in action. For this reason, the focus of this study has been on a particular school's evolution in living out this concept from its reopening in 1987 through 1993.

The process of living out this concept seems to support what the literature indicates as being crucial factors in its development. These factors are leadership, vision, change, and culture. Although these factors are important individually, it is their interrelatedness, which has significantly affected the growth and development of the community of learners. A case study approach that utilized qualitative data from interviews, participant observation, and supporting documents has provided the basis for the description and evaluation of the evolution of this concept .

It is evident that the reopening of the Jefferson School in 1987 provided a unique opportunity for its members to build together a community of learners. The data from the study indicate that although the vision of a community of learners originated with the principal, it has been enlarged by a participative process involving all members of the school community. What began as a very “fuzzy” vision has become the framework from which the goals, objectives, and activities of the school originate. Learning is the school’s main concern and all the members, adults and children alike, are learners.

The data also indicate that enhancing and inhibiting factors have affected this community’s development. A collaborative culture of openness has greatly influenced the collegiality of members and allowed for honest confrontations once trusting relationships have been

established. Although much progress has been made, opportunities for continued growth need to be explored.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Problem.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	9
Purpose of the Study.....	10
Significance of the Study.....	11
Definition of Terms.....	12
Limitations of the Study.....	15
Outline of the Study.....	15
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	17
Introduction.....	17
Examples of Learning Principles.....	18
Leadership.....	19
Vision.....	29
Change.....	33
Culture.....	41
A Community of Learners and Interrelated Factors....	54
3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS.....	60
Design.....	60
Methodology.....	61
Population and Setting.....	65
4. ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF DATA.....	68
Introduction.....	68

Description of the Study. ....	69
Research Question #1. ....	72
Research Question #2. ....	76
Research Question #3. ....	120
Research Question #4. ....	147
Strategies Utilized in the Development of a Community of Learners. ....	161
Examples of Jefferson School's Community of Learners. ....	164
Impact of the Community of Learners' Concept. ....	169
 5.    SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	177
Summary. ....	177
Conclusions. ....	195
Recommendations. ....	198
 APPENDICES	
A. OPEN INVITATION TO STAFF. ....	202
B. CONSENT FORM. ....	204
C. INTERVIEW GUIDE. ....	207
D. ACTION PLAN. ....	210
E. VISION STATEMENT. ....	212
 REFERENCES. ....	214

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Problem

Too often solutions to public education's problems have been recommended by those outside the field, and they have rarely had any meaningful effect within the schools. There seems to be a growing recognition that since it is within the workplace of the schools that problems reside, it is also there that solutions can be found as well. In an attempt to deal with school problems from within the organization, Barth (1990) and Sarason (1990) propose that schools should exist for the growth and development of both the adults and children who inhabit them. This study will examine the evolution of a community of learners who approach reform from within the school.

Sarason states that there are two obstacles to accepting this thesis. The first is in even considering the possibility that schools should exist for the coequal growth and development of its adults and children. This consideration is in opposition as well to traditional beliefs of the general public and educators. Sarason notes, however, that if our schools are to improve, they must "give up the belief that it is possible to create the conditions for productive learning when these conditions do not exist for



educational personnel” (1990, p. 145) . He goes on to say that the second obstacle resides in the lack of readiness on both the part of the public and educators to respond to this challenge (1990, p.146) . In Sarason’s opinion, the first obstacle is the more difficult because it requires educators and the public in general to radically change their perceptions of for whom schools exist.

Efforts at change and school improvement have been dominated by what Barth (1990) refers to as “list logic” (p.38). Many critics assume that if they can devise lists of effective school characteristics and clarify regulations and directives, school people will know what to do to improve their schools. Barth agrees that the “list logic of educational change seems simple, straightforward, and compelling, ... [b]ut it does not seem to work very well” (1990, p.39). In contrast, Barth provides an alternative logic evolving from a core framework (vision) of a school as a “community of learners ... [w]here adults and children learn simultaneously and in the same place to think critically and analytically and to solve problems that are important to them. In a community of learners, learning is endemic and mutually visible” (1990, p.43).

A community of learners realizes the importance of providing conditions which support human learning. Rather than simply asking what students, teachers, and principals should know and do, and how to get them to know and do it, the underlying question becomes quite

different. Under what conditions will student and teacher and principal become committed to sustained, lifelong, cooperative learning?

Barth proposes a set of assumptions underlying a community of learners which is quite different from the list makers:

1. Schools have the capacity to improve themselves, if the conditions are right. A major responsibility of those outside the schools is to help provide these conditions to those inside.
2. When the need and the purpose is there, when the conditions are right, adults and students alike learn and each energizes and contributes to the learning of the other.
3. What needs to be improved about the schools is their culture, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and the nature and quality of learning experiences.
4. School improvement is an effort to determine and provide, from without and within, conditions under which the adults and youngsters who inhabit schools will promote and sustain learning among themselves (Barth, 1990, p.45).

Central to Barth's conception of what a school might become is not only a community of learners, but also a community of leaders where students, teachers, parents, and administrators would share the responsibilities and opportunities for making decisions which affect everyone in the school. Other elements of a good school for adults support the concepts of a community of learners and leaders. As Barth has written, he would welcome working in a school characterized by a high level of collegiality, a place teeming with frequent, helpful personal

and professional interactions. He would also become excited about life in a school where a climate of risk taking is intentionally fostered and where a safety net protects those who may risk and stumble. He would like to work in a school with adults who chose to be there because of the importance of their work to themselves and others. A vital element would be a profound respect for and encouragement of diversity, where important differences among adults and children are celebrated rather than viewed as problems to correct. Barth would also welcome working with those who are philosophers, who ask “why” questions in order to examine and replace practices no longer relevant. A sense of humor would bond the community, especially in difficult times. Of importance to Barth would be working in a school which continually takes note of the anxiety and stress on the one hand, and standards on the other, while looking for the optimal relationship of low anxiety and high standards (Barth, 1990, pp.9-10).

Although a community of learners has much intuitive appeal, there appears to be little research regarding this concept. The number of citations in the literature, however, seems to be increasing. For example, Stephanie Pace Marshall, the President of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development stated in the August 1992 ASCD Update that she believed the creation of learning communities is the foundation for successfully restructuring schools. According to Marshall, “A community is a coherent group of people committed to a



common purpose. They are pursuing a vision that is individually defined but collectively embraced. They are led by thoughtful people whose purpose is to develop an environment that will enhance everyone's learning and thinking, and encourage personal success and harmony. Fundamentally, a community provides safety, security, meaning, and growth" (p.6).

A new set of learner-centered psychological principles, developed by the American Psychological Association (APA), summarizes some of the cognitive and social constructs that must be at the heart of learning communities. According to the APA principles, learning is an individual and goal-directed process of deriving meaning from both experience and information. Learners construct representations of knowledge that make sense to them; they associate and connect new information with what they already know. Higher-order strategies for thinking about thinking enhance critical and creative thought.

In addition to cognitive and metacognitive factors, affective, developmental, and social influences affect learning, as the APA principles state. People are naturally curious; and curiosity, creativity, and higher thinking are stimulated by learning tasks that are relevant, authentic, novel, and challenging. Learning and self-esteem are enhanced by interacting with others in flexible, caring, and respectful instructional settings and relationships.

Marshall (1992) comments that learning communities need to encourage interactive and collaborative approaches to learning; foster interdisciplinary understandings and connections; provide opportunities for experimentation, risk-taking, and active manipulation of models and physical structures; and promote individual achievement and group cooperation.

Sergiovanni (1992) like Barth and Sarason calls for a view of schooling which necessitates changing the metaphor of schooling from the traditional image of a factory or instructional delivery system to that of a community. These metaphors invoke different conceptions of management, leadership, and schooling and provide the reality for school leaders. Whereas instructional delivery systems reduce discretion and force administrators and teachers to assume the narrow role of script followers, learning communities are concerned with very different issues such as defining a learning community, the bonding of a learning community through shared values, purpose, and commitments, the working together to embody these values, and the recognition of the members' obligations to one another (Sergiovanni, 1992, pp.45-46).

The image of a learning community suggests a very different kind of leadership practice. Rather than relying on the more traditional bureaucratic authority based on hierarchy, rules, and the subordination of workers, or psychological authority based on rewards, the new

leadership emphasis focuses on followership and moral authority (Sergiovanni, 1991). The challenge of leadership today, according to Sergiovanni, is to motivate people to transcend their role as subordinates and to aim for excellent and committed performance. Exemplary performance is built on self-management, without monitoring or rewards. The leadership practice needed to inspire excellent performance is the building of followership.

Sergiovanni believes that schools need a moral purpose because they are sacred places. In followership, the leader's ideas are emphasized, rather than the personality of the leader. Ideas in fact sit at the apex of the organization; the principal, teachers, parents, and students serve the ideas. Leaders are followers first, committed to the shared values. The leader is the one who best serves the ideas. Developing followership is the goal of leadership and a major challenge for principals (Sergiovanni, 1991, p.26).

Leadership based on followership and moral authority is concerned with three conditions which enable schools to become communities:

1. Members of the school community must build a covenant of shared values, reciprocal obligations, and commitments which bond people together in a social contract.
2. They must view empowerment as an obligation, commitment, and responsibility to the school as a community, rather than as freedom.



3. They need to understand collegiality as a form of virtue, differentiated from congeniality. Collegiality exists when like-minded people are bound in a common commitment to shared goals. Congeniality is the loyalty and trust engendered when people like one another (Sergiovanni, 1991, p.27).

Taken together, these three principles of community-building are the ultimate task of leadership and the means of transforming a school from an organization to a community. The driving force of a community is its values and purposes. When schools become communities, they are built on a covenant of shared values, understood as duties and obligations.

Sergiovanni views communities as committed to exemplary practice toward valued social ends. In a community, concern is not only for one's own practice but also for the practice of teaching itself. Communities exemplify competence and virtue. When schools are communities, they are no longer driven exclusively by the requirements of hierarchy or the clever use of psychology. A new kind of authority emerges -- moral authority, which is the real basis for leadership (Sergiovanni, 1991).

The present research on the concept of a community of learners, although limited, agrees on the importance of the concept to school improvement. To date, however, there appears to be little practical application by educators.



## Statement of the Problem

There seems to be a growing recognition that if education reform is to be effective, it needs to involve educators within the schools in the process. A suggested focus is the total school and the total teacher as these relate to the learning of students. Barth (1990) and Sarason (1990) appear to be proposing that students will learn, grow, develop, and achieve more meaningfully if they are educated in a community in which the adults are also learning. Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) indicate their support for this belief by contending that how and whether students learn is directly related to how and if teachers learn to become better.

Educators, however, seem to have difficulty using the concept of a “community of learners” to guide their efforts at school reform. The current literature tends to contain suggestions rather than concrete examples of a learning community in action. The problem this study will address is how educators can move toward operationalizing this ideal. The identification and examination of a school involved in operationalizing this concept can be of critical significance to educators in addressing this problem.

## Purpose of the Study

Since there is presently little research on how educators can apply the concept of a community of learners, the purpose of this study is to provide a descriptive analysis and evaluation of the evolution of a community of learners in an elementary school setting. The results of this inquiry might inform the planning and/or implementation efforts by educators in other public elementary school settings who are interested in implementing the concept of a community of learners.

Research questions which support this investigation are:

1. How do members of the school define a community of learners?
2. How does the school culture contribute to:
  - commitment to shared beliefs and values
  - empowerment of members
  - trusting, collegial relationships
  - experimentation and risk-taking
  - respect for diversity
  - balance between individual and collaborative efforts
  - personal and professional growth of members
3. What leadership practices have been supportive to the development of a community of learners?

4. Can factors be isolated that hinder or enhance the development of a community of learners?

### Significance of the Study

Educational leaders within public schools have reason to be weary of programmatic fads, especially those who would call for major reform on the scale of those represented by restructuring. While competent leaders are open to change and risk-taking, few are willing to venture into deep uncharted water without some reason to believe that a worthy goal is achievable (Latham and Yukl, 1975). Recent reform efforts, however, which recognize the importance of the individual school in the change process aimed at improvement hold much potential for educators. One such improvement suggested in the literature is viewing the school as a learning community in which both the adults and children actively pursue relevant learning experiences.

Since there appears to exist little practical application of the concept of a community of learners, this study will attempt to provide one model for practitioners who may wish to apply this concept in their own school settings. It is not intended to be a blueprint, but rather a description which can be adapted to the needs of the individual setting.

The study is endorsed by the researcher's public school system as it begins to study how the vision of a "community of learners" proposed by

the recently appointed superintendent and approved by the school board can be actualized in the schools. Hopefully, this study will provide information which will be useful in assisting educators and community members as they work together in developing strategies for the implementation of a learning community. It is evident that this concept is in need of additional examination and documentation as schools work together to enrich the learning experiences of all those involved. In the following section significant terms are defined.

### Definition of Terms

#### Community of Learners

A community of learners is a coherent group of people who are bonded by shared beliefs and values in order to derive meaning not only from information and experience, but also from the enhancement of the capacity to act and keep on learning. A community of learners implies that school is a context for the continued growth of adults and children alike (APA, 1992; Barth, 1990; Marshall, 1992; Sarason, 1990; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1992).

Crucial to the development of a community of learners are the interrelated factors of culture, collegiality, empowerment, change, leadership, and vision.



## Culture

Culture is the perception of the organization about “the way things are done around here” (Deal, 1985). Schein (1985) defines culture as the basic assumptions and beliefs shared by members of a group or organization. A collaborative school culture which supports working together has the potential of raising morale and enthusiasm, opening the door to experimentation and an increased sense of efficacy (Cohen, 1988; Rosenholtz, 1989). This “working together” is also known as collegiality.

## Collegiality

Collegiality is the process of “collaboration among teachers and between teachers and principal and is characterized by mutual respect, shared work values, cooperation and specific conversations about teaching and learning” (Sergiovanni, 1991 b, p. 138). The concept of collegiality is dependent on empowerment.

## Empowerment

Empowerment is the sharing of decision-making authority (power) with people in the organization. The notion is grounded on the assumption that the motivation and, thereby, the productivity of workers will be enhanced when they are allowed to participate in decision-making and exercise some measure of control over their work. It is theorized that an enhanced sense of ownership, control, and

responsibility for the ultimate success of joint decisions will develop with such power sharing (Deal, 1985; Sergiovanni, 1991).

### Educational Change

Change is an ongoing process which involves the growth and adaptation of participants in the school community as they plan and work together in the pursuit of lifelong learning.

### Leadership

Leadership is the process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the learning community. Burns (1978) states that in this process “leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation” (p.20). Sergiovanni (1992) indicates that developing followership is in fact the goal of leadership.

### Vision

Vision is the process of seeing the future in the present, of journeying mentally from the known to the unknown. The raw materials of the vision are the leader’s ideals, faith, beliefs, facts, figures, hopes, dreams, fears and opportunities (Hickman and Silva, 1984). A collective vision develops when leaders and followers work together in living out their common purposes.

### Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are limited to one public elementary school (Grades Kindergarten through Five) in which the researcher is also the principal of the school. This may affect the degree of openness of members' responses although precautions will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of those participating and the honest reporting of data. In addition, the researcher selected the parents who were interviewed because of their varying degrees of involvement with the community of learners. If the selection had been more random, it may have produced different data. The descriptive data gathered through a case study approach is intended to provide the reader with an important "how to" experience base which may inform local planning and decision-making. It is assumed, however, that each elementary school setting possesses its own unique combination of social/cultural and environmental characteristics which will largely determine the design and ultimately the effectiveness of its improvement model.

### Outline of the Study

Chapter 1 will include the background of the problem, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, definition of terms, and an outline of the chapters of the proposed study.

Chapter 2 will present a review of the related literature. Chapter 3 will present the research design and methods to be used for collecting data for the study. Chapter 4 will present the findings, evaluate, and display the data. Chapter 5 will summarize the findings of the study, draw conclusions, and make recommendations for further study.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Increasing attention in school improvement efforts is being given to the importance of the creation of learning communities that enhance the abilities of both children and adults as the foundation for successfully restructuring schools (Marshall, 1992). There appears to be a growing realization that for schools to do better, equal attention must be given to meaningful learning opportunities for both the adults and children within them (Barth, 1990; Sarason, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1992). Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) believe that reform needs to center on “the total school and the total teacher as these relate to the learning of students” (xiii).

Echoing this sentiment, Glickman (1992) states that “in order for a school to be educationally successful, it must be a community of professionals working together toward a vision of teaching and learning that transcends individual classrooms, grade levels, and departments. The entire school community must develop a set of principles, not simply as an exercise but to establish a covenant to guide future decisions” (p. 24). The sections that follow describe examples of learning principles,

leadership, vision, change, culture, and a community of learners and interrelated factors.

### Examples of Learning Principles

Glickman (1992) cites the following examples of learning principles based on a cross section of educators, community, and business leaders in answer to the question, "What should learning look like in an optimal educational environment (e.g. a community of learners)?"

1. *Learning should be an active process* that demands full student participation in pedagogically valid work. Students need to make choices, accept responsibility, and become self-directed.
2. *Learning should be an individual and a cooperative venture* where students work at their own pace and performance levels and also have opportunities to work with other students on solving problems.
3. *Learning should be goal-oriented and connected to the real world* so that students understand the applications of what they learn inside of school to their outside lives and communities.
4. *Learning should be personalized* to allow students, with their teachers, to set learning goals that are realistic and attainable but challenging and pertinent to their future aspirations.
5. *Learning should be documentable, diagnostic, and reflective*, providing continuous feedback to students and parents to encourage students and to train them in self-evaluation. Assessment should be seen as a tool to develop further teaching and learning.

6. *Learning should be in a comfortable and attractive physical environment and in an atmosphere of support and respect , where students' own life experiences are affirmed and valued and where mistakes are analyzed constructively as a natural step in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding.*

By developing such principles, a school provides itself with a guide to compare current practices and to explore how it can act to reflect the principles more clearly and powerfully (Teaching and Learning Task Force, 1991 in Glickman, 1992).

Crucial to the development of a community of learners are the interrelated factors of leadership, vision, change, and culture. Although these factors will be described separately, their interrelationship will be evident as well.

### Leadership

Viewing schools as learning communities in which adults and children are bonded by the shared beliefs that they can continue to grow and learn together implies a different understanding of leadership. This view of leadership contrasts significantly with the more traditional views of leadership.

## The Old Leadership View

At the operational level, leadership focuses on two main concerns: attempting to determine what needs to be done to make the school work and working effectively to try to determine how to get people to do these things. According to Sergiovanni (1992), traditional leadership theory during the past forty years has been viewed as successful in accomplishing school goals by relying on an overly simple management recipe:

- . State your objectives.
- . Decide what needs to be done to achieve these objectives.
- . Translate these work requirements into role expectations.
- . Communicate these expectations.
- . Provide the necessary training.
- . Put people to work.
- . Monitor the work.
- . Make corrections when needed.
- . Throughout, practice human relations leadership to keep morale up (Sergiovanni, 1992, p.69).

Sergiovanni summarizes this simple approach to management as “expect and inspect” (p.69). He goes on to say, however, that this approach does not work as well today with its differing needs. The standard management recipe was based on two kinds of authority:



bureaucratic (the authority of hierarchy, regulations and rules, job descriptions, and assignments) and psychological (the authority of rewards that occurs when practicing human relations leadership and meeting human needs). Although there is a place for both, problems occur when bureaucratic and psychological authority provide the overall strategy for school administrators' leadership and management. Teachers have the tendency to respond to this kind of authority by becoming subordinates.

#### The New Leadership View: From Subordinate to Follower

In his book Value - Added Leadership, Sergiovanni (1990) suggests building followership in schools as an alternative to subordination. What, however, distinguishes followers from subordinates? Of vital importance is the ability to be self-managed. Kelly (1988) purports that followers work well without close supervision, assessing what needs to be done and making decisions about how to do it. The reason for this is followers' commitment to purposes, shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and a vision of what the school can become. According to Kelly, followership emerges when leadership practice is based on compelling ideas. Paradoxically, effective followership becomes the same as leadership because leaders and followers are both attracted to and compelled by ideas, values, and commitments. This idea structure has its basis in professional and moral authority.

In joining followership and leadership, the traditional hierarchy of the school is changed from the fixed form of superintendent and principal at the top and teachers and students at the bottom. Instead the ideas, values, and commitments shared by leaders and followers become the apex of the organization. When this happens, Sergiovanni believes “a transformation takes place, and emphasis shifts from bureaucratic, psychological, and technical-rational authority to professional and moral authority” (1992, pp. 71-72).

The concept of transformative theory owes much to James MacGregor Burns’ groundbreaking work on leadership written in 1978. He asserts that leadership is exercised when individuals with certain motives and purposes arouse in followers the desire to achieve common purposes. Burns identifies two broad kinds of leadership, transactional and transformative. He defines transactional leadership as “the necessary activities of the leaders that take up most of their days” (p.13). On the other hand, transforming leadership is defined as “leadership that builds on man’s needs for meaning, leadership that creates institutional purpose” (p.13). Burns goes on to describe transformational leadership as a process within which “leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation” (p.20).

Bass (1985) expanded upon Burns’ work. He defines transformational leadership primarily according to the leader’s effect on followers. He sees the “transformational leader as one who motivates us

to do more than we originally expected to do” (1985, p. 20). He says that a leader can transform followers in any one of three interrelated ways: 1) raising their level of awareness regarding the importance and values of task outcomes, 2) getting them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team or organization, and 3) activating their higher order needs according to Maslow’s hierarchy.

Transformational leadership occurs in two stages. According to Maslow’s (1954) needs hierarchy, transformational leaders activate higher order needs for esteem, autonomy, and self-actualization in followers. In addition, transformational leaders address moral issues of goodness, righteousness, duty, and obligation.

A compelling rationale for moral authority as a source of motivation and the basis for management has been provided by Amitai Etzioni (1988) in his important study of the moral dimension in management and motivation. To him, people’s shared beliefs, feelings, cultural norms, and social bonds are more powerful motivators than the extrinsic issues of transactional leadership and the intrinsic psychological issues of the early stages of transformational leadership.

### Leadership and the Learning Organization

Dumaine (1989) writing in the magazine *Fortune* predicted that . . . . “[T]he most successful corporation of the 1990s will be something called a learning organization” which can adapt quickly in a rapidly changing



environment. Many businesses are already using fluid, problem-focused teams to improve their performance, although this maximally adaptive organization is still an ideal (Dumaine, 1991). Many school districts have also moved toward less bureaucratic, decentralized structures (Hill and Bonan, 1991). Pajak (1993) believes that highly adaptive organizations will become more common in business and education as technology contributes to less stability and predictability in society.

Peter Senge (1990a, b) indicates that responsiveness through structural change is just a first step in becoming a learning organization. He comments that learning is more than merely taking in information. It includes a desire to be generative, to expand upon one's capability. Generative learning, unlike adaptive learning will require new ways of viewing the world, whether in understanding customers or in understanding how to better manage a business (or school). Generative learning necessitates seeing the systems that control events. Those who fail to grasp the systemic source of problems are left to "push on" symptoms rather than do away with underlying causes.

Pajak (1993) notes educators already realize that "learning is an organic process of growth that involves the stimulation of higher levels of thinking and creative expression" (p. 174). Since information is viewed as the coordinating principle of life, organizations are starting to resemble organic systems more than mechanical ones. A challenge for educators in the 1990s and beyond is how to facilitate collective learning



in classrooms and schools so that new knowledge and creative innovations are generated (Barth, 1990; Fullan and Steigelbauer, 1991; Garmston, 1991; Sarason, 1990; and Schlechy, 1990).

According to Pajak (1993), schools are *teaching* organizations by definition, although they are not necessarily *learning* organizations. While schools may be designed to transmit information, they do not usually generate or invent it. If good practice is not constantly improved and internalized through continuous feedback, schools that teach well may nevertheless, learn poorly. Drucker (1989) believes that for this arrangement to be successful, schools need individuals who will assume responsibility in maintaining relationships and open communications with others. Rather than emanate from one person solely, leadership will be shared by the group.

Senge (1990 a) states that leadership in learning organizations is very different from the traditional view of leaders which is rooted in an individualistic and nonsystemic worldview. Particularly in the West, leaders are thought of as “heroes” who most often respond to crisis. With this emphasis, the focus is on short-term events and charismatic leaders instead of on systemic forces and collective learning.

The focus of leadership in learning organizations is on subtler and more important work. The roles of leaders in learning organizations differ

significantly from those of the charismatic decision maker. Senge

comments:

Leaders are designers, teachers, and stewards. These roles require new skills: the ability to build shared vision, to bring to the surface and challenge prevailing mental models, and to foster more systemic patterns of thinking. In short, leaders in learning organizations are responsible for building organizations where people are continuously expanding their capabilities to shape their future - that is, leaders are responsible for learning ( 1990 a, p.9).

The role of designer necessitates a systems sense of vision and core values and the nurturance of effective learning processes. The role of steward implies a commitment of service both to the mission of the organization and the people within it. The role of teacher, asserts Senge, speaks to the fundamental process of learning in the organization:

Leaders as teachers help people *restructure* their views of reality to see beyond the superficial conditions and events into the underlying problems - and therefore to see new possibilities for shaping the future (1990 b, p.12).

In a later publication, Senge (1991) summarizes the “Five Disciplines” required to build a learning organization. They are:

1. The Discipline of “Personal and Collective Commitment”

Personal mastery is the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively. As such, it is the cornerstone of the learning organization - the learning organization’s spiritual foundation (1990 b, p.7).

## 2. The Discipline of “Building a Shared Vision”

Learning organizations are comprised of learning individuals. The source of a shared vision is “Personal Mastery.” Strong individuals who have their own vision provide the foundation for a learning team. The team emerges when these individuals’ visions are shared and modified in the course of a dialogue that produces a common vision.

Groups of people form and share a picture of the future they seek to create through continual inquiry about what they are envisioning.

A vision is critical for interpreting current reality, but it is not enough.

## 3. The Discipline of “Mental Models”

Mental models are internal pictures/representations that our minds form from our observations. We use them to interpret and make sense of the world. We treat these abstractions as if they are reality or data. But they are not the reality itself. They are only our interpretations of the reality.

The complexity of current problems requires the building of a shared understanding, a shared interpretation of reality. This shared understanding, in turn, has implications for the exercise of leadership in organizations.

In the conventional model, leadership is exercised by forceful advocates who believe they understand what needs to be done to solve problems and who tell people what to do. In a learning organization, leadership is practiced not through advocacy alone but also through collaborative inquiry.

Collaborative inquiry brings assumptions to the surface and produces a shared search for common meanings that leads to shared mental models, such as “all children can learn.”



#### 4. The Discipline of Team Learning

In team learning, groups of people learn to engage in a dialogue in ways that surface their mental models and assumptions.

Dialogue is the capacity to think together, to originate ideas collectively. Dialogue enables groups to converse in ways that reveal members' mental models and assumptions about the world so that these models can be shared, adjusted, and continually improved.

All too often in our organizational settings, however, we have lost the capacity for dialogue. Instead of having a dialogue, we have a discussion. "Discussion" comes from the same root as "percussion" and "concussion" and literally means "to heave one's views at one another." A discussion is always a game of win or lose - the prevailing opinion is the one left on the field once the battle is done.

Discussion is not always bad and dialogue is not always good. Discussion is often very important for making decisions, particularly when there is a time pressure. But without the enrichment of dialogue, collective learning will rarely occur.

#### 5. The Discipline of Systems Thinking

Systems thinking integrates all of the other disciplines. It means perceiving the larger system within which we operate. This discipline is critical because the major threats to our survival now are slow, gradual processes, such as the arms race, the environmental predicament, and the erosion of a society's educational system, as opposed to sudden, dramatic events. To understand these processes, contemporary civilization needs a perceptual reorientation.

To build a learning organization all five of these disciplines must be developed as a whole (Senge, 1991, pp. 29-30).



Principals who are concerned with building learning organizations such as the kind advocated by Senge need to do what is necessary to become perpetual learners. Skill and know-how are as important as attitude. This means access to new ideas and situations, active experimentation, examination of analogous and dissimilar organizations, reflective practice, collegial learning, coaching in relation to practice and more (Schon, 1987).

As perpetual learners, principals are constantly seeking new ideas, finding out what they can learn from others, and testing themselves against external standards.

It is not easy to be a perpetual learner under the traditional working conditions faced by principals (Peterson, 1985). Nor is it a matter of random learning from a continued bombardment of demands. The principal needs to be involved in vision-building and other orientations both individually and with staff in order to make learning more focused and purposeful.

### Vision

More recent leadership theories have indicated the importance of the leader's vision in motivating followers to achieve effectiveness in organizations. The literature on effective school principals indicates the

necessity of vision (Achilles, 1987; Bryman, 1986; Dwyer, 1984; Manasse, 1982, 1986). In fact, Blumberg and Greenfield (1980, 1986) suggested that effective principals could “see” what their schools could and should be.

This vision of a desirable future becomes a guide to a better future:

Vision is a mental journey from the known to the unknown, creating the future from a montage of current facts, hopes dreams, dangers, and opportunities (Hickman and Silva, 1984, p. 151).

Vision is also viewed as giving life to an organization:

Exemplary leaders imagine an exciting, attractive, and focused future for their organizations. They dream of making a difference. They have visions of what might be, and they believe they can make it happen (Kouzes and Posner, 1984, p.1).

Vision is considered the force which determines meaning for members of an organization:

Management of attention through vision is the creating of focus. . . . Leaders are the most results-oriented individuals in the world, and results get attention. Their visions or intentions are compelling and pull people toward them. Intensity coupled with commitment is magnetic. . . . Vision grabs (Bennis and Nanus, 1985, p.28).

Vision, however, is not something someone happens to have; rather it is a much more fluid process and should not be confined to a privileged few. Fullan (1988) states, “Implementation of any policy will be superficial unless all implementers come to have a deeply held version

of the meaning and the importance of the change for them” (p.32).

Bennis and Nanus (1985) report that the leaders in their study were all concerned primarily with the organizations’ basic purposes and their perspective was “vision-oriented” (p.21). These leaders were talented in eliciting the visions and images of others in the organization:

All of the leaders to whom we spoke seemed to have been masters at selecting, synthesizing, and articulating an appropriate vision of the future. . . . If there is a spark of genius in the leadership function at all, it must lie in this transcending ability, a kind of magic, to assemble - out of all the variety of images, signals, forecasts, and alternatives - a clearly articulated vision of the future that is at once single, easily understood, clearly desirable, and energizing (Bennis and Nanus, 1985, p. 101).

Thus, vision building can be viewed as an interactive process which involves two-way communication skills, empathy, and exposure to different stimuli and ideas (Fullan, 1988). Patterson, Purkey and Parker (1986) comment, “Vision is the product of exercising many skills in a holistic way to create a mental picture of what the future could and should look like” (p.88). They indicate four dimensions involved: foresight, hindsight, depth perception (seeing the big picture, its parts, and understanding how it really works) and peripheral vision (constantly scanning and processing the environment). Ideas as well as values are essential to vision.

The content of the vision must be of value and the process involved in working towards it should be clear to those involved. Leithwood and

Montgomery's (1986) "image of the educated learner" and Barth's (1990) vision of a "community of learners" provide two good examples. These visions become a framework from which the objectives and activities of the school evolve. Learning is the school's main concern and all of the members, adults and students alike, are learners. A central vision can help all members of the organization define roles and activities, and also provide a basis for organizational goals.

Commitment to both the *content* of vision and to the *process* of vision building and implementation are essential (Fullan, 1988). Both assume a dynamic and fluid relationship by the people working to bring about improvement. A number of skills and qualities need to be utilized in the continuous process of developing a shared vision which include two-way communication skills, risk-taking, the integration of pressure and support, the balancing of clarity and openness, positive regard for others, integrity, and a perpetual learning orientation (Fullan, 1988). According to Miles (1987), the process entails issues of *will* (such as tolerance and uncertainty) and *skill* (such as organizational design, the support of others, and the development of ownership). Basically the shared vision concerns the content of the school as it might become, and the nature of the change process.



## Change

Planned change, school improvement, effective schools and staff development all indicate the importance of the principal as key for leading and supporting change (Barth, 1986, 1990; Bossart et al., 1982; Hall and Hord, 1987 a; Leithwood and Montgomery, 1982, 1986; and Manasse, 1985). Hall and his colleagues clearly state, "The degree of implementation of the innovation is different in different schools because of the actions and concerns of the principal" (1980, p.26). Although there are examples where change has occurred successfully without the principal and there are also newer formulations such as teaming arrangements (Hall, 1987), most examples indicate the principal as a strong force for improvement. Fullan (1988), however, asserts that viewing the principal as lead implementer of policies and programs contains serious limitations which may unintentionally foster dependency. Sergiovanni (1991 b) goes on to state that in order to successfully implement the process of change, it is essential to include the ideas and commitments of a variety of people involved in the school's achievements and success.

### Conservative Tendencies in the Principalship

Fullan (1988) purports that in practice there may be more tendencies toward conservatism than toward change in viewing and carrying out the

role of the principalship. Both Sarason (1982) and Lortie (1987) offer some basic and thought provoking analyses of the principal's conservatism. Sarason (1982) states that being a teacher is not necessarily a good preparation for being an effective principal since teachers are limited in their interactions with principals. In addition, the newly appointed principal frequently finds that teachers emphasize maintenance and stability. When making recommendations for change, Sarason comments that principals "assert authority or withdraw from the fray" (1982, p.160).

Lortie's (1987) study of suburban elementary school principals in Chicago reveals four conservative tendencies in the principal's role related to 1) recruitment and induction, 2) role constraints and psychic rewards, 3) the constraint of system standardization, and 4) career contingencies.

In considering a particular change, principals are often concerned with two questions. First, will students benefit from the changes? Since change proposals rarely come with this evidence, this is a difficult question to answer. Second, if teachers resist, is the potential loss of good will and principal influence on teachers worth the risk? Lortie (1987) predicts that principals will not push hard for change in their schools knowing the probable answers to these questions. He judges that successful innovation necessitates "highly sophisticated managerial behavior" at both the system and school levels.

Sarason also discusses the importance of the system and how people's conception of the system, whether it be correct or faulty, influences what they do. Of particular significance are three observations which he makes in his analysis:

1. The knowledge on the part of the principal that what he or she wants to do may and will encounter frustrating obstacles frequently serves as justification for staying near the lower limits of the scope of the role.
2. The principal's actual knowledge of the characteristics of the system is frequently incomplete and faulty to the degree that his or her conception or picture of what the system will permit or tolerate leads the principal to a passive rather than an active role.
3. And perhaps most important, the range in practices among principals within the same system is sufficiently great as to suggest that the system permits and tolerates passivity and activity, conformity and boldness, dullness and excitement, incompetency and competency (Sarason, 1982, p.171).

#### Change Implications for New Dimensions in Leadership

More recent research states the importance of making the transition from the principal's role in influencing the implementation of specific innovations to the principal's role in leading changes in the school as an organization. While Hall and Hord (1987) have found that principals have a major impact on the degree of implementation of particular

innovations, Crandall et al. (1982) have revealed that successful implementation of innovations by teachers often occurs without the intervention of principals. Further, Trider and Leithwood (1988) have reported that many principals favored innovations related to their background interests while not supporting other innovations that were unrelated.

Fullan (1991) cautions that the implementation of single innovations is not necessarily an accurate gauge of longterm school improvement. He advocates looking deeper and more wholistically at the school as an organization. Louis and Miles (1990) distinguish between *leadership* and *management* and stress that both are essential. Leadership involves mission, direction, and inspiration; management concerns designing and carrying out plans, getting things done, and working effectively with people. Although this distinction has been made frequently, Fullan believes that “the two functions are often compared invidiously (leaders do the right thing; managers do things right) or in a linear relationship (leaders set the course; managers follow it)” (1991,p.158). He cites two problems with this image. First, it views the management function as less important and dull. Second, it gives the impression that the functions are sequential and implemented by different people. Organizational leaders do both functions simultaneously. Fullan goes on to say that management refers to both stability and change.



## Systemic Reform - Propositions for Success

Fullan and Miles (1992) believe that reform is systemic and for this reason actions based on knowledge of the change process also must be systemic. They propose seven basic themes derived from current knowledge of successful change. These themes comprise a set and must be considered in relation to one another before and during the process of change:

**1. Change is learning - loaded with uncertainty.** Change is a learning process involving new personal meaning. It necessitates providing opportunities for everyone to work out what the change means for them. This learning involves coming to understand and be good at something new.

**2. Change is a journey, not a blueprint.** There can be no blueprints for change, because rational planning models for complex social change (such as education reform) do not work. Rather, what is needed is a guided journey. Louis and Miles' study of urban high schools involved in major change efforts provides a clear analysis of this evolutionary planning process:

The evolutionary perspective rests on the assumption that the environment both inside and outside organizations is often chaotic. . . . [T]he organization can cycle back and forth between efforts to gain normative consensus about what it may become, to plan strategies for getting there, and to carry out decentralized incremental experimentation that harnesses the creativity of all members to the change effort (1990, p.193).

**3. Problems are our friends.** Problems occur naturally from the requirements of the change process, from the people involved, and from the procedures and structures of schools and districts. Through addressing problems, people can design creative solutions and in the process find deeper change and satisfaction.

In their study of successful urban schools, Louis and Miles (1990) indicate that these schools did not have fewer problems, but rather coped with them better. According to Fullan and Miles, “deep coping,” which is key to solving difficult problems of reform, seems more likely when schools not only work on a shared vision, but also devise an active coping structure. This structure brings more resources to bear on problems, benefits from empowerment, and keeps the energy for change focused.

**4. Change is resource-hungry.** It represents devising solutions to complex problems, learning new skills, arriving at new insights in a social setting already burdened with demands. This serious personal and collective development necessitates resources. Just as essential to the work of change is “resourcing” which requires doing what needs to be done to obtain what is necessary to accomplish change.

**5. Change requires the power to manage it.** Certain things appear to be essential in the successful management of change according to Fullan and Miles. First, change is best managed when it is carried out by a *cross-role group* ( e.g. teachers, department heads,

administrators, students, and parents). Second, this cross-role group needs legitimacy, that is, a clear license to steer it. Third, the cooperation and initiative of everyone is necessary to solve problems. Fourth, the power to manage change is most successful when the school district works collaboratively with the school. Vital second order changes require that the local level be empowered to manage change.

**6. Change is systemic.** There are two aspects to working systemically. First, reform must focus on the development and interrelationships of all the main *components* of the system, such as curriculum, instruction, staff development, student support systems and community, simultaneously. Second, reform must focus not only on policy, regulations, and structure, but also on deeper issues of the *culture* of the system. It is essential that both the state and district/school levels attend to the need to deal with both system components and culture. This involves both restructuring and “reculturing.”

Systemic reform is complex. It appears to be more effective and efficient than traditional approaches. Fullan and Miles state that this proposition is less proven empirically than the other six. According to Senge (1990), however, systemic reform seems to be on the right track both conceptually and practically.

**7. All large-scale change is implemented locally.** Change cannot be accomplished from afar. Fullan and Miles believe this proposition crystallizes the other six propositions. They state:

The ideas that change is learning, change is a journey, problems are our friends, change is resource-hungry, change requires the power to manage, and change is systemic all embody the fact that *local* implementation by everyday teachers, principals, and students is the only way that change happens (Fullan and Miles, 1992, pp. 745-752).

Change in reality involves what the nature of life in a school should be. Sarason (1982) indicates:

[L]ife for everyone in a school is determined by ideas and values, and if these are not under constant discussion and surveillance, the comforts of ritual replace the conflict and excitement involved in growing and changing. The principal may be this or that type of personality, experienced or inexperienced, likable or otherwise, intellectually bright or average - if the principal is not constantly confronting one's self and others, and if others cannot confront the principal with the world of competing ideas and values shaping life in a school, he or she is an educational administrator and not an educational leader (Sarason, 1982, p.177).

Serious reform, as has been indicated, is not in implementing single innovations. Rather it is changing the culture and structure of the school. As the head of the school, the principal's leadership in changing the culture of the school is crucial.



## Culture

School culture, according to Sergiovanni (1991 b), “is a reflection of the shared values, beliefs, and commitments of school members” (p.218). It includes “what the school stands for and believes about education organization, and human relationships; what it seeks to accomplish; its essential elements and features; and the image it seeks to project” (p.218).

Edgar Schein (1985) asserts that the term culture “should be reserved for the deeper level of *basic assumptions* and *beliefs* that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic ‘taken-for-granted’ fashion an organization’s view of itself and its environment” ( p.6 ). The concept of culture is very important because its dimensions are more likely to influence how people think and act than the official management system.

Similar to Parsons (1951), Merton (1957), and Argyris (1964), Schein (1985) indicates that schools and other organizations must solve two basic problems if they are to be effective: external adoption and survival and internal integration. The problems of external adoption and survival are themed to:

1. Mission and strategy (how to reach a shared understanding of the core mission of the school, and its primary tasks)
2. Goals (developing a consensus on goals that are linked to the core mission)

3. Means (reaching consensus on the managerial and organizational means to be used to reach goals)
4. Standards (reaching consensus on the criteria to be used to determine how well the group is doing in fulfilling its goals and whether it is meeting its commitments to agreed upon processes)
5. Correction (reaching consensus on what to do if goals are not being met) (Schein, 1985).

The problems of internal integration are themed to:

1. Developing a common set of understandings that facilitates communication, organizes perceptions, and helps to categorize and make common meanings.
2. Developing criteria for determining who is in and out and how one determines membership in the group.
3. Working out the criteria and rules for determining who gets, maintains, and loses power.
4. Working out the rules for peer relationships and the manner in which openness and intimacy are to be handled as organizational tasks are pursued.
5. "Every group must know what its heroic and sinful behaviors are; what gets rewarded with property, status, and power; and what gets punished in the form of withdrawal of the rewards and, ultimately, excommunication" (Schein, 1985, p.66).
6. Dealing with issues of ideology and sacredness: "Every organization, like every society, faces unexplainable and inexplicable events, which must be given meaning so that members can respond to them and avoid the anxiety of dealing with the unexplainable and uncontrollable" (Schein, 1985, p.66).

When matters of external adaptation and internal integration are addressed, schools and other organizations can better attend to goal attainment and the opportunity for people to derive positive meaning from their professional lives (Sergiovanni, 1991 b, p. 219). Schein (1985) defines culture as:

a pattern of basic assumptions - invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration - that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 9).

Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) assert, "The key question is what kinds of work communities or school cultures are most supportive of teacher growth and school improvement?" (p. 37) They go on to say that the teachers' and students' workplace is the key to reform (p. 37).

Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) discuss two basic types of school culture - individualistic and collaborative. They say that the most common state for the teacher is not a collegial one of sharing ideas and working together with colleagues, but rather one of working alone. The culture of individualism or professional isolation can have both positive and negative effects. While this isolation provides teachers a certain safety net for exercising discretionary judgment concerning the children they know best, it also removes teachers from opportunities for meaningful feedback regarding their work.

Rosenholtz (1989) speaks about “stuck” and “moving” schools in her study of 78 elementary schools in Tennessee. She observed that in “stuck” schools, which were not conducive to change and improvement, uncertainty and isolation were the norm. According to Rosenholtz, measures of teacher uncertainty correlated negatively with student learning gains in reading and math over a two-year period (1989, p.128). One of the main causes of uncertainty was the absence of positive feedback:

Most teachers and principals become so professionally estranged in their workplace isolation that they neglect each other. They do not often compliment, support, and acknowledge each other’s positive efforts. Indeed, strong norms of self-reliance may even evoke adverse reaction to a teacher’s successful performance (p.107).

Rosenholtz comments that uncertainty and isolation are associated with “learning impoverished settings” where teachers learn little from their colleagues and for this reason are not in a strong position to experiment and improve. In these settings, teachers “held little awareness that their standardized instructional practice was in large part the reason they performed none too well” (p.106).

When Lortie (1975) interviewed 94 elementary and secondary teachers in the Boston area and collected questionnaires from almost 6,000 teachers in Dade County, Florida, he also discovered a pervasive individualism among teachers. Beyond discussing rudimentary stories



concerning students and their parents, teachers rarely observed one another teach or worked cooperatively as a team to improve instruction.

Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) assert the need to “crack the walls of privatism” (p.39) in order to accomplish lasting change in our schools. When teachers limit their access to new ideas and practices that might suggest better ways of doing things, they are limiting their growth in fundamental ways. According to Fullan and Hargreaves, “*They institutionalize conservatism*” (1991, p.40).

Two of the root causes of individualism, state Fullan and Hargreaves (1991), are founded on the traditional norms and conditions of teaching. The first of these has to do with negative experiences of evaluation in teachers’ formative periods. For this reason, it is important to disassociate evaluation from efforts to create collaborative cultures between teachers and between teachers and administrators. Instead, efforts should be made to build helping relationships which are reciprocal.

A second root cause of individualism relates to the unreasonably high demands many teachers place on themselves in a position with ill defined limits. The teacher’s role is being defined both by teachers themselves and others in society in increasingly demanding academic, social, and emotional goals. Dedicated elementary teachers strive to meet these diffuse goals which are almost impossible to attain. As a result of unrealistically high expectations, Flinders (1988) observed two

consequences that reinforced individualism. Teachers did not have time to collaborate because they were too busy with their own class. They also found collaboration too risky. Often there has been a reluctance to give and receive help.

Traditionally, teachers find it difficult to assume an instructional leadership role. A teacher in this role when interviewed by McTaggart (1989) comments:

I don't want to go in with these teachers and say I know how to do this. So I have to be careful what I say. But if someone asks, or if the subject is brought up, I will subtly tell them how I have success in a particular way. I still have to be careful and throw in, "I didn't do this right," or "I could have done this a little bit better." This is part of maintaining a good rapport with teachers (p.352).

Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) state that individualism is rooted in the very conditions under which the teacher's role has evolved. As these traditions are being challenged, they issue two cautions:

First, as we seek to eliminate *individualism* (habitual patterns of working alone), we should not eradicate *individuality* (voicing of disagreement, opportunity for solitude, and experiences of personal meaning) with it. Individuality is still the key to personal renewal, which in turn is the foundation for collective renewal. Individuality also generates creative disagreement and risk that is a source of dynamic group learning. Second, we should not underestimate what we are up against in moving toward collaborative cultures. This development represents a fundamental and sophisticated change (pp 43-44).

## The Power of Collaboration

As indicated earlier, Rosenholtz (1989) discussed two distinct school cultures in her study. She referred to these as *stuck* (“learning impoverished”) schools and *moving* (“learning enriched”) schools. The “stuck” schools usually had students with lower levels of achievement and teachers who usually worked alone and seldom asked for help.

Rosenholtz observed that in the “moving” schools teachers worked together more frequently. Most teachers perceived teaching as being inherently difficult. For this reason, giving and receiving help became part of the common quest for continuing improvement. Rosenholtz states, “It is assumed that improvement in teaching is a collective rather than an individual enterprise, and that analysis, evaluation, and experimentation in concert with colleagues are conditions under which teachers improve” (1989, p. 73). Thus, teachers are more likely to value, trust, and legitimize seeking advice and sharing expertise with one another, which enables them to become better teachers in practice. “All of this means that it is far easier to learn to teach, and to learn to teach better, in some schools than in others” (Rosenholtz, 1989, p.104).

Both Rosenholtz (1989) and Ashton and Webb (1986) found that one of the main benefits of collaboration is its impact on reducing teachers’ sense of powerlessness and increasing their sense of efficacy. Barth (1990), Fullan and Hargreaves (1991), and Sarason (1990) likewise state that the power of the workplace and individual schools is where



improvement must occur. Evidence that it can be done are the collaborative schools, although still in the minority, where “continuous self-renewal is defined, communicated, and experienced as a taken-for-granted fact of everyday life” (Rosenholtz, 1989, p.74).

### Characteristics of Collaborative Cultures

Little (1990) has identified four different kinds of collegial relations among teachers. She describes: 1) scanning and storytelling, 2) help and assistance, and 3) sharing - as somewhat weak forms of collegiality. She purports that if collaboration is confined to anecdotes, help giving solely when asked, or to sharing of existing ideas without studying and extending them, it can simply confirm the current situation. There is, however, another kind of collegial relation.

Little comments that the fourth type - *joint work* - is the strongest form of collaboration (e.g. planning, observation, team teaching, sustained peer coaching, mentoring, and action research). Joint work implies and creates shared responsibility, stronger interdependence, collective improvement and commitment, and greater readiness to review and critique work. According to Little, this is the kind of collaborative work and culture most conducive to significant improvement.

Little also claims that many examples of supposed collegiality represent “weak ties.” She provides evidence that coaching and mentoring projects, for example, frequently are of this somewhat



superficial and inconsequential type and therefore have little impact on the culture of the school. It is essential that strong, effective forms of collaboration create the conditions where teachers can introduce and address critical, intrusive questions:

Bluntly put, do we have in teachers' collaborative work the creative development of well-informed choices, or the mutual reinforcement of poorly informed habit? Does teachers' time together advance the understanding and imagination they bring to their work, or do teachers merely confirm one another in present practice? (Little, 1990, p.22)

In addition, Nias, Southworth, and Yeomans (1989) conducted intensive case studies of five primary schools in England known for their collaborative cultures. They taught and observed in these schools noted for their positive staff relationships for one year. Nias and her team found that what characterizes collaborative cultures are not bureaucratic procedures, meetings, or formal organizations. Nor are collaborative cultures mounted for specific events or projects. Rather they consist of specific attitudes, behaviors, and qualities that comprise staff relationships on a day-to-day basis. The basis of these relationships is mutual help, trust, support, and openness. Underlying this is a commitment to valuing people as individuals and valuing the groups to which they belong.

Nias and her colleagues also discovered that failure and uncertainty are not protected and defended in collaborative cultures, but discussed

and shared in order to gain help and direction. Although collaborative cultures necessitate broad agreement on educational values, they also tolerate disagreement and to some degree encourage it. Schools characterized by cultures of collaboration are also places of hard work, dedication, strong and common commitment, collective responsibility, and a special sense of pride in the institution.

Collaborative cultures also acknowledge and recognize the teacher's *purpose* according to Nias et al. The discussion of purpose is not a one time event, but rather a continuous, shared process which pervades the school. In addition, collaborative cultures celebrate respect, and make allowances for the teacher as a *person*. Although teaching is a personal affair, it is not a private one according to Nias and her colleagues. Both staff and leaders are encouraged to reveal their personal sides, replete with vulnerabilities. Purpose and person, both essential elements for teacher competence, are openly discussed and developed in collaborative cultures.

Nias et al. found that collaborative cultures create and sustain more productive and satisfying work environments. They also raise student achievement by empowering teachers and reducing the uncertainties of the job often experienced in a culture of isolation. Collaborative cultures create communities of teachers who no longer experience the dependent relationships to externally imposed change that uncertainty and isolation tend to promote. Rather, teachers develop the collective confidence to

deal with change critically, choosing and adapting those aspects that will enhance improvements in their work situation, and rejecting those that will not.

Most striking about Nias and her colleagues' outcomes is the particular configuration of behaviors and beliefs in the collaborative schools. These schools inherently value both the individual and group. In valuing individuals, teachers showed an interest in one another's personal lives, while also respecting the right to privacy. Individuals were also valued as unique contributors to one another. Interdependence was valued both in the sense of belonging to the group and working as a team. With this orientation, the acceptance and appreciation of diversity is more likely as people work interdependently to solve problems and accomplish common goals. Nias et al. insist that developing collaborative cultures is not easy, but rather necessitates a high degree of openness and security among all members.

### The Role of Leadership in Collaborative Cultures

Research indicates that the development of collaborative cultures depends greatly on the actions of school principals (Barth, 1990; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; Leithwood, 1992; Nias et al., 1989; and Saphier, 1991). In addition, according to Fullan and Hargreaves (1991), it is a particular *kind of leadership* which moves school cultures forward. This is dependent on a subtler leadership which elicits meaningful activity for



others. This activity is aimed at producing better learning for students and utilizing continual staff development in the process. In this regard, Barth (1990) believes “*that* a teacher or principal is learning something is probably far more important to the creation of a culture of learning in a school than any list of *what* a teacher or principal should know” (p.46).

The basic role of school leadership can be viewed as leading the development of collaborative schools in which teachers are empowered “to frame problems, and to discuss work individually and collectively to understand and change the situations that caused these problems” (Smyth, 1989, pp190-191). Essential to the building of a collaborative culture is the encouragement and development of shared leadership within the schools.

### The Context for Collaborative Decision Making

Saphier (1991) comments:

A school system that is a learning organization consists of staff members and constituents who are empowered to grow, learn, and have an impact on the policies of which they are a part. This requires that decision making is shared widely, which is to say collaborative. Collaborative decision-making is **group** decision making (p. 46).

Saphier indicates the importance of the group’s understanding how to make effective decisions within the group. He states that effective decision making should include the following elements:

**Level I. The study of “legitimate” decision making.**  
A decision making process is legitimate when participants who



disagree with the outcome of a decision can agree on the validity of how the decision was reached. Any team or group involved in making decisions benefits from studying legitimate decision making.

**Level II. The creation of inclusive, institutionalized structures that include all major constituencies within a school community.** Representative and broadly-based, building-based, management teams provide an inclusive, permanent structure that contributes to good decisions.

**Level III. The establishment of structures that compel teachers' interdependence.** Joint projects in which teachers need one another to reach their goals help to build skills for effective decision making teams.

**Level IV. The development of a sense of community.** Decision making teams can create processes that encourage individual teachers to take initiative for the good of the school and nurture the value of acting for the larger community.

**Level V. The establishment of core values for the entire school community.** Collaborative decision making is most effective when it is guided by a set of priority outcomes, or core values, for students and the school.

These levels of support are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Members of a decision making team develop a sense of "ownership" of core values when they have a role in developing them. These core values then provide a focus within which shared decision making can be exercised responsibly and the authority to make decisions can be decentralized (Saphier, 1991, p.46).

## The Relationship of Collaborative Schools to the Outside Environment

In order for schools to remain collaborative, Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) indicate the necessity of gaining active support and involvement from the outside environments such as, the local community, regional, national, and international contexts when applicable. Fullan and Hargreaves provide two reasons for involving the outside environment. First, just as openness is essential within the school, it also should characterize how the school reaches out to the community outside. Schools need to develop close working relations with parents and community members as they work to share new ideas and practices which take into account both school and societal needs. Second, decisions outside the school have an effect on the school's future. According to Fullan and Hargreaves it is essential "that the collaborative school - to protect itself, to get even better - must constantly engage in and *negotiate* its future with the outside" (1991, p. 52).

## A Community of Learners and Interrelated Factors

As has been previously noted, a community of learners is a coherent group of people who are bonded by shared beliefs and values in order to derive meaning not only from information and experience, but also from the enhancement of the capacity to act and keep on learning. A community of learners implies that school is a context for the continued

growth of adults and children alike (American Psychological Association, 1992; Barth, 1990; Marshall, 1992; Sarason, 1990; Senge, 1990; and Sergiovanni, 1992).

Instead of being driven by a “list logic” (Barth, 1990) for educational improvement, the concept of a community of learners operates from the basic assumption that individual schools have the capacity to improve themselves when given the right conditions. According to Barth, the underlying question for a community of learners is, “Under what conditions will principal and student and teacher become serious, committed, sustained, lifelong, cooperative learners?” (1990, p.45).

The evolution of a community of learners is dependent upon the interrelated factors of leadership, vision, change, and culture. Whereas traditional leadership theory has emphasized bureaucratic and psychological authority, the idea structure for leadership in a community of learners has its basis in professional and moral authority (Sergiovanni, 1990, 1991, 1992; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991). The challenge of leadership today, according to Sergiovanni, is to motivate people to transcend their role as subordinates and to aim for excellent and committed performance through the building of followership. Ideas become the apex of the organization, and the principal, teachers, parents, and students serve the ideas. As Barth (1990) states:

The more crucial role of the principal is as *head learner*, engaging in the most important enterprise of the schoolhouse - experiencing, displaying, modeling, and celebrating what it is hoped and expected that teachers and pupils will do (p.46).



Learning does in fact keep up the momentum of the leader by “continually sparking new understandings, new ideas, and new challenges” (Bennis and Nanus, 1985, p.188).

The second interrelated factor in the evolution of a community of learners is vision. When the principal realizes a major revitalization of the school is necessary, s/he needs to find ways to inspire followers (teachers, students, parents) with a vision of a better future which will compensate for the abandonment of doing things the old, familiar way. The vision (e.g. community of learners) “provides an overarching framework to guide day-to-day decisions and priorities and provides the parameters for planful opportunism” (Tichy and Devanna, 1986, p.126). For a vision to be successful, Tichy and Devanna believe that it should have a tension which reflects its having been created from both logical analysis (left-brain thinking) and intuition (right-brain thinking). This vision tends to evolve over a long period of time and is enlarged through a participative process which involves all members of the school community. The vision becomes the framework from which the objectives and activities of the school evolve. Learning is the school’s main concern and all of the members, adults and children alike, are learners. Through this central vision, all members of the organization are helped to define roles and activities and are provided a basis for organizational goals. The basis for their decisions is founded upon their binding and solemn agreement which is the school’s covenant. When both vision



and covenant are present, a community of learners responds with increased motivation and commitment and their performance extends beyond expectations. As Gardner (1986) points out:

A great civilization is a drama lived in the minds of people. It is a shared vision; it is shared norms, expectations and purposes. . . . If we look at ordinary human communities, we see the same reality: A community lives in the minds of its members - in shared assumptions, beliefs, customs, ideas that give meaning, ideas that motivate (p.7).

The vision of a community of learners is also reinforced by what Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) refer to as “moral imagination” which they view as “the capacity to help us see the discrepancy between how things are and how they might be and in so doing invite us to act on those imagined possibilities and through our actions, transform the present - to move closer to the imagined (and possible) future” (p.228).

Change is inevitable as a community of learners works toward transforming the present for a better future. It is essential that everyone work collaboratively as ideas are discussed and conflicts addressed. As a community of learners, people can design creative solutions, and in the process, find deeper change and satisfaction. The ideas and values need to be continually explored in order that those in the school can continue to grow and develop as a community of learners.

Most essential to the continued growth and development of a community of learners is a school culture that is supportive of everyone's growth and school improvement. Barth suggests:

Leaders need to be able to set general directions and create environments and structures that enable everyone in the school community to discover their own skills and talents and thereby be free to help students discover theirs. For students' needs will not be fully addressed until teachers and administrators together have worked out their own (1990, p.145).

In a community of learners, the school culture reflects a value, respect, and support for both individuality and collaboration. Individuals are regarded both for their own worth and for their contributions to one another. Collaborative cultures are more likely to appreciate diversity, while at the same time encourage interdependence as individuals learn from one another, determine common concerns, and work together to solve problems.

Research has shown that collaborative cultures, although desirable and beneficial, are not easy to develop. Nias and her team (1989), for example, found that they need a high degree of openness and security among their teachers to work well. Collaborative cultures according to Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) are difficult to achieve and maintain because they are highly sophisticated and delicately balanced organizations. Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) comment that a principal's achievements are in fact limited by the culture and context of

the school situation. Their studies of schools and effective leadership lead Blumberg and Greenfield to believe:

The critical ingredients in all of this are value leadership, vision, and the capacity to exercise “moral” imagination. This is a much-understudied aspect of leading and managing the school, and it is a dimension at once intertwined with the character of the principal, the culture of the school, and the socio-political context within which the school is rooted. Value leadership essentially involves increasing awareness among teachers and parents of what is possible within existing constraints and then working with those constituents to close the gap between what is, and what is not possible (1986, p.239).

The evolution of a community of learners offers one way to close this gap. Barth (1990) issues the challenge for principals, teachers, students, and parents to work together and “create within their school an ecology of reflection, growth, and refinement of practice - a community of learners” (p. 162). In the chapter which follows, the research design and methodology will be presented.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to provide a descriptive analysis and evaluation of the evolution of a community of learners in an elementary school setting. For this reason, a single case study design which utilized naturalistic inquiry was employed as a means of describing the process of the evolution of this community of learners from 1987 through 1993.

Since the study consisted of an examination and description of on-going phenomena with a view of understanding their nature, organization, and changes, the researcher conducted descriptive research. Descriptive research is concerned with conditions that exist, practices that prevail, beliefs and attitudes that are held, processes that are on-going, and trends that are developing (Lovell and Lawson in Behr, 1973, p.10).

#### Design

The design of this study has been both descriptive and evaluative. First, it has been descriptive in that completion of the study has illuminated the significant factors in the development of a community of learners, the barriers to its attainment, and the strategies utilized in its



continued development. Second, this study has provided an evaluation of a particular community of learners by considering its impact upon those involved. In order to remain open to emergent patterns, no hypothesis will be given to prove. Rather, the researcher through the descriptive research of a case study, aimed to provide a rich context for the reader to connect with his/her experience.

### Methodology

The methods of this study were qualitative in nature. Patton (1980) states that the qualitative methodologist's task is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their point of view about the world, or that part of the world about which they are talking (p.28). According to Patton, the major way in which the qualitative methodologist seeks to understand the perceptions, feelings, and knowledge of people is through in-depth, intensive interviewing. For this reason, data were collected from audio-taped, open-ended interviews with a representative sampling of nine volunteers who have had varied involvements with the development of the community of learners in the study. The central office administrator interviewed was the superintendent. The school administrator was the assistant principal. Four classroom teachers and one specialist were

interviewed who responded to an open invitation to all staff by the principal. Two parents were also interviewed.

Since the researcher is also the principal of the school being studied, the interviews were conducted by an impartial interviewer trained in qualitative research methods. This was important for protecting anonymity and enlisting honest responses. The impartial interviewer mailed the tapes directly to a second person who acted as the transcriber, assigned pseudonyms, and returned the tapes to the individuals who were interviewed. The researcher, in turn, received the transcriptions with only pseudonyms indicated. Participants also had the opportunity to crosscheck and reassess all input. In addition, the researcher reviewed information for feedback and verification with a principal colleague with whom she has worked closely.

To understand fully the intricacies of many program situations, however, direct participation in and observation of the program may provide the best evaluative method. Howard S. Becker, a leading practitioner of qualitative methods in the conduct of social science research, purports that participant observation is the most comprehensive of all research strategies. The most complete form of the sociological datum is after all the form in which the participant observer gathers it: an observation of some social event, the events which precede and follow it, and explanations of its meaning by participants and spectators, before, during, and after its occurrence. Such a datum gives

us more information about the event under study than data gathered by any other sociological method (Becker and Geer, 1970, p.133).

Since the researcher is also the principal in the building being studied, she was able to utilize the strategies of prolonged engagement and persistent observation which Lincoln and Guba (1985) cite as being key in bringing scope and depth to the inquiry. Thus, data were collected through observations which included planning sessions, staff meetings, individual conferences, teacher workshops, classroom visits and building walk throughs, special events, and daily routines. In addition, pertinent documents such as memos, conference notes, home bulletins, teacher questionnaires, and workshop handouts by the principal and teachers were reviewed and analyzed.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the object in analyzing the data is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor. A second purpose is to generate the information upon which the emergent design and grounded theory can be based (p.201). Inductive analysis, which is defined as a process of making sense of field data, was utilized. The researcher begins with “not knowing what I don’t know,” proceeds to a deliberate clarification of what is not known, and develops a theory grounded in the specific contexts. Establishing trustworthiness of the inquiry with regard to data analysis

comes through strategies of triangulation, thick description, and the development of an audit trail (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Throughout the research, data were recorded to reflect four different purposes:

1. To detail the methodological process as it emerges with a record of day-to-day activities involved in the inquiry;
2. To document observations made in classrooms, meetings, conferences, hallways, and other significant places;
3. To transcribe the interviews of the nine participants and pose follow-up questions;
4. To process and reflect in a personal description of the inquirer's thoughts.

Initially these data were logged in notebooks specific to purpose or location. Throughout the inquiry, the logs were transcribed into the computer to create a more legible, permanent record. Observational and transcribed interview data were constantly compared for critical incidents and quotes supportive of emergent themes (Glasser and Straus, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). A system of colored dots were used to indicate themes. Some quotes or incidents have more than one dot which indicates a multiplicity of meanings. Eventually, files were printed for the analysis of emergent themes. A similar procedure was followed for support materials which were utilized to triangulate and affirm that which was shared and observed.



As stated by Lincoln and Guba, the aim of the thick description in the case report is:

to so orient readers that if they could be magically transported to the inquiry site, they would experience a feeling of déjà vu -- of having been there before and of being thoroughly familiar with all of its details (1985, p.214).

This ambitious goal necessitates a loosening of style to include first person recording, statements of affect, and also literary devices that facilitate transporting the reader while maintaining the integrity of the data. This rhetorical device is purposeful and specific to naturalistic inquiry. It reflects the immersion process of the observer, just as the absence of style in rationalistic inquiry seeks to convince the reader of the writer's objectivity.

### Population and Setting

This study took place in an urban elementary school (K-5) located south of Boston, Massachusetts. While overwhelmingly Anglo, the city's population is becoming increasingly multiethnic reflecting a large Asian influx and a variety of emerging cultures as well. This multiculturalism is reflected in the school being studied. The parents' occupations in the school community vary from professional and blue collar workers in the mid salary range to a number of unemployed workers. Nineteen percent of the students participate in the free/reduced lunch program.

This school is in the somewhat unique position of having been closed for approximately five years due largely to Proposition 2 1/2, a tax cutting measure, and then subsequently reopened after considerable parental pressure because of a significant influx of elementary school-aged children in the area. Currently, the school, which is 1 of 10 elementary schools in the city, is entering the seventh year of its reopening. The researcher has been the principal since the school's reopening. The student population has fluctuated from 350 students to its present 434 students. The school houses 17 regular classrooms (K-5), and 1 special education/resource room where regular education students, who are classified as having special needs, receive additional help during the day. Professional staff include: the principal, assistant principal, 17 classroom teachers (including the assistant principal) and 1 special education/resource room teacher who work fulltime in the building. Music, art, and physical education teachers and the media specialist are itinerant as are the speech teacher, school psychologist, guidance counselor, and nurse. They are present one to four days per week. The professional staff is supported by the school secretary, 2 fulltime aides (1 for building security, 1 for servicing a highly allergic child) and 1 part-time bilingual kindergarten aide and 2 custodians.

The average age of the building staff is late 30s to mid 40s with 17 to 22 years of classroom experience. Most of the staff have been working together for the past five years. During that time, they have had many

opportunities to interact and learn from one another. Their personal and professional transitions have been key to the development of this community of learners. The following chapter provides the analysis and presentation of the study's data.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF DATA

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide a descriptive analysis and evaluation of the evolution of a community of learners in a particular elementary school setting. A single case study design which utilized naturalistic, qualitative inquiry was implemented. The analysis and presentation of data for the study were organized according to the following research questions which supported this investigation:

1. How do members of the school define a community of learners?
2. How does the school culture contribute to:
  - commitment to shared beliefs and values
  - empowerment of members
  - trusting, collegial relationships
  - experimentation and risk-taking
  - respect for diversity
  - balance between individual and collaborative efforts
  - personal and professional growth of members
3. What leadership practices have been supportive of the development of a community of learners?



4. Can factors be isolated that hinder or enhance the development of a community of learners?

### Description of the Study

An initial starting point for gathering information on the evolution of this community of learners was an open invitation given to staff by the principal (APPENDIX A). Four teachers and the media specialist volunteered to participate in the interviews. The assistant principal and the superintendent represented the administrators and two parents were included as well. All but one staff member have been involved with the school since it reopened in 1987. Consent Forms (APPENDIX B) were given to participants before they were interviewed.

Since the researcher is also the principal of the school studied, it was felt by the committee and the researcher that someone else should conduct the interviews. The person chosen was trained in interviewing techniques as part of his doctoral program, which he has successfully completed. In addition, he is an experienced elementary teacher who also has had administrative responsibilities, which engendered a confidence and rapport with those interviewed.

As the principal, I met with participants individually a week before the scheduled interviews and shared with them an interview guide (APPENDIX C) which the interviewer would utilize in the interviewing

process. This provided an opportunity for participants to ask for clarification or express any possible concerns they may have had. Through this process, I gained a sense from participants that they not only felt comfortable about the interview, but also that they could respond openly and honestly to the interviewer without having their identities revealed in the reporting of the data. This was particularly important for the teachers in the study, although anonymity was not necessarily an issue at all times because respondents occasionally chose to give grade level specific answers. Nevertheless, in an effort to preserve participants' anonymity, fictitious names have been given both for people interviewed and for actual places. The superintendent and assistant principal realized and consented to being identified because of their roles. In this study, the city will be referred to as "Hopedale" and the school as the "Jefferson" School.

On the days of the interviews, the principal introduced the interviewer to each person and provided a private room in the school for the interviews which lasted from forty-five minutes to one hour and fifteen minutes. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio taped and subsequently sent to another person for transcription. These transcriptions were then sent to the researcher for analysis. During the analysis, the researcher communicated with the interviewer to corroborate findings and in some cases to ask for clarification. Having an outside interviewer was both a positive support and a limitation. The

most positive aspect involved participants' candid and forthright answers to questions and their not feeling constrained to give "one right answer" to any question. As the researcher, I felt a great limitation in not being able to ask follow-up questions in some cases, although the interviewer showed great sensitivity in this regard. I also missed the important nuances provided through participants' body language. I believe, however, that participants' honest, open responses far outweigh any limitations cited.

In analyzing the data from the interviews, the researcher found that participants' responses, particularly to the questions involving culture and leadership, were very closely aligned. In an effort to avoid direct repetition in both categories, participants' answers at times were shortened and/or summarized when a similar thought was expressed in another category. References are made to the overlapping of the factors throughout the data analysis.

As the analysis of the interviews proceeded, certain conceptual categories emerged from the data through the process of inductive analysis as described by Patton:

Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to the data collection and analysis....The analyst can use the categories developed and articulated in the program studied to organize presentation of particular themes (1988, p.306).



The conceptual categories generated from these interviews are significant components of the participants' perceptions of the evolution of a community of learners in a particular setting.

The interview questions focused on four main topics: 1) participants' understanding of the concept of a community of learners; 2) the relation of school culture to the evolution of a community of learners; 3) the role of leadership in its development; and 4) factors which may inhibit and/or enhance the development of a community of learners. Through the data analysis, themes related to each research question are analyzed.

#### Research Question #1

How do members of the school define a community of learners?

In the interviews, participants were asked how they would explain the concept of a community of learners to someone new to the school. Bill Connors, the superintendent, responded by referring to Francis Parker, the first superintendent, who in 1875 stated:

There never was a Hopedale method unless one is willing to consider that the Hopedale method was a spirit of everlasting study and everlasting change, and that there was not one thing decided upon except to bring into the lives of children that that was good and best for them. . . . Francis Parker called his forty-four teachers in 1875 his little band of heroes who were an academy for the study of education. . . . To me a community of learners is continuing the legacy of Francis Parker.



The assistant principal, Diane Epstein, commented:

What has been developed in this school is a community of learners - a place where every person who has a connection with the Jefferson School in some way is an active learner. The students, the teachers, the parents, and all the paraprofessionals there have opportunity for learning as well as working within the school.

The teachers and parents supported the view that everyone is a learner. Lou Davis (teacher) suggested:

The concept of a community of learners should be explained as an approach to learning where students and adults alike are involved in an ongoing learning process. The adults in many cases would be teachers who develop a method where they would impart knowledge they have acquired and avail themselves to participate in activities outside their classrooms and further broaden their learning, i.e. visiting other classes and teaching a lesson or two.

In a similar way, Ann Ballardo (parent) said:

It's a group of people who are here for the same purpose, to educate one another.

It is evident from participants' responses that they felt united in their common focus on learning for everyone. Mary Burns (teacher) commented:

I would say that a community is a group of people who have a common goal and in this case the goal is seeing that the children and the people who are working with the children are all learning together within the confines of the school.

Another teacher, Fran Godfrey, stated that the community of learners "shares the same vision and goals and that's to develop {like one}

learning.” This development involves a united concern for children as expressed by Chris Malone (teacher).

I think that all the faculty here are very concerned about children. Their focus is on children. They are very concerned and I've seen this happen a lot of times in the teachers' room. One of the teachers will say, "Gee, so and so doesn't seem to be reacting correctly, have you noticed this lately?" And we talk, and we talk with the specialists' staff. We talk with Betty (principal) and it's a very open school that way and I think the big common focus is children in the school. And they are concerned when a child doesn't seem to be making progress, and I think that's the one common thing that we all feel.

Pat Nadowski (parent) stated it another way.

The school is very special in that it's child-centered, but it also requires a lot of involvement from parents, teachers, administrators, and the community. It's a real community school.

Being a community of learners has involved risk-taking. Terry Francis (teacher) commented:

A community of learners is a group of people that make mistakes together and don't really judge each other by those mistakes but what they have learned. I think it's a hard thing to achieve in a total school setting. I think it's very difficult.

The theme of risk-taking recurs throughout the study and will be referenced again.

The evolution of a community of learners has provided staff, principal, and parents the opportunity to act as role models for children. According to Fran Godfrey (teacher):

The most important thing within a community of learners is to become a powerful model for kids. To have the kids see their teacher is still learning. I also think that it's important for the parents to be involved. The kids see that their parents can become learners. I also think it enhances the parents' self-esteem when they can come into a building and know what goes on with their kids' education. They feel a part of it. They feel connected.

From parents' comments it is evident that they feel this connection with the school. Pat Nadowski stated:

Another very integral part of the school is the fact that it has a somewhat open door policy where parents are encouraged to come in; grandparents are encouraged to participate in their grandchildren's education. The community is drawn in to help with certain needs that we might have.

In commenting on parental involvement, Ann Ballardo (parent) discussed the cyclical aspect of learning.

We've brought up the kids and we entrust them to the school once they enter kindergarten. I don't think it stops there. It continues. Even as adults, it's nice to continue to learn. I think when the children see us being involved in the school, it spurs them on. It should be a cyclical thing. We're all in this together.

Parental involvement, however, is not without its difficulties. Fran Godfrey (teacher) commented:

I think especially from my standpoint, from the teacher's point of view, so many times and historically, we have seen parents as adversarial. It's hard to invite them in and help them become an active participant. However, I think as the community develops

and strengthens, it becomes easier for teachers in a way because I think we have become more confident in ourselves as teachers because we finally have the vision and we have goals that help us achieve the vision and benchmarks {to} know how successful we are becoming as teachers and it gives you that empowerment. So you can have the self-confidence to invite parents in and have them become more active participants in their own children's education.

Chris Malone (teacher) echoed this ambivalence regarding parental involvement. She stated:

As long as I keep the parent volunteers in a very structured situation, I seem to do very well with them. But I have been stung by parents in the past and I also have the feeling that you have a very well educated group of people in the community of learners and as a group we are doing what we are trained to do and what we do best. I guess I don't feel that I want parents coming in trying to tell me how to do the job. And in some cases, that is contradictory to the whole concept, but I do have a problem with that. Some of the parents have been very good and very understanding and they are very receptive. I suppose because I kind of feel if you send your child to a doctor, you don't tell the doctor how to do it.

### Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:  
- shared beliefs and values?

Participants agreed that the reopening of the school provided a unique opportunity to build together shared values and beliefs. The superintendent commented:

All of us being a part of a community of learners share respect for education, for learning, for personal growth and development that



we want to see ourselves become better persons, and so much of that obviously is part and parcel of learning, of change, of growth, of development. I think that's probably at the heart of everything. I think that other values. . . would be respect for somebody else's pursuit of knowledge and growth. A concern that again you bring the best, the true and the good into the lives of someone. That there is a value of openmindedness that we would not be a closed book to anything. That we would not lock out any ideas without examining, studying, researching dialogue/discussion - - a confrontation even. So those would be some of the values that I would say we all share in. I think it all comes under the general heading of respect.

When the interviewer asked the superintendent if he had seen evidence of this respect at the Jefferson School, Bill Connors remarked:

Definitely! I think the Jefferson School is probably one of our best examples of that. The Jefferson School had an opportunity of leadership to pull together before the building opened. The principal and staff had an opportunity to talk about what kind of school they wanted it to be before the school was made for them. They had an opportunity to approach the children and their parents before {for example} "Wait 'till you get Mrs. So and So. You had Johnny, wait 'till you get Ann Marie." There was none of that. The principal and staff had all of that missing from their starting point. So they could start with the best of ideas, and the best of plans and high hopes for success. That has permeated everything they've done from those initial planning days that summer before school opened. And it has carried through. So I do think there is at the Jefferson School certainly an outstanding example of a community of learners. Collegiality! We're in this together. Sink or swim, this is going to be a good school because we're going to make it a good school! . . . . The principal and staff were starting out fresh. What was built was built together.

At the beginning of the initial summer workshop of 1987, the principal shared the following thoughts with staff.

. . . . Although much of what we do this week is of necessity dealing with needed practicalities in order to be ready to open school on September 9, I believe it is important to keep in mind the foundation upon which we are building. In relation to this, I attended an institute on school culture last spring, and I also participated in the Commonwealth Leadership Academy's Institute for administrators during the last week in June. This institute will be ongoing during the coming year. Its focus is on clinical supervision which has continuous staff development and improvement of instruction as its dual aims. The vision which I have for the Jefferson School is one which I hope you will also value and share with me. I want the Jefferson School to be known for promoting learning for everyone: students, staff and community -- a community of learners. My goal is the development of a cohesive group working toward establishing a school culture which will promote each learner's potential. . . . What we do this week will be the beginning of working together to develop a nurturing environment and positive school climate which will promote academic excellence for students attending the Jefferson School.

Diane Epstein (assistant principal) commented on teachers' initial expectations.

Teachers have certain expectations themselves when they come into a new building, how they can fit into that new plan and so I think everybody who came here, came with that newness and with the idea that they were going to be builders and {a} part of the process of working on the vision for the Jefferson School so I think they share that value.

Mary Burns (teacher) echoed this same sentiment of building together.

I volunteered because I thought it was an opportunity for people to start something fresh, that didn't already have preconceived critics or ideas of how things should run. I thought it would be kind of

exciting to get in on the ground level. I had participated in the closing of two schools during the rifting of proposition 2 1/2 and it was kind of nice to be in at the opening of a school and see something grow.

Participants viewed themselves and one another as learners along with their students. In discussing the value of continued growth, Mary Burns said:

People are very concerned with being involved with the latest trends, for example, working more with whole language as opposed to an old fashioned approach to reading. Whenever they hear of something new, people are either desirous of taking a course in that or they are hoping to maybe pilot a program within the school. There are a lot of people . . . that aren't happy just staying where they are and want to continue to grow.

Another teacher, Lou Davis, spoke of the value attached to the ongoing process of learning.

Probably most important is the fact that students see that learning is an ongoing process, and that teachers as well as students are always in the learning process. It doesn't stop when you leave. I try to make a point to my students that I'm always like a student and I'm always trying to learn from them and they have things to share . . . . I think that's important for them to see.

Terry Francis (teacher) reiterated this viewpoint of the teacher and children learning together. This teacher captured the excitement of being involved in something new, but also the corresponding ambivalence that change and uncertainty bring.

I became a learner right away because Betty (principal) introduced a reading program that I was very intimidated by called "Open Court." I heard it was only for the very bright. Right away I was thrown into this and became really fearful of doing a good job.



I was learning right from the beginning with the kids. They were learning with me. I was making a lot of mistakes with them, but laughing about it. And the staff! They really created the school. There wasn't a school here; it was just an old building. So we all brought a lot of enthusiasm to this job. To open a building takes a tremendous amount of work. It's not just moving people in; it's moving your ideas in with you and trying to find people who will feel comfortable with the way you're conducting yourself. It was probably the best thing educationally that I have done . . . . The whole philosophy as far as I'm concerned has just been fun. And I've learned a lot!

An important part of the learning experience according to Fran

Godfrey (teacher) involved:

Valuing each member of the community for what they are and what their cultures are. I also see a community of learners {as} a microcosm of a global society and we have to teach kids to live in that society.

Pat Nadowski (parent) believed that the value which the community attaches to education unites people of all ages.

{Education} is one of the most valuable commodities as far as holding a community together. To bring people together of all different ages and if we have a good strong base in education, then the community itself will be a strong community in a strong neighborhood. I think it's the value for education throughout, from elementary into one's adulthood, that makes the community of learners work and kind of hold it together, makes it cohesive.

In a similar vein, Ann Ballardo (parent) commented that being a community of learners contributed to children's independence if parents are open and willing to take the necessary risks involved.

I think that we all want our children to grow up independent and I think this is a way of fostering that . . . . A lot of parents nurture their children and give them extra things outside school . . . . There are



some parents who have blinders on and have trouble going beyond what they were brought up with. . . . If they (we) can all open up a little bit and try and learn new things, and if it doesn't work out, well fine. So you've tried. I think we have to take a few risks. It's a nice, warm feeling. I have been made to feel extremely welcome, but maybe there are parents who don't have enough self-confidence. They feel what do they have to offer? So I think that's a problem.

The role that the concept of a community of learners played in the fostering of self-confidence in adults and children alike will be referenced later in the study.

The development of shared values has not been without its problems and concerns. In this regard, the superintendent stated:

Those common traits, characteristics that have become expectations for all at Jefferson are now shared. This is also not to say that there haven't been one or two teachers at the Jefferson School that haven't been able to cope with that. It is interesting to see that they have chosen to be in another school. Not because they went out angry, but they knew that this was just not going to be something that they could buy into. They just were afraid. I would think they were afraid of it really. They were afraid of the notion that I have to be part of shared beliefs. I am going to be expected to participate. I am going to be expected to join in discussions, to have an opinion. To maybe modify my behavior because this is the way we are going to do things around here. I think one of the interesting things is some people who couldn't make that and they opted out of the school.

The history of education for the classroom teacher as the literature indicates has been one of isolation. Typically, the teacher closes the door and teaches his or her children without communicating with teacher colleagues and administrators. A sharing model is one which involves

considerable time, effort, and planning on everyone's part. Diane Epstein (assistant principal) stated:

Well right from the beginning, there was a sense of sharing in this building in the sense of collegiality. Those were part of Betty's original vision and she started off right away by suggesting we develop a logo for the school, certain goals for the school, certain kinds of things that children would participate in. I think that's very much contributed to this working community of learners because as we got involved in different projects, even something as benign as the drama program, which I am involved in, more and more people get involved in it and it does become a culture - it becomes a way this school does business. . . . It becomes a tradition of the Jefferson School. We started off with the idea of a very simplistic saying (Up, Up and Away with Learning); something that is printed on our stationery.

A notice from the principal to staff indicated the attention given to the building of the school's culture.

I would like to thank each of you for your supportive contributions to the staff meeting last week. Meetings such as this provide me with a tangible means of knowing that we are beginning to build a positive school culture together! As agreed upon at the meeting, we will spend this week discussing and brainstorming with students: What the Jefferson School Means to Me. Next week we will explain the Logo Contest to students. We will have ground rules, which we will share with them at this time. All entries are due on October 23 and will be judged on October 26, 1987 .

Thank you for your cooperation.

Everyone's sharing involved repetition, but it also demanded modification as indicated by the assistant principal.

Activities became repetitive year after year . . . . We all got involved in this culture and the culture was a sharing because as we modified, we changed. People were allowed to input into the

process and learn from their mistakes, evaluate, and make adjustments.

Before the process of developing shared values could be developed, however, the diverse experiences and backgrounds of both staff and students needed to be acknowledged and recognized. Fran Godfrey (teacher) commented:

This is a unique situation where the community came together six years ago. We all came from different schools and different experiences. Some of us came from a real academic setting where the children came from professional homes and then other people on the staff came from schools that were set in the lower socioeconomic setting where I guess the main focus was to see their kids were healthy and well taken care of, not sexually or physically abused, which many of them were. So some came with the importance of school being good test scores and memorizing the multiplication facts, where some of us came with the notion that we were the emotional caretakers and almost primary caretakers to kids in some sense. So it was quite a different group.

We sensed that first year that not only did we as a staff have that kind of culture shock with one another, but the kids did too. There were those kids from that academic setting that came in and there were also kids from another school that were blue collar kids and we felt those kids had an awful amount of stress to achieve put on them . . . . So it was quite an interesting mix and to come away with a kind of a unified vision of taking this eclectic group and making it one community with a shared vision was pretty difficult.

Fran Godfrey continued by commenting on the significant role the principal played in the development of the school's culture, which other participants indicated as well. This will be addressed in the section on leadership.



The underlying theme of openness recurred throughout the study, whether it is referred to as “a feeling of openness” or “open door policy” as expressed by participants. It is this openness which increases the comfortability level and allows for risk-taking and the building of trusting relationships based upon commonly held values and goals. Pat Nadowski (parent) commented:

I think the open door policy is the most valuable way to get these values and ideas across. The parents feel comfortable coming into the school without an invitation. . . . The same thing for the community. If a community leader is going by and he wants to come in and see what’s going on, or see if there’s a particular need that needs to be addressed, he doesn’t have to make a phone call; he doesn’t have to be invited. I think that’s very important and I think that’s the way it works. The more times you come in, the more comfortable you feel. If you have an idea for something . . . you open the door, you’re inside the school, and you’re talking to somebody, and I think that’s the key . . . . And it spreads that way person to person. They know that you’re another parent, no different than they are, waiting on the corner for your child to come out of school. And you just went in and approached your idea and went out. It’s not a big deal, but it’s open. It feels good and it feels comfortable. And the kids like to see that too.

Ann Ballardo (parent) agreed that there were many opportunities for parental involvement, but she also expressed a concern about those parents who do not become involved.

I think that there certainly have been many opportunities for parents to become involved in the day to day activities of their children. Individual teachers have opened up their classrooms to have parents come in. The principal’s little recipe box (Parent Aide in Education) . . . you know, what talents do you have, and I think that a lot of parents may say I don’t know how to do anything. Or they think it’s mostly academic in nature that they would



contribute, but it isn't and the principal made that very clear. I think the unfortunate thing is that a lot of people . . . don't come to PTO and a lot of parents don't read notices.

Ann Ballardo believed there were still some parents who "don't feel comfortable opening themselves up," despite the openness in the building.

Although shared beliefs and values were evident in this school, two of the teachers who were interviewed weren't certain if these were a result of being a community of learners. Lou Davis, a more recent staff member stated:

I think the teachers are dedicated. I've worked in many different schools and teachers are genuinely educators. They love doing what they are doing and they put forth their best, and I don't think it has to come under any umbrella in order to do that.

Mary Burns (teacher) also commented:

The other buildings that I have been in, perhaps I've been fortunate, but I did find that people that are in education, people who stayed in education that have gone through all the difficulties, {Proposition} 2 1/2 and how we are perceived in the city because teachers have not been valued I don't feel by the outside community in the last ten years the way we were when many of us began teaching in the '70s. So I feel people who have stuck with it into the '90s are there because they are very committed.

## Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:  
- empowerment of members?

In discussing empowerment, many participants referred to the principal's openness and willingness to share power. Diane Epstein (assistant principal) commented:

Well because collegiality is part of the culture, I think right from the beginning that Betty (principal) is an easy person to talk to and although we don't always agree with one another, I think she treats each day and each problem as a new problem . . . so I think that it's opened the door for people to communicate. Another thing that she feels very strongly about is hearing everybody's side of things and trying to move based on what people want to honor - - to honor people's wants as much as is possible and realistic in any school. So empowerment is part of the vision and part of the way the school has done business right from the beginning.

Mary Burns (teacher) discussed the importance of the principal's modeling empowerment through learning.

Betty has made it important for everyone in the building to be learning, including the principal. She has put a sign on her door that says, "Out Learning" (or "In Learning") . . . . She is very willing for us to try new things provided we have some feeling for it because we have taken a course or we have seen it done in another building. She is very open to our trying new programs, bringing in a student teacher, bringing in people from the university, maybe a parent who has an expertise in chemistry and helping us with the program. She is not at all afraid to take a risk if by taking a risk she may improve the quality of the instruction of the building.

In a similar way, Chris Malone (teacher) stated when asked if people felt as though they were in charge:

Yes, and I think that has come in a large extent from Betty. Whenever you talk to her and you say, "Gee, I think I'd like to try . . . or what do you think about . . . she may have some comments on how she feels you should handle something, but it's usually, "Go ahead, try it." Whenever I've asked any teacher on the staff for any sort of help or support on anything, they will always be very gracious in saying, "Oh yes, we'll try that." Everyone seems to be willing to work with another person on any kind of thing provided they have the technical background or whatnot on that sort of thing.

Empowerment has also encouraged an honest sharing of ideas. Terry Francis commented:

Well, we're not afraid to say no. We're respected for that which is something. I was very timid before. The way I was brought up, I would say yes. I might mutter. Now if I have a question about something, I'll go right to Betty. I think everybody here does. There are a few people who will . . . you get groups of women, you get backbiting here and there. I would say that 80 % of the staff feel very secure about what they're doing and if they have a question or feel uncomfortable in something they are involved in, they will speak up.

Participants expressed that empowerment brings with it responsibility.

Bill Connors (superintendent) stated:

In this system, we often have talked about participatory decision making. If you're to be part of a decision, you have to be involved in making that decision . . . . Now what we have added to that - - I also have to be accountable and responsible. I think that's the new ingredient that we see, and maybe some of that comes from an older staff. People who are more seasoned, people who are more ready to understand that it is one thing for me to say, "I played a role in making that decision, but I totally disregard it as



my day -to-day operation. I'll close my door and forget all about it." I think there is an understanding that it's not enough for me to be part of that. I now have to carry it out. That is very much part of the accelerated school {movement}. Empowerment with responsibility. I think we have seen it grow from participatory decision making

Fran Godfrey (teacher) echoed this sentiment.

I think empowerment is really a very heavy thing, but with it comes a lot of awesome responsibility at the same time. I think that because the school culture supports risk-taking, students and teachers are free to offer suggestions about topics of study; decision making here is a team sport. Ideas and proposals are suggested, investigated, and then adopted or not depending on the consensus of the group. That's not always easy either because sometimes you just want to shut your door and do what you want to do and take the ball and run with it. It really helps you when you have to explore or defend or explain a position you have to your colleagues first of all. Then maybe to the parents and maybe to the students, it's also quite beneficial to yourself. It forces you to take that empowerment and be responsible with it.

Parents' roles have also changed with the evolution of a community of learners. Fran Godfrey (teacher) commented:

I think parents are also empowered in the community of learners. With education and participation comes a desire and a need to participate in decision making. It's not always easy for the teachers to deal with. As I said before, we feel threatened sometimes, and we can become defensive. However, because of the community of learners, I don't feel it's a negative thing anymore. Parents have come into the classrooms, worked with the kids. We have gotten to know them on a personal level and it kind of breaks down those barriers. The kind of "us" against "them" type of thing.



Pat Nadowski (parent) used the PTO as an example of empowerment.

Maybe the easiest way to get into the word empowerment might be through the PTO. I think the way the school has always encouraged the PTO in anything that they've done. And encouraged the PTO to go beyond just financing isolated things. . . Looking to the PTO for people with expertise in certain areas. Going to the PTO to find out, for instance, who might be a good person to come in as an artist in residence . . . . I think the PTO is vital in that aspect because you can hit the most people at one time, and having the principal, assistant principal, and staff members at PTO meetings, I think, has broadened the circle. It has not just empowered the PTO, but empowered everybody to work together. And not just to figure out how to solve problems, but to initiate things that might be of help within the school.

Ann Ballardo (parent) viewed empowerment as the freedom to express ideas, a view held by teachers as well.

I think there's a lot of freedom to express your ideas. Whether you get turned down or they are accepted. I think the atmosphere is here to speak your mind.

Ann used the beautification of the grounds outside the front of the school as an example. When the building first reopened in 1987, the grounds had one large tree at either end of the building which were close to the sidewalk. The front of the three- storied brick building had a semicircular concrete walkway with a large grassed area in front of the walkway. Surrounding the grassed area at either end were a few overgrown, thorny bushes.

From the beginning, Ann suggested planting new bushes in front of the school, and removing the thorny bushes as well. At that point,

everyone, including the principal, was more concerned about getting the inside of the building ready for the children. Ann commented:

I remember getting with the beautification thing. It did start out as a real joke . . . . The more people you talk to and you realize that maybe it wasn't their idea, but yet they are willing to come on the bandwagon. I got a lot of negative feedback, too. A lot of people thought, "Oh, what difference does it make? A bush or two in front of the school, who cares? It's what goes on inside." I think you have to have both. We had said that if we had the children involved, which we did. It wasn't just an adult thing. Have the children involved and have the children taking care of it, that maybe they won't vandalize it.

The pride engendered in the beautification of the outside of the school does, in fact, reflect the pride within the building and the community. The process eventually involved the entire community. The principal and a few parents, including Ann, formed a beautification committee. One of the parents contacted a landscape architect who donated her time and drew up a plan. With her advice, the committee contacted a landscaper who sold the bushes at cost. A Pumpkin Fair, which involved the entire community, was held to raise the money. The city donated the soil, prepared the grounds, and planted the bushes according to the architect's plan. A ceremony was held which was attended by the mayor, those involved in the planning, school officials, teachers, parents, and children. Members of the committee spoke and the children sang and recited nature poetry.

In recalling the effort, Ann captured the spirit. She said:

I think good things take a long time. It was fun. We laughed. We were the shrubettes. All we did with the visors. We had a good time. I think laughter is one of the things the principal had said or some researcher had said. You've got to have a sense of humor. You want to take it seriously, but not so seriously that there isn't warmth or fun. School should be fun for everybody.

The beautification effort became contagious, and has been extended to both sides of the building with plans currently underway for the improvement of the schoolyard in the back of the building. These efforts have also won first and second prizes in the city's beautification competition. The prize money has contributed to continued beautification.

## Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:  
- trusting, collegial relationships?

Participants were asked what practices have most influenced collegiality (professional sharing of ideas, interactions of staff, etc.) in the school. Once again, the influence of the principal was evident in responses. Bill Connors (superintendent) stated:

The truth is there's an innate feeling within the building. If you want to, the opportunity is there. It's not like "Oh, she (principal) only looks with favor upon the stars." What you've got is the absence of the "teacher's pet, principal's pet." What you've got is: "If I want to do something and develop a program, I'm going to get supported in this building; I'm going to get encouraged; I'm going



to be given every opportunity to find time to do it and the resources to do it.” That I think says to a staff, “Go for things.”

Staff indicated the same feeling of encouragement and opportunities for professional sharing. Diane Epstein (assistant principal) commented:

I really think that collegiality got off the ground because of the newness, the fact that everybody in the school wanted to be here. When you come in on ground zero, you are building the tradition, the culture, and everybody is encouraged to input into the process. Collegiality gets off the ground in a big way.

The assistant principal proceeded to say that this was not enough, however, to sustain collegiality.

What kept it going was the openness, the feeling that you could go into the office to discuss things just off the cuff and not have either acceptance or rejection. There would be openness to the idea, support actively brought to programs right on the spot, without a whole bunch of wait . . . . Teachers who came in and said, “Gee, I saw this and such programs; I’d like to try it in my room.” Maybe three or four days later, there would be something in their box (mailbox) saying, “You know that program that you mentioned, here’s some information about it, or I’ve got some money for it, or why don’t you try it, or why don’t we sit down and talk about it.” That really fosters collegiality, the growing, the learning, all the stuff that the vision is about.

It was evident from teachers’ responses that they have been encouraged to share with one another. Mary Burns (teacher) commented:

If she (principal) knows that a teacher has taken a course in something such as cooperative learning, she will ask those teachers if they will do a workshop for the rest of the staff on a Tuesday (release afternoon). If there is a teacher that has something interesting going on in their classroom, she will ask that teacher when we have our next meeting as a staff, if we can meet in that room so that people can see what’s going on.



In this same regard, Fran Godfrey (teacher) said:

We have started a new program of having host teachers for staff meetings. We meet in different classrooms with different teachers in a neutral territory type thing. And we also get to see another classroom and see what goes on, looking around and that does a lot to help collegiality . . . . We were also encouraged to make classroom visits. It clarified for each other what we did in our rooms and it also valued each person as an individual member on the staff. No one classroom was shown up as more important - - the model.

Similarly Lou Davis (teacher) stated:

I really appreciate having other teachers share with us the new ideas and methodologies they have acquired in courses they have taken.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) felt the summer workshops have greatly influenced the growth of collegiality.

Summer workshops - - that is how we were first introduced to one another. We were paid which was very nice. They were usually off-site at a beach. So it was really nice. There we set up the short term goals, which later became in-depth studies of the school as a community of learners with {a} vision statement, goal setting, assessment of achieving goals.

Fran also commented on the influence of a social vehicle instituted by the staff.

We also have an arts and entertainment committee set up by the staff and that is to set up the "party" syndrome. But it's nice to know people better on a personal level because when you've gotten to know someone personally, it's a lot harder to get upset with someone when you like them personally. I think that always helps.

Collegiality, although worthwhile and valuable, is not easy, however.

Terry Francis (teacher) noted:

Betty encourages us to share, but most of us are like that anyway. Most teachers don't share. They guard their own turf. That's not the case in this building at all. If we have a problem with a child or a particular program, anybody will sit and listen and try to help. This is very unusual. These people chose to be here and the people who didn't, who found their way to the school, have found their way to another school. It's a very unusual staff. It's not hunky dory all the time. It never is. Too many women anyway!

Similarly, Chris Malone observed:

I think she (principal) has always encouraged it. I think some of the staff are very good about it. The kindergarten teachers get together and work beautifully, but as I say, some of them go into their classrooms and do their own thing. When something comes into the building, the offering of a course, the possibility of a workshop, Betty is very good about getting it out to everybody. Even if people don't seem to respond right away, she will go to someone she feels is interested and she will say, "If I get you a sub {substitute} would you be interested in this?" It's a mixed bag.

Pat Nadowski (parent) felt that she had gotten to know teachers through their speaking and sharing of ideas at PTO meetings. What she has witnessed is the staff's approachableness.

If there are any problems or anything you don't understand about what's going on in the classroom, they really, truly want you to ask. They want you to send in a note; they want you to come in; they want you to talk to them about it. I think because you've seen them; you've seen them talk; and you've seen their sincerity that they want the best learning environment for your child. If there is something you can add after seeing them talk at one of these meetings, you really feel they are approachable. They're not just Miss Smith; they are now a person that you have some sort of a bond with.

This, in turn, adds to the comfortability level, a recurring theme. Mrs.

Nadowski stated:

Then you feel comfortable . . . . It takes away that whole judgmental feeling. You don't feel . . . they don't feel . . . I guess it must free them, too; they don't feel like you're judging their teaching approach if you ask them a question. You don't feel that they're judging you if you ask them a question - judging the parenting style that you have or what you do once the kids go home, so it creates a bridge that is very valuable.

Ann Ballardo (parent) felt that a number of factors have influenced the development of collegiality. She said:

Well, I guess probably the Tuesday afternoons {release time}, although I think there should be less of them. I think they're well used from what I've heard. You know I think people's own self-motivation and wanting to do more and learn more and making learning more exciting. Just try something new; if it doesn't work, then you don't do it. At least you've tried it. The principal has {those who are} young in spirit. She's really lucky; for the majority of teachers, there's a real spark.

Another parent expressed similar sentiments in a thank you letter to the principal dated June 20, 1989.

I'd like to thank you for another wonderful year at the Jefferson School. My girls are receiving an excellent education in a caring, accepting, supportive environment.

There is so much going on at the school, and so many programs and opportunities, such as the play, poetry, after-school athletics. And these all seem to fit into a general plan. We appreciate these "extras" which enrich the kid's education, and which are evidence of such a devoted staff.



Thank you also for the school volunteer breakfast yesterday. We all enjoyed it and the chance to socialize with other volunteers. And the teachers can really cook! It was a beautiful "spread." What is done at the {Jefferson} School is done well and graciously, whatever it may be.

A memo to the principal from Bill Connors, who was the director of elementary education at the time (October 13, 1989) also commented on the positive school climate.

Betty, so often I visit your school and see so many good things. My most recent visit was no exception. The positive school climate so evident in your building is an example of what is termed in the contemporary literature an effective school.

I am extremely proud of you and your school and want you to know the high esteem in which I hold you.

The principal, in turn, shared this memo with staff and added the following comments.

I wanted to share this memo that I received from Bill Connors after his visit last week. This compliment belongs to you as well because of your enthusiastic efforts. It's good to know that the positive school culture we are working on together is recognized by visitors to our school.

I am proud of each of you, and am grateful for your continual, supportive efforts for Jefferson students and their parents!



## Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:  
- experimentation and risk-taking?

Participants agreed that the encouragement of experimentation and risk-taking involved several interrelated factors such as, empowerment, trust, openness, and comfortability. Bill Connors, the superintendent, when asked if the school culture at the Jefferson School had encouraged experimentation and risk-taking, responded:

I would definitely say that. I should say that I have been in a better part of the risk-taking situations. I would say that empowerment has done that. Obviously there are some examples that come to my mind right away. The effort in science, the principal's own participation in that effort to set the direction. The effort to look at gifted education to see if there is a way that we can do things that would complement what the system was doing, but also tailor it to the Jefferson School.. The number of the reaching outs to and looking for collaboration with other school systems, with other communities, the use of consultants, and looking for opportunities to develop within the staff a sense of staff development {that} is something that must be homemade. Also it can't all come from the school system. It has to be initiated from the people within. So I think at the Jefferson School, there is a real healthy understanding of that. What can I say except that it's great to watch and great to be a part of!

Pat Nadowski (parent) also commented on the relationship of empowerment and trust to risk-taking.

If you're empowered, you're not afraid to take risks; you're not afraid to ask or to initiate an idea. . . . What came to my mind initially reading that question was the beautification effort. Here's something just beyond what was going on in the school, but it definitely affected the school. There had to be a real sense of trust

when people came to the administration and said, "We're going to beautify your school." You have to trust that they are going to do things that are actually going to be beautification. Long term beautification because you couldn't just have someone go out and decide to do things that were to their own taste. You had to have something that was going to be universally accepted. So I mean in that sense it was a risk. It was a risk allowing parents to initiate the project - - to draw up the plans, to understand that they were going to be able to get the money to do the project, that they were going to be able to maintain the project . . . To beautify. I think that's the risk-taking. We wanted to go out and do something, but would we have the follow through? I think we did feel encouraged and we did feel a certain sense of trust and we kept working on all the different aspects until we had something that was accepted by everybody. Everything turned out beautiful and it's concrete. It's something that's not as abstract as some of the educational things that go on that you don't have the proof right in front, but this you do. It looks nice.

Pat Nadowski also related the widespread effect and symbolism that the beautification effort had upon the wider community.

It did reach out a little more into the community too, and it reached out because we asked for something from the community. But it reached out in another way because the community saw that we were doing something that improved the neighborhood. They were seeing something concrete about the Jefferson School that they could see without going inside. And I think that it shows the commitment by the people inside, but it shows how it does reach outside the school, outside the circle of parents, and now it's reaching into the neighborhood and then into the further communities. I think it is symbolic of everything that does go on.

The openness of the administrators and staff has also been significant to experimentation and risk-taking. Diane Epstein (assistant principal) stated:

I do think that Betty is open to new ideas and new approaches to things. You know you can talk to any six teachers and get six different opinions. A lot of teachers feel if you don't take their opinions, you're not open, but she has really listened to lots of different kinds of suggestions and approaches, curriculum changes, just different kinds of experimental approaches to things. As long as people are not only willing to do the work, but there seems to be a consensus, one that involves a team or whatever, she has not only agreed to it, but she has encouraged it. She has backed it up with in-service kinds of programs, financial support, provided materials, done some ground work for teachers who do not have time to check out things and come back to them. So this is very encouraging. It is not just to say, "Yes, you have a nice idea; why don't you work on it?" But it is an active part of the process so I think that has really encouraged experimentation.

The assistant principal commented on the importance of people feeling comfortable before they could be risk-takers.

Risk-taking comes when you're comfortable and you try things and you're not put down or stopped in your tracks but rather encouraged, supported. It is discussed at that point and you look at it and sometimes you can go further, so the next time you have an idea or something you would like to try, obviously you're more open to taking a chance, taking a risk so to speak because you feel it's a very positive experience to do so.

Mary Burns (teacher) commented on the principal's openness to change her own perspective regarding a reading program.

Betty has allowed us to do a lot of work with the linguistic approach to reading even though her own gut feeling was for us to continue with the reading program that she liked. But once we explained to her the way in which we were going to use the basal



reader versus just what the publisher said. And I do think that was risky for Betty because she really liked the publishing company, and she really liked the way they handled teaching reading. So for us to say, "We think we can do it a little better as teachers." It was difficult for her to let go, but she did.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) also revealed the value attached to change as staff and administrators worked together.

I think it is a unique school, again, that it was opened for us. The books were ordered so we all felt there was kind of a set curriculum and we were so well stocked that we really felt responsible to carry it through. For six years though, we have been allowed to adapt to change and involve the curriculum that the kids and the teachers have developed. There was always money (where there's a will, there's a way type of thing) for new materials and for staff development at the teachers' request. New ideas, speakers, programs were invited in, and it was left to the teachers to try or not to try in their classrooms. I don't really feel that anything was forced down our throats. If we wanted to try a new program or new things, I never felt they were ever scrutinized.

It was evident from participants' responses that risk-taking came in stages. Terry Francis (teacher) revealed her progression as a risk-taker as her comfortability level increased.

I was pretty much forced to adapt to this program. I wasn't intimidated by parents, but I would never have invited them into my classes and be part of the group for the day. In the beginning, I worked fifty or sixty hour weeks. I would get here at 7:00 a.m. and leave at 5:00 p.m. and make materials. But as I saw this program come together, then I realized I was doing things with first graders that I had never done before! Then I started to openly solicit the parents - - "Please come in and be part and watch and please spend at least 2 1/2 hours with me and be part of the class. The kids will train you and I will train you." It just blossomed. The second year I must have had forty people, and it's been like that ever since. I was never a risk-taker before. I would just never feel



comfortable. I just got to the point, I think it was maybe the second or third year, where if a visitor was in the building, Betty would push them by {my} room quickly because it was like a hook. "Come with me; I will show you what I'm doing," that sort of thing. It was great for the kids because I would tell them right from the beginning, "We are equal; I know this but you are also going to teach me a lot more about what I thought I knew, but not maybe as well." That has gone through the class, year after year. So the kids have become risk-takers.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) also commented on the children's becoming risk-takers as well.

The culture dictates that all kids can be enriched and therefore I think the staff has done a lot to teach the kids how to be risk-takers. We do a lot of problem solving; we do a lot of hands-on science and math. There's a lot of "learning to learn" done in the building; there's a lot of metacurriculum being done by teachers in the classrooms. I think we do a lot to celebrate successes and {deal with} failures. I know there's an Invention Convention in the school where kids actually do invent things. They write their journals and not all of them are successful {in their execution}, but everybody is celebrated that day at the Invention Convention.

Fran Godfrey also related the importance the school culture attaches to the application of learning to every day life.

One thing that is really important that we try to do is to apply the learning to every day life. I think for kids it lets them see that it can be risky, that every day life is risky, that problem solving isn't always easy for adults either. If you're studying trees, you talk about the rain forest and the problems there. They learn that things are risky and complex and that adults don't have the answers either. So they should never feel bad when they don't come up with the right answers themselves.

Ann Ballardo's (parent) comments reiterated the importance of openness to experimentation and risk-taking.

I think by opening the doors and saying to come into your child's classroom and help out. I think the programs and opportunities are there to take advantage of. It's just the matter of the want . . . . I think you've got, just judging from my perspective, a very open faculty who are really willing to try and really get excited about trying new things and taking courses in the summer and going above and beyond.

Two of the teachers offered a somewhat different perspective regarding experimentation and risk-taking. The comments of Chris Malone (teacher) revealed the reflection given by staff before deciding to do something, which is not necessarily incompatible with risk-taking.

I'm not sure you would call it risk-taking. I think this is generally a very conservative staff. I think they don't try things that are new and different unless there is some background in it, unless somebody knows something about it . . . . I think people aren't afraid to try things that they have heard other people have tried and worked successfully. But I'm not sure they are a real risk-taking staff.

Lou Davis (teacher) commented on the influence of legislators and administrators in the process of experimentation and risk-taking.

I feel the teachers have been given the green light to some degree to try new approaches to teaching. Where risk-taking is such a new concept, I feel it would take a while to move forward. The educational process sometimes moves in strange ways. When you have legislators at the state level, who know so little about education, making laws that demand certain performance levels, {it} could be risky for teachers to try something really different.

Administration sometimes feels the pressure from parents when changes are made, and they pass the possible concerns to the

teachers. {This} means the teachers could hesitate before trying something dramatically different.

## Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:  
- respect for diversity?

Participants agreed on the school culture's honoring of diversity. In commenting on the diversity of the school population, Bill Connors (superintendent) said that the attitude at the Jefferson School was one of:

Let's find out the values of {children's} culture; let's find out the values of their home life; let's celebrate that in our school; let's bring that into focus. That's what I see going on in the Jefferson School today. That's where I see that diversity - - that how do you celebrate the diversity of the children, the staff and there are staff from all different walks of life, from different persuasions, from different backgrounds and so forth. It gets to be celebrated in a school, appreciated and respected again.

The assistant principal, Diane Epstein, cited the relationship of openness and empowerment to a respect for diversity.

When you have a culture that's open and open to people's different opinions and moves by really teacher empowerment, that has to show respect for diversity. You're allowing for diverse opinions, diverse views, and diverse ways of doing things, so it definitely supports that and respects it.

Both teachers and parents commented on the school's not only accepting differences, but celebrating these differences as well. Mary



Burns (teacher) stated:

Once again we have been encouraged {by having} children from different backgrounds, whether it's by bringing in different foods or explaining their country that they are from. We have had children from Saudi Arabia, Lithuania, many countries besides our Asian population. And they are always encouraged to participate and to share.

Chris Malone (teacher) reiterated:

We have a lot of very different kinds of teachers and we have a lot of different students. And I don't think that anyone here feels the least bit alienated because of it. I think they are real good about accepting the differences in people.

According to Fran Godfrey (teacher):

The most important thing and speaking to diversity, I feel that each member of the community is treated as an individual. Also we hopefully provide care and nurturing in an environment that's safe. We discuss cultural, economic, and family similarities and differences.

Pat Nadowski (parent) commented on the children's acceptance of one another.

There isn't a sense, particularly among the young children, that anyone is any different or any culture is superior to another and I think that's remarkable. I can remember Sally came home from kindergarten and one of her friends, I can't remember, I think she was Asian, and I knew from the name. I asked her {to} describe her to me. She said, "Well, she's little and she has black hair," but nothing else. Anything else wasn't important. She was little; she was tiny, because Sally was always on the large size of her class. That's what she noticed and that's what made the difference.



Ann Ballardo (parent) commented on the need for the city to continue to grow in its acceptance of different minority populations.

We are a diverse {population}, especially in this city. I think it used to be a negative connotation, and I think it's going to take awhile to turn that around. I know acquaintances of ours who moved to Weston because they didn't like folks coming into Hopedale. That's one of the reasons I'm staying because both kids, their best friends are Chinese. I just think that's a whole other world. It's so important.

Different programs which are initiated by staff and encouraged by the principal also effect this respect for diversity. Terry Francis (teacher) observed:

There are a lot of different programs going on in the school due to the initiative of the teachers who wanted to become involved. One {teacher} is in her master's program and she has been bringing back a lot of materials from Lesley and she has gotten us all involved in what she's doing. It's encouraged by Betty, and as I said, maybe it's the mix of people we have, but they are really not afraid to take a step which is so different from my other school.

Pat Nadowski (parent) commented on the positive effect of the school's multicultural programs.

When I was thinking about this, I thought mostly about all the wonderful multicultural things that go on in the school. There is never a holiday that goes by that isn't explored in a multicultural way. I've thought often when I come into the school, it's the smells of the school. I mean there will be a day when they're having an international cooking day and you'll smell Chinese food, or you'll smell food from the Colonial times. I think there's a tremendous respect for the diversity of the staff and the children and the community as a whole. Coming into the school, you only have to look around and listen and even smell to realize that this is all being respected. And I think things like the Holiday Concert and the Spring Concert - - they're always reflective of all the different

people and backgrounds of people, types of people that make up the school.

Pat also made reference to the installation of a wheel chair ramp at the entrance to the school's auditorium. This was part of the school's beautification (improvement) efforts.

Even things like the wheel chair ramp are part {of respecting diversity}. I mean it's a different type of diversity having handicapped people involved with the school, involved as community members trying to come and vote in the school. That was one of the things the people really wanted to have was that handicapped access, so people with disabilities could come to functions and could come to vote in the school. So I think there is a very strong sensitivity to the diverse population that makes up the Jefferson School.

Ann Ballardo (parent) stated:

The programs that have been put on here, the Chinese dancers, all the different programs the principal has brought into the school from grants or whatever. {These} are very important to make them, let's say the Chinese people, feel welcome and also to educate our own kids. There are different ways of celebrating and they can all be part of that because what it does too is the children don't just celebrate one particular holiday. . . . I know when I went in Joe's and Andrew's class to do Hanukkah . . . they were very proud that their mother came in and I felt good. I had fun.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) commented on the school's pursuit of a deep understanding of cultural differences .

We have celebrations of people's different ethnicities but we realize that's only the tip of the iceberg. I think our school is committed to {a} deep understanding of the cultural diversities within our community and that we need to explore not only the holidays and food, but also the cultures, the languages, the values that motivate different cultures. . . . There are evidences in the

celebrations that we do with the kids, reading materials, there are a lot of multicultural books that are assigned and done in classes, problem solving - - teaching minorities how to problem solve for themselves, empower themselves as a minority, social action which we also do in cooperative learning. We do a lot of that in school and I think that all helps to create an atmosphere that accepts the diversity and acknowledges and celebrates {it}.

Ann Ballardo (parent) referred to the PTO's acceptance of diversity. She believed this also increased people's comfortability levels.

The PTO, the group of people in charge, have always made other people feel extremely welcome. It's not like they are the high and mighty, and that kind of thing. I think they would rather sit in the audience and not up at the table. There's no like "I'm the boss" from the principal on down. I'm made to feel very comfortable and I've heard other people are too. If you're not made to feel comfortable, maybe it's your own thing you're going through. I think the opportunities are here to become involved. It's how do you choose or how do you get parents to become involved.

## Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:  
- balance between individual and collaborative efforts?

It was evident from participants' responses that both individual and cooperative efforts are valued at the Jefferson School. The Superintendent, Bill Connors, expressed the promotion of this balance through everyone's efforts to equalize opportunities for all students.

I think what I see at the Jefferson School is a concern for students in particular. The Jefferson School has manifested a real concern for the gifted child. How are we going to better reach; how are we



going to deliver services to the gifted child; how are we going to extend and how are we going to challenge and motivate and reach beyond. Yet at the same point in time, they haven't closed their eyes to cooperative learning. They haven't closed their eyes to the needs of the special needs youngster or the bilingual youngster. All of that says to me they're looking to appreciate equalizing opportunity for all children. Specifically, I can quote things that I see when I see a group of youngsters in the fifth grade who are part of a drama production and I know that they have all been given an opportunity to {take} part. It's the entire grade that's represented and not just certain youngsters . . . . You see things coming out of the art and music area that are so respected. The number of kids involved in instrumental music and participating in our strong elementary school all-city band and things of that type. You begin to see specifics of how that's happening in the school.

Once again participants indicated the importance of openness in balancing individual and collaborative efforts. They also commented on the principal's support of their efforts. Diane Epstein (assistant principal) stated:

When an individual is open, {then others} feel free to take a risk without a lot of prejudging or a lot of negative response. They feel that they can speak and they can make suggestions and that there is really an open ear. I think then the amount of effort from individuals is going to be greater. And when individuals work with each other, they feel they're respected and supported both educationally and financially as well as emotionally. The kind of support a principal would give, positive support, I think really encourages collaborative projects. The drama program started off with two teachers and two fifth grade classes and it's up to seven teachers and ninety kids. Collaboration certainly has been encouraged in that program and that's not the only one. We had Open Court {reading program} go into three classrooms and it ended up at several levels. There were good things and bad things {about the program} and people accepted and rejected things. The program is still in the school six years later, and it's



more than three people doing it. That shows that collaboration is alive and well at the Jefferson School.

Each year the team of teachers involved in the fifth grade play have received letters of commendation. The following excerpt is taken from the curriculum coordinator's letter dated April 19, 1989.

The fine work that you collaborated on as a team provided the Jefferson School youngsters with an experience in cooperation that they will not soon forget. The music, songs, dances, and acting were truly student centered and reflective of the type of performance that children of elementary age should experience. I left the auditorium humming several of the tunes.

I think what pleased me most about the performance was that the children did not seem under pressure; they truly enjoyed the evening and taking part in the play.

Mary Burns (teacher) also commented:

I would say that individuals are encouraged to do something even if it's different from what the other grade members are doing. Betty (principal) will support them.

She also discussed some difficulties experienced in this area. Openness has been essential to the process.

I think it's often easier for people to work sometimes individually because you don't always find someone else who necessarily shares the same feelings that you do whether it's about geography or how you're approaching math. But we have been open about it in the building so very often we do find people that we can share with even if not at our grade level at different grade levels.

Chris Malone (teacher) saw staff as more individualistic than collaborative.

There's a certain amount of teaming that goes on. But generally, you know that I'm not here all the time, so I may not see it the same way. But I think that most teachers kind of do their own thing. If it's a collaborative effort, perhaps it's more with me because I'm the media person and they may need materials. They may need support in the way of equipment; they may need help in running a computer program, but I think it's more that kind of relationship. They may all be working on common curriculum programs but they all seem to work on their own.

Although the culture valued collaboration, Chris Malone felt it was not viewed as more important than individual efforts.

I think collaboration is encouraged, but it's not encouraged over individual efforts. I think it's kind of left to do it in your own style, in your own way however you feel more comfortable. There are some things that are done collaboratively. For instance there is a fifth grade play that all the fourth and fifth grade teachers work on and they work beautifully together; that's not a problem. One is a director; one takes care of the scenery; one takes care of the choreography. That all gels very well yet they seem to work better individually. But there is some teaming too; the fifth grade moves from teacher to teacher and the fourth grade does some of that.

Chris Malone also referred to the staff's ability to put together schoolwide assemblies and programs.

They do it beautifully at very short notice sometimes I found. All of a sudden somebody realizes it's Flag Day in two days and then I get the calls for "Have you got a poem that's really short {that} the kindergartners can do?" And they do; they pull it together beautifully. They can function as a team.

Although much time and effort has been given to developing a balance between individual and collaborative efforts, there is still difficulty in living out this concept. Fran Godfrey (teacher) indicated:

Although we view ourselves as a community of learners, intuitively we know success of the community depends on the participation of each individual member. It's very easy to deal with when everybody supports your ideas and your proposals, but it isn't always easy when someone in your group disagrees. The old feelings of "trying to build a better mousetrap" resurface sometimes. However, now I think it's easier to deal with. When you can take the time out to reflect on: does the item of controversy truly speak to the vision and the goals; and through previous dialogue sessions, what's the history of the motivation behind the dissent? There is something that makes you stop. It doesn't become a totally personal confrontation. You sit back and you say, "Now who's going to benefit from this?"

Terry Francis (teacher) also commented:

I can think of only one case in this building, and the person is a fabulous teacher but if someone does something, that person has to do the same thing plus. But that's the only exception I think. People are asking to spend time in other teachers' classes. That's encouraged by Betty (principal) and a lot of teachers have taken advantage of that.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) spoke about the importance of time in the process of working together. She also cited the necessity of leadership's participation as well.

Collaboration needs time to be effective, but I feel that Betty has always encouraged us to seek advice from one another. {She} encourages class visits - - time if you wanted to see somebody {work on} cooperative learning or shared reading or whatever. That there was always time for the aide to come up and take your class while you went and watched. Leadership must also be



willing to hear and learn and participate as well. To be a member of the collaborative board and not always the leader.

Lou Davis (teacher) referred to the reluctance of some teachers to accept others' suggestions and/or to offer their own.

I feel that several teachers have really made efforts to inform other teachers and share in courses they have taken and share their ideas. . . . Sometimes I feel there is some hesitation of other teachers to accept what those teachers are saying, and there may be some hesitation in trying some of the things they have been successful at. But overall I would say that the school culture does promote teachers both doing their own thing and collaborative efforts.

Lou felt that this reluctance to share was not a positive direction and reflected on a possible reason for this reluctance.

I think it would be more beneficial if more people were willing to share and maybe they are just too hesitant to think about what they have to offer is of great value.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) believed that a common vision, beliefs and values helped to provide a balance between individual and collaborative efforts.

It's nice to have that vision to balance your suggestions by. It's good to help keep the programs and issues on track with the beliefs and values. It also keeps away the danger of having an eclectic collection of programs and activities {with} no learning theory embedded behind them so it keeps the school on track that way. I think that's good because individually you can kind of do what you want, but you also have the big picture that you have to answer to. You helped develop that big picture so you have a stake in that, too, in terms that you believe in that and you have to support it.



Pat Nadowski (parent) gave the example of the PTO's participation in kindergarten orientation as an illustration of individual and collaborative efforts.

Individually I was thinking, parents and children, and collaborative would be kind of forming a union between parents, the children, the teachers and the staff. One of the things I saw as a promotion of this {was} how we worked together to get everyone understanding the same things at kindergarten orientation, which is a unique day and experience. The PTO set up a booth to welcome the parents and to let them know we needed their involvement. We had balloons so that the children would feel that they were being welcomed into their new school. The kindergarten teachers had a day of activities for the kids so they could get used to the procedures and then the principal went down and spoke about the whole school. She spoke to the parents about the need for parental involvement; to the kids about what a good time they were going to have and how they were going to learn and how excited they would be.

It was a good reflection of how everything was working together . On that particular day we had parents working with the staff and the children themselves to make that first experience when they come inside the door a positive one.

Ann Ballardo (parent) stressed the school's outreach to the community as particularly important in supporting individual and collaborative efforts.

Well, I think the principal's idea of the recipe box {parent aide in education} brings in individual parent talents. I think the plays - - the fourth and fifth grade plays, the puppet shows done by the first and second grades. The outreach is there. Everyone has extended themselves here to ask for help. I think if teachers and the principal say, "We do need help, we can't do it alone." That's another positive step, which maybe was a negative, but it's turned into a positive. Being willing to say as a person, "I need your help" or "I can't do it alone" and the parents can make a contribution. I think they want to and I think they're really proud and feel good

about helping. I think the breakfast - - the parent appreciation- - is wonderful and it's grown. It works both ways. We do it for the teachers and it's really nice.

## Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:  
- personal and professional growth of members?

Participants believed that the school culture supported both personal and professional growth. Although levels of participation varied according to individual's choices, the influence of the principal and other staff members was evident throughout the responses. Bill Connors (superintendent) commented:

I don't think there is a staff member at the Jefferson School that would hesitate approaching the principal and saying, "There is this particular conference I would like to attend." We all know we don't have a budget for conferences but somehow or other we are going to find a way of supporting that teacher. Or that "I want to be a part of a staff development workshop that's going on." More importantly the people within the Jefferson family who are now taking leadership positions in staff development. . . . It has to be that there is something there that allows me, that encourages me, that says this is something for you to do. This is something that is appropriate in your growth and development.

The superintendent also cited the efforts of both individuals and teams of people who are providing leadership both in the school and system.

I know the degree of ownership in the primary grades, the vested interest of ownership in the curriculum. Challenge them for a minute and you are in big trouble. I saw Mary Boyle {from

Jefferson} yesterday at Math Their Way workshop playing a very active role in that. The staff is involved in systemwide kinds of things not only as participants but as leaders. There is recognized leadership coming out of the Jefferson School in the curriculum. Also as in other issues I think of Bob Morley's intergenerational program at the Jefferson School that has grown through the kids going to the nursing home. Wonderful helping out! I just think Bob . . . where he is in his career to have taken all that on and made such a wonderful program of it in the last two years. An outstanding example of an intergenerational program!

The superintendent remarked on the staff's support of one another.

The cooperation that I see the teachers giving one another. You're going in for something and maybe the focus is going to be on you and the limelight is going to be on you, but there's usually two or three other Jefferson teachers that are right there supporting that person, very happy that teacher is getting recognition. Not in any way feeling, "There goes the Prima Donna again stealing the show." You don't sense that from the staff.

According to Diane Epstein (assistant principal), the personal and professional growth of members is essential for collaboration .

The school culture and the goals of our school really encourage people to be learners because that is what this school is all about. That's what Betty's vision is all about. {Staff} are encouraged to take courses; courses are brought in; materials are brought in. People are encouraged to do in-service programs out of the city, in the city, so I mean all that kind of sharing and encouraging the diversity of people's own individual ideas is actively supported. Really that's been in the professional growth and that's where it comes. That's the backup for the collaboration. I really think that that's been done.

Chris Malone (teacher), however, felt that staff's participation in courses varied from person to person.



This group segments I should say. {Some} are very conscious of going back for courses; other people don't do it at all. I think that may be partially to do with the political climate in Hopedale. I think the lack of funding and the lack of support from the city has had more to do with people being discouraged with doing any more or going any further. There are some people who are constantly taking courses and others as I look back on it, they don't but they have done some in-service things. They have gone on a Tuesday afternoon to some kind of an explanation in some other building of some program that's going on. So it varies from person.

Mary Burns (teacher) commented on the principal's supportive efforts.

If Betty sees something in the mail . . . for example if she knows a person is interested in science, she will put in your mailbox a posting about a course offering that's maybe given on a weekend. If it's something that's being given during the week and she can get you a day off for professional growth, she will do that. . . .She is very supportive. She wants the teachers to pursue more educational experiences and then come back to the building and share what they have found out, even if it isn't something that everyone is interested in. Sometimes there are components of what you've learned that other people are interested in finding out more about.

Likewise Lou Davis (teacher) stated:

The school principal has encouraged teachers to take courses and participate in in-service programs. The school actively searches out monies, such as the Eisenhower Fund and local grant money that can be used to provide enrichment programs for the teachers.

In this same regard, Fran Godfrey (teacher) responded:

The administration recognized that staff development is the key to improving the caliber of the community itself. You can put the right materials in the wrong person's hands; it's still ineffective. So I think any direction that the staff looked at was encouraged and then that staff person was encouraged to come back and



disseminate the information to the rest of the building. We could all learn from that person's experiences. A feeling of respect for members as professionals, I feel we have that also. It encourages visitations on site, off site. Courses, workshops, and people coming into the building have always been encouraged by the administration.

Terry Francis (teacher) commented on the professional opportunity she and a colleague experienced in relation to their reading program.

It got to the point with the reading program that the Open Court company sent their representative to monitor us as we grew with this. They offered two of us full time jobs which we didn't want. But we thought we would be interested in training people within the Northeast. My friend, Mrs. Boyle, and I did it. We were the only team teaching group they ever had, but it was so much work. I would rather do my own thing in my own room. We're encouraged to really do what we want. If I found something in any area and I said to Betty, "Well gee I'd like to try it, I know she would say, "Fine." She also would try to find some money for it if she could.

It was also evident that the principal is an active participant in the learning process. Fran Godfrey (teacher) observed:

I think one thing that's fairly evident in this building is that when the principal goes to a workshop, she is there as an active participant and not a go and show. I find that really offensive as a teacher and as someone who is sitting on a task force or a committee. Nothing is more infuriating than to see a principal breeze in, stay ten minutes and then breeze out. But I must say I don't see anything like that happening in this building. The administrator is an active participant in any course or task force that she is a member of.

Fran Godfrey also commented on the principal's understanding regarding staff's personal lives.

I also think that Betty is very supportive of our personal lives. We have families, we have children and we are caretakers for older

parents also. She has always been supportive of anything personal that has come up and we always feel that we can go and talk to Betty about problems.

Parents also felt that they had received opportunities for their professional growth as well. Pat Nadowski stated:

I consider parenting a profession. A lot of people don't see it that way but I consider it definitely a profession. I think the things that were supportive were the speakers that we've had that would come in and talk on topics the parents would be interested in. I think the specialists {from school} that came in and spoke on things, different types of learning to be aware of. Eileen Kyle (occupational therapist) ...was exceptional. . . . She was so interesting because she highlighted things that your children were doing as infants and toddlers that were reflected in what they were now doing and their approach to learning in the kindergarten and the first and second grade. That enhanced my growth as a parent, even though my children are a little bit older. It kind of put things back in perspective.

Ann Ballardo (parent) responded that she had grown in the following way:

I think having programs here. I know a lot of teachers take courses through the summer, on vacations, on weekends. That says to us as parents, "Gee if they're willing to give up weekends and summers, we should get off our duff and do something for them kind of thing. They have families, too." So I think it's been offered.

In addition, parents felt that notices from the principal, such as the monthly calendar, contributed to parents' personal and professional growth. Pat Nadowski stated:

I think also in a lot of the notices that we got home there would be excerpts from journals and stuff that the principal had read. I found those very supportive too. Different things. Parents don't necessarily have access to educational journals and would mostly

rely on things like from "Parents Magazine," "Ladies Home Journal," those kind of magazines, and they're not the same types of articles and they're not generally geared right to education . . . so including those notices that were pertinent to the children's day, you would definitely turn them over and read them. I think it was very supportive. It kind of broadens your educational background.

The following excerpt from the June 1991 calendar which was sent home to parents provides an example of the principal's sharing to which Pat Nadowski referred.

I would like to share with you something which I read recently. To me it portrays the delicate balance which is so necessary in the teaching/learning process. Mary R. Jalongo wrote:

If we look into the classrooms where children are learning well, we see how teachers address and balance children's needs. Good teachers do not resort to a grim "You'll thank me someday" mentality; they make learning important here and now. Good teachers do not follow outmoded stereotypes about teacher behavior; they teach as they would want their own children to be taught. One of the hallmarks of high-quality education is that teachers believe that they can do something for every child. As a result, the learners are given a sense of their own powers - the power to think, to express ideas in many forms, to accept rather than resist growth. In America's finest classrooms, there is structure and routine, but there is also freedom. Teachers have the autonomy to teach in ways that meet children's needs, while children learn to make responsible choices about their own learning (Jalongo, 1991, p.33).

As I visit the classrooms, I see teachers and children actively engaged in learning experiences which are exciting, challenging and rewarding. I thank the teachers for making "learning important here and now." I commend the students for making "responsible choices about their learning." Finally to you the parents/guardians, I extend my appreciation and that of the



Jefferson staff for your continued support of our efforts in working to develop a community of learners!

### Research Question #3

What leadership practices have been supportive to the development of a community of learners?

Participants' responses to the principal's leadership practices revealed the interrelationship of vision, culture, and change. In fact, the interrelated factors of leadership, vision, culture, and change were cited previously as being necessary to the development of a community of learners.

When participants were asked if the principal had shared a vision, the answers were consistently positive. Bill Connors (superintendent) stated:

It has been part and parcel of Betty as a principal. To make sure that she has shared a vision, that she's shared it with her parent community; she's shared it with her staff; she's shared it here through the central office, and certainly with the youngsters, with the children themselves, most importantly with the children.

The principal has also shared her views with principal colleagues according to Bill Connors.

At our principals' meetings, Betty was always there. Never just sitting and not participating. She is a very active participant. People begin to know what Betty believes in from the way, as we get into different topics, she's not going to sit there without wanting to share with her colleagues what she believes in, and it's not how big the pizza slice should be in the lunchroom. It's in the real areas that we should be concerned about as educators. How do



children come to know? How do we deliver services to the youngsters? What are the values we should be bringing into the lives of children? There is never a time when she is going to be silent about these things because that's the time when she has it to shine.

According to staff, summer workshops and Tuesday afternoon release time have provided opportunities for the principal to share her vision. At the initial summer workshop of 1987, the principal stated:

The vision which I have for the Jefferson School is one which I hope you will share with me. I want the Jefferson School to be known for promoting learning for everyone: students, staff, and community - - a community of learners. My goal is the development of a cohesive group working toward establishing a school culture which will promote each learner's potential.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) recapped her initial response to the first summer workshop.

As a result of the Commonwealth Leadership Institute two articles were sent to us before the school was opened. One was on the community of learners and the other was on school culture. These were new terms to us six years ago. Only now do I understand the full implications of these concepts. We knew that Betty had a vision for the school. We had a lot of summer meetings; we had a lot of discussion about the concepts. When I started back to school in September, I was caught up in adjusting to my situation. I was very apprehensive of coming to the school; the school was a culture shock for me. I had been in a city type environment with no parental involvement at all. They wouldn't even give you a phone number to contact them. It was very high pressure. It was the community itself that opened the building so it was a high pressure school. Therefore, I was a little apprehensive.

Fran proceeded to describe the evolutionary process and the principal's influence which allowed for the developing of the concept of a community of learners.

But the idea of a community of learners was always stored in the back of my mind. We were always getting articles in our boxes from Betty. Gradually we became conscious of the empowerment and the idea that we were a member of the team. We had more dialogue; we developed our working definition of the community of learners. . . . I have since come to appreciate the values of the concept of a community of learners for myself and my students. I think it's successful because the principal acts like a leader and not a boss. Recognizing that the success of this concept of the community of learners had to come from the staff itself. It couldn't come from above. She shared her vision with us. It was almost like an introduction and then she gave us the ball and we were able to take it and run with it. We developed our own vision, our own goals, and yet she had the foresight to let us decide how we wanted to develop those in the classroom acting as a facilitator and learner herself.

Terry Francis (teacher) remarked on the relationship between the concept of a community of learners to the principal's personal and professional beliefs.

I had never heard of a community of learners before. It's part of Betty's doctoral program but it's also part of her belief system. She really believes that. I think Betty was always like that anyway. It's a community. There are a lot of us. It's like one big animal with a lot of arms and legs, a very good brain, going in all kinds of directions. Sometimes there are so many things we want to get involved in, there just isn't enough time.

Fran Godfrey's observations encapsulated the interrelated factors of leadership, vision, culture, and change.

I think that the culture was originally set up by Betty in that she encouraged a lot of dialogue between the staff and she had the

patience to let us work through some of the differences ourselves, which I think was important. Through our differences we had to learn to respect each other's opinions and realize that we were coming from different settings in different situations. I think Betty also allowed time to get together to discuss some of these issues and money. She called us and we got paid for some of these workshops which was nice. Looking back at it retrospectively, I didn't understand what was going on then and there. But now we have these summer workshops to set up short term goals and by discussing these little things that we could accomplish together within the nine months of school, we also learned how to dialogue, how to discuss, how to interact with each other. These became the focal point for developing our vision and our goals as a community of learners later on down the road. It helped us do that. I think that was important; that was one way it was achieved.

In the same regard the assistant principal said:

Just about every year, we have had a summer work session before school starts to share goals. Kind of review what we have done, where we have been. Kind of look ahead to where we would like to go, and the adjustments we would like to make. Learning from the mistakes and then evaluating and adjusting.

The summer workshops have provided an opportunity for the principal and staff to plan ways to make operative the vision of a community of learners. The principal believed that it was important for staff to be paid for participating in these workshop sessions as a tangible sign of recognition of their time and efforts. It was also important to hold them at the end of the summer when everyone was relaxed and refreshed. The principal sent a letter each August to staff regarding the workshop. The following excerpt is from a communication dated August 16, 1988.



Enclosed is a copy of the original workshop proposal. I think the four objectives can provide the format for our agenda. I am also enclosing excerpts from two articles which should be helpful in providing a focus for developing our second year priorities. Feel free to bring anything which you think is applicable, too. The most important aspect of the workshop is the opportunity to share ideas and plan together in order to develop Jefferson's primary goal: to encourage learning for everyone in a caring, collegial environment.

While participation was optional, most staff members chose to participate. Results of the workshop were shared and discussed with everyone at the beginning of the school year. Goals for the coming year were readjusted in light of everyone's input. The following excerpt dated October 12, 1990 from the principal to staff indicates one way that summer workshop reports were shared.

Attached is a copy of the Summer Workshop Report. Please read and feel free to send me comments or suggestions. I would appreciate having at least two volunteers for the enrichment committee, one from primary level and one from intermediate. If you are interested, please let me know. It would probably entail meeting once a month for planning purposes.

In addition, if you have any ideas for an object (e.g. rocket, sneaker) that could be used to display books children have read, please send an illustration to the office. See report for further information.

We will be referring to this report during the year as we meet. Thanks for your attention and response.



Parents also provided examples of the principal's sharing her vision with them. Pat Nadowski stated:

I think it's very clear that the principal takes every opportunity possible to share her vision for the Jefferson School children starting with the first time the parents meet her which might be at the first PTO meeting. The first time they meet her on paper is when she sends home the first notice and there's always an introductory paragraph about what she considers the Jefferson School and how valuable she considers parents. It's always the first thing out {saying} that she considers the parents and teachers valuable, but it all has to work together - - the parents, the teachers, and the children - - to have a successful education. That's repeated almost every time we get together.

The following letter illustrates how the principal communicates in writing to parents. It was taken from a booklet which is provided each year to parents who are new to the school.

Welcome to our community of learners at the Jefferson School! Our community of learners, comprised of adults and children alike, is bonded by shared beliefs and values regarding learning. Learning enables us to gain meaning not only from information and experience, but also enhances our capacity to act and keep on learning. At Jefferson, we strive to provide positive learning experiences which will contribute to everyone's continued growth in a caring, collegial environment.

Since we believe that everyone has a unique contribution to make, we encourage your participation in the learning process. You will have many, varied opportunities to become involved with our community of learners. We hope you will be able to take advantage of some of these opportunities.

The staff and I look forward to working cooperatively with you to enlist your help in extending these experiences to your home and the wider community as well. It is a great challenge to provide conditions which encourage sustained, lifelong, cooperative

learning. We appreciate and depend upon your positive response to this challenge!

Ann Ballardo (parent) remarked on the various ways the principal has communicated her vision.

Well, I would say certainly verbally. She has T-shirts, posters, and placards she carries around. Certainly in her monthly epistles and the way she treats people and the way the school is run. . . It's not just the principal at the helm and the teachers are under her. She does reiterate the vision, but it's a nice reiteration. I think the more she says it, the more we see it, which we do. It's not just a lot of verbiage; it's a reality. I think there's still a ways to go as with anything. Certainly it was a big job to open up this school and bring so many teachers with so many different styles and the principal's agenda and the parents' agenda. I think we all have to be good listeners, too, and be accepting.

Pat Nadowski commented on the influence of the school's Open House as a vehicle for sharing the vision of a community of learners.

Actually the whole idea of having Open House, a purely Open House where the parents can kind of be the learners and the children show them around. This is now their world. They'll show you what they do and how their classroom works. . . . That's the concrete, even beyond the things that you take in through the written word and the things that you hear. . . and it's a very enjoyable night and the numbers reflect that.

When participants were asked whether their ideas had been enlisted in the development of the vision, their answers revealed various levels of involvement. The superintendent was asked to comment on how the

Jefferson School's vision of a community of learners related to his vision for the school system. He stated:

When I was appointed acting superintendent a year ago February, One of the first things that I did at the first School Committee meeting was to present a vision statement to the School Committee. {I communicated that} my vision for the school system is that we will become a community of learners and that vision got repeated many times in the newspaper. I've been amazed at how many people have utilized that in dealing with their own staff or in talking with parents. . . . I think there are times when you need to put down on paper, and then spend time in missionary fashion trying to preach that doctrine. So that enough people hear you. So that the dialogue that you do get into has some relevancy because it's what you want people to start talking about.

Diane Epstein (assistant principal) responded:

Right from the beginning Betty and I were collegial in every sense of the word, not only socially collegial but professionally collegial and collaborative. . . by respecting each other's ideas, by making comments and adjustments. . . . I think that's what made me feel so valued in the Jefferson School. When I said something, after awhile she would not only hear what I say, but sometimes adapt things based on what I say, which is very flattering and also professionally it's very pleasant.

Terry Francis (teacher) replied:

Absolutely. We have the ability to critique anything that we don't like. If we have an idea, no one is so shy that they wouldn't speak out at a meeting. I know what Betty has done in the past year or so at the beginning of our staff meetings. If anyone has anything they want to share or a concern or if anyone has anything they just want to announce, good, bad, or indifferent, that's encouraged.



Lou Davis (teacher) also commented:

Yes. At our monthly meetings our teachers are actively encouraged to participate in defining and redefining our goals and overall vision of the school. I personally have not contributed any ideas towards this vision.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) responded:

I feel that many of my educational beliefs are inherent in both the vision and the goals. I was an active participant in the workshops that wrote and identified the goals.

Chris Malone (teacher) said: "Yes, very definitely."

Mary Burns (teacher) provided a somewhat different perspective.

I would say that our ideas have been noted. I would say for the most part our ideas are shared with Betty. Most of the people on the staff agree with her philosophy.

Parents felt that although they had not been involved in the initial development of the vision, they were very active in its implementation.

Pat Nadowski replied:

I would probably think not as much in the development and I wouldn't think it should be because the idea has to come from a strong source initially. Someone has to have the vision; someone has to have the foresight to start judging what's going to be important and what's going to be less important within a particular school environment, and I think particularly in a school that never existed before.

Pat commented on the difficulty of bringing children and staff together from many different schools and being able to incorporate different perspectives . She believed that someone's having a vision was

essential to this process. In referring to her involvement with the vision, she stated:

{With} the vision, they go along the same road. So I would say in the development {of the vision} no. In the implementation, yes because the principal in sharing what she sees as valuable educationally for the Jefferson School has always at that point solicited things from others. Be that from parents, staff, children, about how they see how things would work, how they would feel comfortable with things. Particularly as the years go on, you find that it's not static, that things are always growing and in motion. Something that was very important that first year to get everybody going, to get everybody motivated, has kind of evolved into something more open now. There's a whole series of ideas that you wouldn't have been able to touch in that first or second year, but now you can because you've got the base, you've got the flow and people are of a like mind. . . as more people understand the base and know what things work best within the total picture.

Ann Ballardo commented on her ideas having been enlisted in the school's beautification efforts which were described earlier. She also reflected on the parental aspect of the vision of a community of learners. She felt that parental involvement has had a positive influence on the children.

I think it makes for a nicer place for the kids to come to school to have parents involved. The day the principal had the beautification ceremony, I had to speak and I was a nervous wreck. You know my kids said to me: "Mommy, Mommy, we're so proud of you, but you were so nervous." I think in their eyes it was nice for them to see their mother up there and Linda (another parent) up there. It was a real community venture. But we had fun and I think that's why I laugh every time Betty mentions it.

Participants agreed that vision has played a significant role in the school's culture. Bill Connors (superintendent) reflected on vision in a more global manner.

If we're talking about an individual vision - - the principal's vision, the superintendent's vision for the school system. The collective vision that we're talking about. Obviously the vision parents have of the school. If it {vision} doesn't {influence culture}, there's something wrong ; that's all I can say. It certainly should and I believe it does.

Diane Epstein (assistant principal) commented:

Yes, right from the beginning it's a community for us. . . . You know people think that schools are just places where children learn and Betty made it clear in her vision right from the beginning that this is a place where everybody has the opportunity to learn. So when you develop a culture, you include in that culture, events, activities, traditional things that support that. We have lots of things in the Jefferson School that go on with some regularity that show our culture includes things from her vision. We have respect for each other as human beings and we develop that. We have a Memorial Day program; we have a Flag Day program. We have assemblies that we bring together on things that we study and take a look at values. This requires a clarification of programs.

Lou Davis (teacher) responded with an example of how the vision effects culture.

The principal talks to the students on the public address system from time to time, especially on various holidays about the values that students should be developing. Often when we get together for assemblies these values are reviewed. Teachers are periodically discussing with their students the values that should be part of their lives.



Mary Burns' (teacher) reply illustrated how the vision has effected parent participation.

I feel that Betty has made parents feel welcome. In many schools, parents feel they are on the outside. In this instance, parents feel very welcome in this building.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) further discussed the vision's influence on the culture as it related to each member.

Definitely. As I said, we care first for the safety and well being of the members. We speak to the rights and respect of each individual member. We believe every child can learn and has a right to be enriched in an environment that encourages risk-taking. I feel totally confident that you could walk through any classroom of this building and see learning evidences of the application of our vision. Our success is borne out by the fact that we are the number one chosen school for open enrollment.

Terry Francis (teacher) discussed the personal effect the vision and culture have had on her. When asked if the vision has influenced the culture, she replied:

Yes, because it's a very upbeat place. It's so unlike the school I was in. I did teach in New York for a year back in the late sixties. Where you were in your own little world, and you closed the door and you tried to do the best job you could. {Now} my doors are always open. It has just changed my whole philosophy of teaching. I always thought of myself as a professional, but now I am surrounded by people who are very professional and who provide wonderful input. It makes it fun because we are all learning together.

Terry also added a cautionary note.

A community of learners though to really achieve it in its pure form, I don't know if you can do that because you have so many different personalities. If you can get one person with the same outlook

toward things who is not threatened. I think this is a very good group but there are people within the group who are threatened by it. They perhaps don't want to change or they don't want to think that way. I don't know whether it will ever be achieved. I think in theory it's wonderful. I certainly have seen staff work towards that for the most part.

Pat Nadowski (parent) commented on the importance of trust in expanding the vision to include others.

People have to accept it {the vision}. They have to say trust again. Trust is such an underused word lately, but I think it's a very valuable quality and I think that's what you have to do. You have to trust the vision because you didn't help formulate it. . . you trusted it in the beginning because it sounded good and as time went on, you saw positive things coming back and that trust has increased, and then it expands the vision. It expands the base from which you are drawing because the problem with being an administrator is if you're the only source for ideas and information, eventually you're going to be tapped dry.

Pat reflected on the dynamic quality of vision which is effected by culture and change.

You even notice the change of officers, the change of staff. Every new person who comes in contributes something a little different and that's what keeps it growing, too. That's vital. It's kind of a pulsating orb. It sounds like something from Star Trek, but it has to have a life. It has to eventually have a life almost of its own; I guess it's a dynamic, too.

Ann Ballardo focused on the individualistic nature the vision has upon the school culture.

Yes, I think it's individualistic to a certain point because you want to individualize with the child in the classroom. But I think overall, just the way the halls are decorated and themes and cooperative learning and going to the younger grades to read and the diversity

is expanded upon, it's celebrated instead of being a hindrance; it's used as a tool. And I think that's hard. In the past we have looked upon diversity as a negative. I think a lot of people still do. So I think by bringing more parents in and offering more programs and more opportunities for them to become involved will narrow that gap. I think that's something to work on.

Participants also agreed that the principal's leadership had been extended to include their involvement in school goals. Bill Connors (superintendent) responded:

For us in the Hopedale Public Schools this is something natural. It's part of who we are. I don't think you would find an administrator or principal who wouldn't understand that if I'm going to go about a new project or if I'm going to get something, I'd really like to have a reason, the goals, what I'm going to accomplish.

Diane Epstein (assistant principal) commented on everyone's being part of the process.

Right from the beginning, she shared with people her vision. She made them part of the process by allowing them to input into the process and encouraged their own professional growth and their own learning. Of course it takes a number of years for that learning and that growth to happen. We grow every day but we don't notice it until it's cumulative. So over the years this continues; it wasn't a one shot thing just because the school has reopened. But when we were in year two and year three, there is still growth. There is still learning. There is still openness and encouraging of our different ideas. Every person has at one point or another and probably at many points offered suggestions, made changes and adjustments, created programs that have become part of our culture.



Chris Malone (teacher) referred to the principal's influence in involving staff.

I've been in enough schools to know that where the principal is going and what they're thinking molds the school and Betty has always been very goal oriented. Very conscious of organization, where we're going and how we're going to get there. Yes, I think we have all been involved in the process.

When asked if she had been involved, Terry Francis (teacher) replied:

Most assuredly. I know in my other school we had to establish five year goals. I don't think the principal really cared what ours were because he had his. It just looked good on paper.

Lou Davis (teacher) also discussed personal involvement.

At the beginning of each school year, the staff meets to review the goals that were in place the previous year. In most cases these goals don't change from year to year. The wording may be modified or an additional goal may be added or dropped.

Mary Burns (teacher) referred to a process the principal has utilized to include staff in developing goals.

Periodically we meet and we talk about what our goals are as a staff and Betty will ask us to participate in the wording of those goals. We will get together . . . for example she had a teacher from each grade level get together around different tables upstairs and we wrote up what the goals were and then we put them all together and saw what things were the same and different. And she took from that and she wrote them up in school so you felt that you participated in that and they weren't Betty's goals but they were everybody's goals.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) further elaborated on the vested interest the staff have in the goals.

As I stated, the staff developed the vision and goals for our community of learners. I don't feel we would be as successful if they were handed down. Our blood, sweat, and tears, so to speak, were the instruments in creating these goals. We're truly vested intrinsically with the application which we are entrusted with as professionals by the principal to implement in our classroom as we feel most beneficial for the children. The principal is also responsible for encouraging us to go out and to learn more about the issues of education and learning to be ambassadors, so to speak, and come back and disseminate the information and new concepts and to discuss these and use them in grading our goals.

Parents also felt that the principal had involved them in schoolwide goals. Pat Nadowski commented on the relationship of vision and goals.

As an offshoot to vision would be the more specific concrete goals and I {hear} them at PTO meetings and again {through} the flyers that go home from school.. If there's a particular goal, be it an educational goal or a goal that's more concrete like a furniture goal, that's always shared with the parents and shared with the children and out of that sharing comes the underlying idea that maybe somebody has an idea of how to achieve this. Maybe something a little bit different, a different approach, a different idea.

Ann Ballardo (parent) related the sharing of goals to the kind of learning that occurs at the Jefferson School.

It's cooperative learning. Learning from one another and bringing strengths and weaknesses to each individual project. It's not dictatorial; it's more, I keep saying, we're in this together. The principal is always around taking pictures. I think that's another way of melding everyone together. Having the slide show when we're having Open House. The kids seeing the principal take pictures and having memories to look back on and saying, "Remember when we did this; remember when we did that."

Ann also reiterated the underlying feeling of respect which she has witnessed for example at PTO meetings.

As a parent at PTO meetings there must have been times when we disagreed with one another but that's {how we have} diversity of opinion, not just diversity of culture and beliefs. I think we respect one another; I think that's basically it. I've never been made to feel as a parent that my opinions were worth less than the principal's or a teacher's. I sense that the principal is that way with everybody. That's important because some parents will open up and they'll speak.

Participants also felt that the principal had encouraged their personal and professional growth. Their responses were very similar to those concerning the culture's promotion of personal/professional growth, another example of the close relationship between culture and leadership. Bill Connors (superintendent) indicated that he has had many opportunities to exchange ideas with the principal.

Visits to school, regular monthly meetings that brought us together, the informal meetings that we've had at the school, or Betty's popping in here and the telephone. Of course that's to say nothing of the stuff that she would send me up. "Just thought you might want to read." The books she gave me but I haven't read yet which are going to Maine with me.

Diane Epstein (assistant principal) commented on her personal and professional relationship which she considered to be one of collegiality and mentoring.

She has listened to me, heard me out on many occasions when we disagreed but never made me feel that I was anything but a valuable contributor to the school and that's really in my case been a very positive experience. She has been there not only



professionally but she's been there personally at tough times in my own life with my family. She has encouraged me to go on. In fact, she is encouraging me at the present and I'm giving some thought to it. She has been not only my principal and my co-worker and my colleague but my mentor.

In a similar way, Fran Godfrey (teacher) stated:

Betty provides support and time for my own professional growth. I feel as if she has become a mentor. I truly value her support and often we discuss educational issues that pique our interest. Never feeling it as a one way conversation. I always feel we're speaking on equal terms exchanging different views and information.

Other teachers commented on the principal's influence in her sharing of articles and information on courses, workshops, and additional resources. Terry Francis (teacher) replied:

She provides us with stacks and stacks of photocopies of whatever she's interested in that she thinks we would be interested in. Whether we want to read it or not, we get it. Most of it is very, very good. If there is a course that she thinks some of us might be interested in. For example, I just did one a couple of weeks ago. There was one in spelling at Milton Academy. Fascinating! It was a course on how to teach spelling. Open Court is very instructional and I was fascinated by that. So we were provided with the information.

Similarly, Lou Davis (teacher) answered:

The principal keeps me informed about in-service programs and programs being offered in the area. She sometimes joins with other principals to offer programs for our school in some subject area such as science. Articles and books are made available to me periodically which relate to teaching approaches and activities to be used with the students.

Likewise Mary Burns (teacher) stated:

As I have remarked before she is very good about letting you know when different workshops are being given. Or if she sees some sort of advertisement for maybe a publication that's on a topic that she knows you like to cover, she makes sure it gets in your mailbox. . . . If she can help you purchase different materials for your classroom, she will do whatever she can. And she is very willing to let you bring people in from the outside to work in the building and help as well.

Chris Malone also agreed that the principal has encouraged her personal/professional growth but stated that in this area, her department head has been a significant contributor.

Yes, but she is not totally responsible for that because although I am in the school, my department head is an administrator in another building. So it has been her that has been more the one when I say I would like to do this . . . . There has never been a feeling that Betty didn't want me to do something. But she was not the one who led the way on that thing.

Parents gave particular examples of the principal's encouraging their personal/professional growth. Pat Nadowski related being included in learning opportunities.

I was thinking in particular about the occasion I had to go to a meeting for that company that was going to sponsor a foreign language program. I guess the invitation went out to principals and I think out of all the participants there was only one parent. I went at the principal's invitation and I considered that a privilege. Now I think that's indicative of the way the principal likes to do things. If there's been an invitation that they'd like parent input on a particular subject, the principal always looks to find one.

She also commented on the corresponding importance of validating parents' experiences through sharing.

It has to be encouraged. . . . {by} using the information when they come back. Making it worth their time that they spent, a couple of hours, and the information is vital and their interpretation of the information is vital to formulating curriculum or revamping a report card, whatever the case may be.

Ann Ballardo (parent) reiterated that her experience in the beautification project had been a positive one.

I'm a shrubette. I haven't done anything in my own yard but I'm thinking of doing the school.

She also related the principal's encouraging her when she was thinking of changing her grade level as a teacher.

The principal said that she felt I would be good in any middle school situation. When I was thinking of teaching high school, she said the same thing. In that respect, we don't just talk about the Jefferson School.

From participants' responses, it was evident that their opportunities for personal/professional growth have influenced their teaching/learning practices in the classroom. Bill Connors (superintendent) replied:

The number of people in the Jefferson School that constantly are involved in staff development workshops and so forth, as well as their leadership programs begin to say very clearly how significant that influence has been.



In her comments, Diane Epstein (assistant principal) referred to the positive effect of the leader's openness to change and respect for the individual.

Oh! Absolutely because if you feel open to the fact that the administration of the school is open to changes and new ideas, then you are going to be encouraged to produce new ideas. If you feel valued as a human being, then you are going to be open in your approach and your mind is always going to be thinking of ways you can do things differently or make a contribution.

Terry Francis (teacher) commented on feeling free to grow, particularly in reading and math.

We have a lot of freedom to do pretty much what we want and whatever we're interested in, Betty values. It's not usually trivia. On my grade level, we got very involved with Open Court in the reading program. And also with the math. I don't know how many times the first couple of years I'd run in the office and say to Betty, "You've got to come in and see this. I don't believe it." She would come in and watch. I was never like that before. I was always very polite. I'm very quiet. I'd never run out and grab someone in the hall.

Similarly, Mary Burns (teacher) stated:

Definitely, because I have gone from pretty much following the basal approach in reading to now being able to develop my own thematic units and take from different types of basals what I feel are important strategies.

Lou Davis (teacher) cited the importance of:

The critical thinking workshops that we participated in. I found those very helpful in the classroom.

Fran Godfrey's (teacher) comments illustrated how professional growth opportunities have changed conceptions of learning.

Because of continued professional growth, I have certainly changed my theory of learning. I have finally developed one after twenty years. I have learned, probably by example, of setting up schoolwide vision and goals, to set up my own belief system and to measure all my educational decisions and instruction against those beliefs.

Fran also indicated how this experience has increased feelings of self-confidence and personal sense of empowerment.

Doing this has given me confidence in myself as a teacher. I feel confident in assessing learner strengths, acting as a facilitator rather than an instructor dispensing knowledge, nudging learners to the next level of learning. I feel confident in myself as a valuable member of the teaching staff with the community of learners. I also feel confident to deal with parents and administrators. This is empowerment. I've moved from the traditional skills teacher to one who believes in taking the cue from the child to teach for deep understanding and metacognition.

It is evident that the children have been influenced by these teaching learning practices. Chris Malone stated:

I have seen it by the things the kids bring into me and ask help on. It's always things that are often some of the newer things that people are interested in in the fields. It's an individual research kind of thing. Very often children are off on something they are interested in, not just a class project. I think, yes, it has made people more open to other things.

Parents also felt the influence of the teaching/learning practices in the school. Pat Nadowski discussed how the open door policy enabled her to be a part of classroom learning opportunities in many ways.

I think it definitely has. Being a parent who has an educational background, but in secondary education, I came to elementary education from a slightly different perspective. And I had some preordained ideas as to how children should be taught, or what they should be taught. I think I came with a lot of apprehension because I know how important the elementary years are.

The kind of open door, the collegiality, the whole thing making you feel part of the circle relieves some of the anxiety . . . by letting you become part of the classroom in various ways. Even if it's only as a room parent on a party day. You have so much more feeling for what goes on in the classroom. So when you go home, you know the kind of questions to ask. You know first grade is very particular as far as the reading system the kids have. Well if you go to that first orientation that the teachers have, it gives you the keys you need in order to help the kids with their reading.

Pat also cited the importance of the principal's monthly calendar.

I think even keeping parents informed about the calendar is very valuable. Who's going to be in the school. If you're going to have a musician come into the school, chances are none of the children will tell you they've seen one. But if you ask specifically what this musician did or did you enjoy him. What kind of music did he play? Then you get answers and then you're participating in the child's education.

Ann Ballardo (parent) commented on the learning opportunities offered to the PTO. She referred to the Talents Unlimited program, an enrichment program for all children in the school.

I was really turned on by hearing the presenter, Janis Baron. I was thinking I can apply this to helping the kids at home and I can certainly apply it to teaching. When they offered it {in my school system}, I just signed on.



Participants revealed that the principal's encouragement of collegiality has been essential to this community of learners. Many participants have referenced this previously, particularly in their comments on vision and culture, which once again illustrates the interrelatedness of the factors. Bill Connors (superintendent) reflected on collegiality being intertwined with the principal's nature.

It's part and parcel of her nature. She is that kind of person. It's not so much even a question Betty Bostrom would go about encouraging collegiality. She encourages people to work together, to respect each other, to be part of a team obviously which are all ingredients of collegiality. That's her. . . . That's the way she does things. That's the way she's always done things. She did that as a teacher . . . research assistant . . . but it's great when it's part of her as a leader of a school because then other people have an opportunity because she's setting a tone.

Diane Epstein provided examples of how the principal has encouraged collegiality.

I think she has done her part through things so simplistic as having volunteer breakfasts or having breakfast for someone who is leaving, coming, has an accolade or two. More serious things - - professional recognition, empowering people to take different programs and encouraging them to take ownership of the program and to take care of the sharing with the faculty. So in every way, she has encouraged that.

Mary Burns (teacher) described the effects of collegiality on both staff and students.

She (principal) has tried to get people to meet together both socially and for work related purposes. . . .She had teachers going to different teachers' classrooms and observe what's going on so that people see what's happening throughout the school and don't

just get locked into what's going on within the corner of their own classroom. They get out and see how we all work together. She has encouraged teachers for example from lower grades to work together maybe one afternoon a month with teachers from higher grades. I know a first grade teacher that works with a fifth grade teacher. The fifth grade students may help the first grade students to write letters to friends or one may put on a little play for the other group. That has created a sense of community among the students, not just the teachers.

Chris Malone (teacher) believed that the principal's openness has encouraged collegiality.

I think it's because she's open to ideas and you never get the feeling that when you go in to talk to her, you're going in to talk to the "boss." At least that's not the feeling I get. I get the feeling that she has kind of all over responsibility for the school and that if something can or cannot be done, she would be the one who would know one way or another.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) commented on the positive effect collegiality has had on decision making which keeps in mind the best interests of the child.

I feel that each person on staff is encouraged to participate in decision making. Each person's view is respected and has a right to be heard. I feel that decisions are made not on a personal "inside track" kind of manner but truly weighed against how it helps implement our goals and succeeds in fulfilling our vision. I always feel that whatever the controversy or issue is, the best interest of the child will prevail - - that is our vision.

Collegiality does not come without a price, however, as Fran indicated.

Sometimes I get voted down. It's not always easy. But when you realize that there is a benchmark to measure things by, you see how it goes and you know that you can present your argument, that you can support it all you want and even though you are



loaded down, you know that the best interests of the kids are still at heart. This makes you feel good anyway to know that can happen.

Fran also revealed the importance of time and collaborative work for collegiality to thrive. This is similar to the responses of Mary Burns and Diane Epstein.

Time for collaborative work is encouraged as is time for sharing expertise with one another. I think time is an important thing. There's a lot of that provided in the school. Total school themes have been introduced and worked on. Community action projects have been taken on by the whole school. Food drives. There is even a playground restoration project and there's a nursing home visitation program - - projects like that are carried on throughout the school year.

The practice of collegiality can lead at times to confrontation as indicated previously and further discussed by Terry Francis(teacher).

She (principal) has tried to encourage us to confront each other if there's a problem. To verbalize our feelings if we have a concern. To work together as a staff. It's hard though because there are certain parameters you just want to stay within.

Lou Davis (teacher) also reported that bringing the staff together has not been easy.

I feel the principal has done a great job trying to bring the staff together. I think that sometimes she has a real job on her hands trying to do that. I think there are a lot of teachers, particularly in this building, who have a lot of self interest and they do find it hard to come together. I think their outside lives are quite demanding and it is hard trying to bring the staff together.



Of special significance to Lou Davis has been the principal's assuming of duties as teachers do. Lou feels that this has also contributed in some way to collegiality.

Another thing that makes her, I'm not sure about the collegiality, but I think it's important to see her, when we assign jobs, and do our duties and such, she herself takes a duty. She isn't above the other teachers; she's on of the staff. She's out in that playground every morning supervising the school, where teachers could actually be required to go out there and do that. . . . I look upon her favorably for that because it's the first school I've been in that a principal just doesn't dump it on a teacher to do that . . . . She does that and I think that helps with the collegiality in some way.

Parents also felt that the principal has encouraged collegiality in the sense of their being able to share as parents. Of particular importance to them was the feeling that they have a vital role in contributing to the community of learners. Pat Nadowski reflected:

I think that had the principal not encouraged collegiality that most of the other things that I have mentioned wouldn't be possible. You have to have that feeling that you're important and you're wanted in the school and that your ideas are wanted, or you just don't participate at that level. You do something different and there's two separate circles rather than intersecting circles of home and school.

#### Research Question #4

Can factors be isolated that hinder or enhance the development of a community of learners?

Participants felt that the interrelated factors of leadership, vision, culture, and change contained aspects which could be viewed as enhancing factors at times, while at other points, could be considered as inhibiting the development of this same community of learners. While these areas will be considered separately, there will be a necessary overlap at times. Individual's own mind sets and interpretations of issues and events contributed a great deal to how these factors were viewed.

#### Enhancing Factors

The underlying theme which recurred throughout the study as being essential for the development of a community of learners was openness, whether it was referred to as for example the "principal's openness," "staff openness," "open forum," or "open door policy." Participants referred to this value, whether they were discussing leadership, vision, culture, or change. Bill Connors (superintendent) discussed the significant role of the principal in defining a community of learners and actually living it. He said:

I think first of all is the fact that the principal endeavors to define what she means by a "community of learners" . . . .What the expectation is. So it's not just educational jargon or words. Practical kinds of things. Trying to define it as often as she can for

her staff. Obviously the other thing that probably goes hand in hand with it is actually living it. Bringing it back in focus for people on every occasion that she can when she speaks about the school. What makes our school distinct, what makes our school unique, what makes our school different - - well, we're a community of learners. And constantly repeating the mission.

Having the openness to look at things from different angles was also a significant factor to Diane Epstein (assistant principal). She observed:

{The principal} has had the managerial skills. . . and the openness to take a look at budget in more than one way. So flexibility in terms of materials and money for that kind of thing. She's been very open to anything educational not only for the children but for the teachers. Any programs that come up, she shares their availability, then encourages people to go, works out the time if at all possible, and coverage has not been a tremendous problem.

Mary Burns (teacher) echoed this same underlying theme of openness through the examples she provided.

I would say informal summer meetings followed up by informal workshops during the year, sharing of ideas. . . throughout grade levels and people not being locked into just one grade level, primary versus intermediate. Discussion on how the funds are to be dispersed so that they are shared equally throughout the building. Support for taking course work. Support for having people come in from different universities . . . and keeping us aware of new trends and new course offerings throughout the system.

This openness has led to staff's feeling accepted as professionals and having the freedom to innovate. Terry Francis (teacher) felt this was particularly significant.

Well the freedom to become involved in anything that's educationally exciting for us and our children. We are accepted as professionals by the administration and we're supported and



we're not threatened. I had a very negative background in terms of principals. People that I liked, liked me but they had their own problems. They didn't take the teacher's feelings into consideration at all. I had seventeen years of that. It's a total opposite to be with someone who encourages. . . . I think principals on the whole are not usually like the principal I have now.

Lou Davis (teacher) also commented on the principal's support and recognition of staff as being significant for the development of the community of learners.

I think the principal has made a genuine effort to try to bring the staff together in a variety of ways, whether they are get-togethers in the school or get-togethers outside of the school making a point of recognizing teachers for whatever. I think she does a nice job at making teachers feel they have done a good job. She is quite supportive of teachers and in most cases agrees with the approach you take when you're dealing with parents and kids and that kind of thing.

Chris Malone (teacher) viewed the constancy of the staff and the corresponding continuity of children's programs as being particularly significant.

I think the fact that the staff has remained fairly constant has been one of the things because you're not having a constant turnover and so everyone is aiming in the same direction. . . . I think just the fact that people know each other as people over a period of time that you begin to feel this bonding process. You're not constantly trying to know a new person. Can you work with them? Will they respond to your way of doing things? They're not constantly learning a new pecking order. I think a constant turnover is a real problem if you're trying to reach a point out there. I think this has been wonderful.

In regard to programs, Chris stated:

We've also had some programs that could be continued in the next grade, too. We've seen children go from kindergarten right through to the fifth grade and out of the school. And children who were in second grade were constantly looking forward to this class play in the fourth and fifth grades and it was a feeling of cohesion there. I think the fact that the reading programs have remained pretty much in place. We're not constantly changing. So the second grade teacher knows where the first grade kids have been. Knows the program and picks it up from there. I think it's kind of a continuity thing that seems to work.

Fran Godfrey's (teacher) response also supported the commitment and caliber of the people involved in living out the concept of a community of learners.

I think the most important thing is commitment from all the members of the learning community. From the principal, teachers, parents, students, and the community groups. For so many of us this is not "just a job." Another important thing is the caliber of the people involved. As a staff I think we're bright, intelligent, strong personalities, strong professionals and each brings unique characteristics that make them a valuable asset to the community.

In addition, Fran indicated the importance of leadership and vision in this community.

Another important factor is leadership. The awareness of the leader of the community of which she is a member. . . . She knows the strengths and the weaknesses of the community as a whole and of each of its individual members. The leadership should be kept abreast of the principals' changing roles. She has a good concept of what today's leader brings to her organization, and the personal and professional skills and strategies she needs to accomplish the mission.

Another important factor is vision. One needs a direction to follow. By its nature the vision itself must be long term, complex. The vision of building a community of learners is analogous to reaching Nirvana - - it's a perfected state unattainable, yet always to be worked toward achieving, with measurable goals or benchmarks with which to lead the way and measure success toward achieving that perfection.

Parents also referred to the importance of "openness" or the "open door" policy in the development of a community of learners. Pat Nadowski related this to the significance of vision, trust, and the courage it took to open the doors to everyone. She stated:

I think it's significant that you have an individual with a vision initially. I think the other significant thing is that you develop this feeling of trust among everybody - - the teachers trust the parents, the parents trust the administrators, the children trust everyone. Because you have to be open in order to learn. You have to be trusting in order to learn. And I think it must be difficult for teachers to allow parents unknown to them into the classroom and into the school. I mean it would be much easier, maybe not as profitable, to teach with a closed door policy where you go in and you're lord of your classroom and the parents are the lord of their home and you don't intersect the two. But I think the kids are cheated in that sense. I think it's the person with a vision and you have to trust the vision. . . . A vision is one thing because it works on paper, but you have to have somebody with a little bit of courage to start opening these doors and encourage other people to open these doors.

Ann Ballardo (parent) also commented on how the school's open door policy has contributed to parental involvement.

I think the door is open. . . . I've been made to feel very welcome. There have been so many opportunities to volunteer and help. I think someone shier than I would feel comfortable. . . . I think you can see the PTO meetings have gotten involvement. That's not even an indication because everybody can't come all the time. I



think the involvement in the school. When you need something, they are there to help out.

As indicated earlier, staff also viewed parents on the whole as supportive of their efforts. Chris Malone (teacher) stated:

We have been lucky to have some fairly cooperative PTO people. Very warm, caring people!

Chris also indicated:

We have had our share of opposites, too. I'm sure Betty (principal) will admit to that.

Some participants referred to the principal's initiation of a fifteen minute Open Forum at the beginning of staff meetings as a significant factor in being able to share ideas and concerns as a group. Terry Francis (teacher) stated:

We have the ability to critique anything that we don't like. If we have an idea, no one is so shy that they wouldn't speak out at a meeting. I know what Betty has done in the past year or so at the beginning of staff meetings. If anyone has anything they want to share or a concern or if anyone has anything they just want to announce, good, bad, or indifferent, that's encouraged.

Lou Davis (teacher) also indicated:

I think the Open Forum is a good idea. It gives you a chance to bring up concerns like I had the base line markers painted in the playground. Just having a chance to talk with the principal about some of the concerns in the building.

When asked if this was received well by the staff, Lou replied:

It was, and a lot of the teachers had definite things that they brought up to her.

There were some participants, however, who indicated that the Open Forums were problematic. This will be considered under inhibiting factors.

It was evident from participants' responses that the feeling of openness was supportive to a caring, collegial environment, a culture supportive of learning opportunities for everyone. Ann Ballardo (parent) said: "I think the atmosphere is very positive." Terry Francis (teacher) referred to the school as "a very upbeat place." In a similar vein, Pat Nadowski (parent) indicated:

{The school stresses} that we're all in this together. You just can't drop your child at the front door of the school and expect at this point forward, when they hit the kindergarten, that the school is going to solve all their problems because they can't. It's too all encompassing for all of us together, but it's impossible for anyone singularly - it wouldn't work.

### Inhibiting Factors

Just as openness has been an underlying theme contributing to the enhancement of a community of learners, the lack of it or the misinterpretation of its meaning, has also been an impediment. In this regard, Diane Epstein (assistant principal) commented:

I think six years is a funny time. I think it's a time when the negatives start. The first two or three years everybody is building and growing and then we kind of get to know each other and then we start to get a little more cynical. This year particularly we had some issues around an Open Forum time in meetings. Betty was very responsive to this and respectful of that - - giving teachers an

Open Forum time. That Open Forum is open forum for what people want to say and the way they want to say it. Sometimes people get angry; they get negative. But it's all part of that Open Forum, and I think at that point we had some problems. I think they have been worked out to some degree, but I think trust is built as long as you're encouraged and as soon as somebody puts a block, you all of a sudden don't feel so open anymore and you get a little cynical and you get a little hesitant to be as open if you feel put down. I think that's been the only problem this year.

It did in fact become evident to the principal during one of the first Open Forum periods that some staff members envisioned using this time to vent their anger concerning certain members of the pupil personnel team who were not present at the meeting. For this reason, she suggested a future meeting of staff with the pupil personnel team to clarify concerns. The principal also indicated the importance of expressing a concern in keeping with the underlying respect members had for one another. This was interpreted by some as meaning that they could not be honest.

The quality of exchange during Open Forums was certainly influenced by participants' differing connotations of openness which were greatly determined by their own personalities and agendas. Mary Burns (teacher) commented on problems involving personal relationships.

I would say that one of the things that is difficult in the school that I have seen sometimes enters personal relationships. In this building there {are} three of every grade and sometimes you get two teachers who really work well together and the third person will feel like odd man out. Sometimes there are difficulties in the relationships that develop between staff members and I think that's difficult for Betty. I think she has handled that the best she can.



She has tried to get people to sit down and talk whenever possible so that if she sees that any hard feelings are brewing, that they come out and they are dealt with because very often it's a misunderstanding. It's not anything concrete that's happened; it's like someone's individual perception of something. But I do think that's difficult in a building where there are three of each grade.

Many of the impediments to openness were viewed as being related to human factors, such as differing personalities. In this regard the Assistant Principal commented:

I don't think it's Betty or the school or the vision or the lack of ability to share or empower. I just think after a certain amount of time, personalities become very defined. It's a very hard balance to keep that openness going and I think you have to regroup.

Terry Francis (teacher) also referred to the problem of having some negative personalities who are threatened by a change they feel they can't control.

Just the negativity of three or four staff members who would be negative no matter what. Who are threatened, who are insecure for God knows whatever reason. Who were like that before they came here and will be like that for the rest of their lives. Surprisingly enough they are excellent teachers. They are not burned out. That's just their personality. But I think they are threatened not so much by change, but by change that they cannot control ultimately.

Lou Davis (teacher) provided an example of what happens when individual and collaborative efforts are not balanced.

I think part of it is just the makeup of the teachers themselves. I think that some of the teachers are very much into doing their own thing, and I think I shouldn't say but they have a lot of growing up to do. They seem to be into their own personal improvement rather {than} improvement for the staff, and seeking further

development on their own or just doing things for their own glorification rather than working together more as a team. There are a few of those around.

Chris Malone (teacher) also cited additional human factors as being an impediment at times. Chris stated that some staff felt threatened by having monthly meetings in individual's classrooms. This was also cited in previous sections as being a positive aspect of the community of learners.

The things that I see are more individually human things. I know at one time Betty asked people to have the monthly meeting in their room and kind of share with the group what they were doing in various facets, if they had a particular program going that she really felt was of particular value for others to hear about. I think some people were threatened by that. I'm not sure why, whether they felt a particular person was showing off. There seemed to be a little of that. Because I happen to be the strong union person in the building, some people will come to me and talk to me. Maybe just because I listen. They felt a little threatened by that. They didn't mind sharing at a teachers' meeting where people were in their domain and looking around. I don't know; I can't tell you. People just feel threatened by that. I think it happened two or three times.

Fran Godfrey's (teacher) response indicated how the same factors which enhance the community of learners can also detract from it at times.

Paradoxically, the same things that contribute to its success can also lead to its failures. The lack of commitment or understanding of the concept. The caliber of the people involved. Sometimes because we are strong personalities there are issues of control, and when issues of control surface, no one is the winner. Nothing gets accomplished. The leadership itself has to allow for decision making and policies to come from the community and not impose that directly from the top. The vision itself must be broad and complex rather than narrow or actually confusing method with

mission, i.e., having the desire to increase math scores or literature based on whole language, instead of broad sweeping visions. I think teacher isolation is another obstacle. Teachers must collaborate; they must feel vested and part of the product.

From the parents' perspective, human factors have also been impediments in getting more parents involved. Of particular concern was the need not only to improve communication with the non-English speaking population, but also to motivate the entire parent community to become involved. Pat Nadowski stated:

I think the multicultural makeup in the school itself is a factor. How do you get the word out there? We've talked about translating different memos and stuff into different dialects, but there are so many different dialects. So I think that multiculturally there's a big difference. But it's not the only one because even the people who are fluent and can read all the information, sometimes it's hard to get them motivated. It's hard to get them to understand this would be good for them and their family as a whole. This is something worth putting on the schedule. . . . I think that the hardest thing is expanding the community.

Ann Ballardo also referred to some parents' traditional ideas of schooling. This can be an impeding factor for a school that is trying to innovate. She said:

You know, well gee, you're not sitting in a reading group with a reading book. You're reading comic books or you're writing a play or you're doing a project. It doesn't mean you're not reading. I think there still is if you're not sitting there in the little blue bird reading group, some parents may feel that's not reading. Or math should be five pages of computation and not helping me balance my checkbook so you could see exactly how the math works for you.



Ann also commented on some parents' fear of the changing ideas in education.

It's scary. I think because I'm in education I see these things and I'm a part of them so it's not foreign to me, but I sense from some people who maybe didn't go to college that are parents here. You go back to what you grew up with. And that's your only frame of reference. They don't take courses; they don't read as much as you and I do but they still have good ideas. I think maybe they feel like they don't.

In addition to the human factors cited, participants also felt that certain external factors, such as money and time, have been impediments to the development of a community of learners. Bill Connors (superintendent) stated:

I suppose that we can always say lack of significant financial resources that will allow you to do the kind of things that you want to provide opportunities for parents, teachers, and children. . . . I go into the Jefferson School and I walk into that little office and I say that Betty (principal) needs a conference room. She needs a community room in this building for these kinds of things where it's readily available. Let the school have the technology that allows it to call different parts of the country. To be into telecommunications. And those are the things that I would think get down to financial. We're always kind of restricting ourselves because we don't have quite the money to do the kind of things we want.

Mary Burns (teacher) commented not only on the lack of money, but also on the individual school's not having enough control of how that money is spent.

I see that money is the main issue because there just isn't enough for the schools to do all that they want and I feel that very often the way that money is spent isn't controlled enough within the school

itself. There are factors that just coordinators and administrators in the main office have jurisdiction over how monies are spent so that it becomes a competitive process. Principals have got to compete for money from the administrators and in turn teachers often have to compete for money from the principal. If a certain grade level is granted a program, often people on other grade levels feel well, "What about me?" And they don't often have the full information of why the principal or administrator has chosen level three to give a social studies program to. I feel that it's a real problem because it's impossible to please everyone as long as there isn't enough money. You have to make choices at the administrative level as to who gets what cut of the pie. That is something that unfortunately leaves many teachers frustrated if they see the funds continually go to intermediate grade levels or maybe go to a primary grade.

Chris Malone (teacher) indicated the negative impact of not having the necessary funding.

I think to some extent {funding has been a deterrent} because in the last few years, we have not had the people. The first few years when we were opening up the building, we had lots of speakers and workshops coming in and things like this that were wonderful. We have seen less and less of that. Perhaps funding through education reform will do that.

Ann Ballardo (parent) also commented:

Lack of money. You know it's a city school system. A city is different. It's got many more problems. Money {needs} to be spent on different things.

Time has been cited throughout the study as being a positive factor in building a community of learners. It has negative aspects as well. Pat

Nadowski (parent) indicated:

Time from the point of view of everybody. The parents are extremely busy. {There are} a lot of two parent working families, a lot of single parent families. There isn't as much time as people

would like to do as much as they would like to do. Also on the side of teachers. Teachers have their own families. They have their own set of problems so the time they have to put in is limited, too. I think . . . people don't have as much freedom of time so things have to be orchestrated in a much tighter fashion than they would have years ago.

Terry Francis (teacher) also commented:

There is never enough time to do all that you want to do.

Chris Malone (teacher) referred to the changing role of the principal under the recently passed Education Reform Act and a possible negative effect this could have on schools.

It's got nothing to do with this building. It's something that's an external influence. I feel that the position the principal would be in under this new reform bill, I'm wondering if that would change {principals}. I'm not sure that it would change Betty, but would it change some people? Because once you empower someone else, you give up a little of your own power. And Betty so far has not had a problem with that. But I'm wondering if some principals will find they are "Johnny on the spot" in the new reform bill. . . . And I'm wondering if it will impede a new thought.

Chris also viewed the Legislature as interfering with educators' empowerment.

In some of my readings on a community of learners, they keep talking about the educators being able to reform from within. But the educators aren't being given the power to do that. It's the Legislature that's doing it and I just don't think they know what they're doing. I think educators could do it if they were left to do it. But for some reason or other, people in general, the Legislature in particular, don't feel that it can come from within. I think some things like this new legislation may be a deterrent to this kind of thinking because it's made everything cut and dried and it doesn't make provisions for new thought.



## Strategies Utilized in the Development of a Community of Learners

The strategies utilized in the continued development of this community of learners have been dependent on the interrelated factors of leadership, vision, change, and culture. In order to communicate these strategies in a more personal way, the researcher, who is also the principal of the school being studied, feels it is necessary to be reflective in the first person.

When I was first appointed to the principalship of the Jefferson School in 1987, I was given the opportunity to participate in two learning experiences which significantly influenced my approach to the principalship. The first experience was a two day workshop on school culture given by Jon Saphier. I had previously read an article by Saphier and King entitled "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures." This workshop did much to expand upon my belief that building a strong culture needed to be the foundation for our efforts as a school. For this reason, I shared the article with staff before our initial summer workshop. The twelve norms of school culture have provided the basis for many discussions and activities in our school. The twelve norms indicated by Saphier and King are:

1. Collegiality
2. Experimentation
3. High expectations
4. Trust and confidence

5. Tangible support
  6. Reaching out to the knowledge bases
  7. Appreciation and recognition
  8. Caring, celebration and humor
  9. Involvement in decision making
  10. Protection of what's important
  11. Traditions
  12. Honest, open communications
- (Saphier & King, 1985, p.67)

The staff and I have been involved continually in the building of these norms. As Saphier and King indicated:

Building these norms depends equally on teachers' will and commitment since good leadership alone cannot make them strong; but without such leadership, culture cannot begin to grow or be expected to endure (1985, p.68).

The second significant learning experience was my participation in the state's Commonwealth Leadership Institute which was a year long institute (1987-1988) conducted by R. Mason Bunker. An essential part of this institute was the devising of an action plan (APPENDIX D).

Mason's leadership and the many opportunities to exchange ideas with colleagues helped me to "flesh out" this plan which had as its vision:

The Jefferson School will be known for encouraging learning for everyone in a caring, collegial environment. Students, staff, and parents will be viewed as a community of learners.

The participation of staff, students, and parents was essential to the living out of the concept of a community of learners.

In the process of exploring with others the vision of a community of learners, I was also influenced by my involvement in the doctoral

program and my own professional readings of such authors as Barth, Fullan and Hargreaves, Sarason, Senge, and Sergiovanni who have been referenced in the study. Some of these readings have been shared with staff and parents and have also been utilized in staff meetings, workshops, and informal get-togethers. As the principal, I believed it was important to grow together through the sharing of ideas regarding learning.

The participation of staff has been vital in determining our core values which are inherent in the school's vision statement. This statement was rewritten in the fall of 1993 to reflect everyone's input. Five year goals were also written to reflect how the vision was to be enacted (APPENDIX E). The vision and goal statement have been shared with parents and students as well. Our common belief in the value of learning for everyone has been continually enriched through everyone's participation.

The building of a shared vision has been slow, painful, but most often exciting and challenging. Although I emphasized the importance of staff input, I felt that in the first year, my leadership was mainly "directive." As a facilitator at meetings, I would say something and there would be some dialogue, but almost anything I said was rubberstamped. Once an atmosphere of trust and collegiality took root, however, genuine input from staff increased. The process of learning together and working cooperatively has involved change which at times has brought with it



uncertainty and sometimes conflict. However, an underlying feeling of openness has permeated the culture in which members have felt trusted and respected and correspondingly free to be risk-takers and experimenters. The development of this community has not been without its problems which have been indicated throughout the study. The following examples are illustrative of the growth and development of the community of learners at the Jefferson School.

### Examples of Jefferson School's Community of Learners

#### Rededication Ceremony

Rather than have the traditional ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by the mayor and central office personnel at the beginning of the school year in 1987, a ceremony was planned which involved all constituencies in the spring. The entire community was invited on a Sunday afternoon to celebrate the successful completion of the newly-reopened school. A representative from each group (central office, city official, school administrator, teacher, parent, and student) shared their reflections about what the Jefferson School meant to them. This was followed by an open house during which everyone toured the building and celebrated together in food, song, and laughter.

## Staff Development

### 1. Talents Unlimited Program

At the end of the 1988 school year, staff expressed a dissatisfaction with the systemwide enrichment program for third and fourth graders. This was a pullout program for which teachers in each school identified third and fourth graders who would benefit from enrichment. These students received instruction once a week in a special class held in the building. Teachers believed that this program contradicted our school philosophy that every child deserved to be enriched in his/her learning experiences. For this reason, they requested a meeting with the central office director of the program. At this meeting, the director agreed that our school would pilot a schoolwide enrichment program. She also agreed to provide money for staff development in this area.

During the following school year, Janis Baron, a consultant for Talents Unlimited, provided four workshop sessions from January through April. At these sessions, the principal and teachers received training in Dr. Calvin Taylor's Multiple Talent Approach, which stressed that there were several ways of being smart which were related to the world-of-work. These "talents" included academic talent as the base, but reached out to include: productive thinking, communication, forecasting, decision-making, and planning. This was not an add on program, but rather integrated thinking skills throughout the curriculum.

Teachers had the opportunity to practice these talents with students and then meet with one another to discuss and share results. In addition, Janis Baron explained the program to parents so that they could encourage this kind of thinking at home as well as in school. Even more important than the program itself, was the opportunity for the principal, teachers, and parents to interact as learners and to collaborate in building positive learning experiences for children. We are continuing to expand upon our enrichment program which focuses on developing gifted behaviors in students with an emphasis on critical/creative thinking utilizing a problem-solving approach to learning.

## 2. Project Excellence in Elementary Science

The principal and a third grade teacher were chosen to participate in this project which was sponsored by the National Science Foundation and held at Simmons College during the summer of 1989. Its focus was on moving away from a textbook emphasis in teaching science to a hands-on, inquiry-based approach to thinking and learning. Upon their return, the principal and teacher shared their learnings with staff and parents during workshop sessions. Demonstrations and support were given to all staff in their efforts to provide hands-on, problem solving experiences to students. Teachers worked individually, in teams by grade levels, and across grade levels to achieve this goal. During the summer of 1991, two additional teachers participated in the new



technology workshop held again at Simmons College. The same process of sharing occurred upon their return to the school. Teachers and children together predict and carry out experiments.

### 3. Individual Staff Development

A powerful force in the development of a community of learners has been the opportunity I have had as the principal to model what it means to be a learner. Through my sharing of professional readings, my participation with staff in workshops and also more formally through my doctoral studies, teachers realize the importance I attach to lifelong learning. Many staff members have taken and are currently involved in taking workshops or courses for example on critical and creative thinking, cooperative learning, approaches to literacy and inquiry based math/science. These topics often become the focus of large staff meetings and also small group meetings which individual teachers choose to attend. This kind of involvement has been instrumental in developing shared values which are powerful transformational devices. Everybody models for everybody else.

### Children's Learning

The staff's opportunities for learning are reflected in individual classrooms. On the whole, children are active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge whether it be kindergartners taking a

neighborhood walk to explore the changes in the season; first graders witnessing the metamorphosis of butterflies and then expressing what happened in prose or poetry; second graders predicting which of their hand-made boats are most likely to sink or float before actually putting them in water to compare results; third graders presenting an original puppet show which illustrates a theme discussed in reading; fourth graders constructing a village replicating what life was like for the Pueblo Indians; or fifth graders designing a new invention to share with others for problem solving. Whatever the activity, children are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and share their knowledge with others.

### Parents' Learning

As previously reported, the principal and teachers have involved parents in learning experiences. This involvement with the school takes many forms. For example, some parents volunteer as docent art instructors in the classrooms, media center helpers, computer assistants, field trip chaperones, life skills demonstrators, or special project helpers. Of special note is the evolution of the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Originally this group was very didactic and dictatorial in its focus, probably due to the fact that these parents were most influential in getting the school reopened. As a result, this core group felt that they could dictate school policy which was an obstacle the principal had to

overcome through strong leadership. The principal helped parents realize that though their input was solicited and regarded, certain responsibilities were beyond their purview. Now the focus is on parents as partners in their children's education.

### Impact of the Community of Learners' Concept

The majority of participants agreed that the concept of a community of learners at the Jefferson School has greatly influenced the attitudes of both children and adults toward learning. Bill Connors' (superintendent) comments provided an overview of how he believes the concept has affected everyone.

The Jefferson School under the principal's leadership and what's been happening there and the people she's pulled together and the melding of the staff, the growth and development of the staff. It's a school where the direction is clear of what we want it to be, what kind of a community we are, on what we're going after, from the efforts at school beautification, concern about the environment, to this whole notion of a very vocal and active parent group that has the right and opportunity to speak up and to be heard. The teachers who are constantly concerned about improving themselves as professional educators. The principal's sense of what it means to be an educational leader and the demands she places upon herself. . . so that she can be a better leader for these people. I think all of these things are very much an indication of why the Jefferson School is an outstanding school, and why it's a quality school, and why it represents so much of everything that is part and parcel of the Hopedale Public Schools.



Diane Epstein (assistant principal) also indicated:

The principal had the vision. She's worked with the teachers to create the goals to best carry out the vision. We've evaluated. It's an ongoing process; it's an open process. It's had its problems like every place else but I think we're right up in the nineties for success.

### Open Climate

Throughout the study, participants have revealed the importance of openness, an attitude evidenced in the climate of the building, whereby people felt trusted, respected, and empowered to expand upon the vision of a community of learners. The assistant principal indicated:

When you have a place that really has an open door and positive feeling, and people come and go. They come spontaneously and they offer this, that, or the other expertise or opinion, and it's received. They become part of the program that they might develop and they're active in the program.

Similarly, Chris Malone (teacher) commented on the role teachers have played in contributing to this open atmosphere.

In this particular school, the teachers have tried to make {learning} fun and even in sharing with other people, they have tried to make it fun. I know in some schools, the attitude is "I don't care if you want to learn it, you've got to learn it anyway." It's drudgery. I think they try to keep an open, fun atmosphere here. Maybe that's part of the result of it. I feel relaxed in this building.

### Influence on Children

Mary Burns (teacher) related the influence the concept of a community of learners has had upon the children in the school.

Children also are not afraid to take risks. One thing that Betty (principal) is good about is that part of learning is making mistakes and getting things wrong, and as a result {the children's} goal is more to see what they can learn and not to get their paper back and see how many things they got right or . . . wrong. So I feel that she has geared the school on a very positive kind of track in that the children are here to see how much information they can collect and gather and how much they can learn about learning how to learn. So when they're not in school when it's summer, for example, they know how to get a book; they know how to get a video; they know how to maybe try different hands-on things. They don't feel that they need a teacher there in order to help them learn. They are learning to be their own teacher in a sense.

In a similar way, Pat Nadowski (parent) commented:

They feel learning is ongoing; it's not a discipline. It's something that they're doing all the time. Numerous kids are doing journals over the summer to submit for next year, and I think that's remarkable. From the children you couldn't get to read one book over the summer, now they're not only reading everything on the summer reading list but they're also keeping journals. I think that's a positive indication. It's a lot of children. It's not one or two children or the children who seem to be more intellectually oriented in that way. It's all of them. They all feel they want to accomplish reading the whole list.

Pat also remarked, as did Mary Burns, on the children's motivation to learn on their own and for their own enrichment.

You don't even need the affirmation of a teacher to continue. The kids, before I left to come here, were working on a rain forest poster. For themselves, just to do it for themselves. That obviously didn't come from nowhere; it was a carryover from something they didn't get to do. And it doesn't matter that a teacher won't see it. They're doing it for their own gratification.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) supported the view of children's being involved in learning at home as well as in school.

It's easy to see and measure the level of commitment to learning during the school day. I think our successes come when we see the number of students involved in after school enrichment programs, vacation courses and summer school enrichment courses. Participation in home reading programs during the school year and summer reading programs during the summer are proof of increased involvement in the personal education of students.

Pat Nadowski (parent) felt that this approach to learning was what was most valuable for children.

{This is} something that will keep them for a lifetime. It's a life skill because it's an approach to a problem or an approach to learning that they'll keep. That's valuable. The facts will eventually filter through and more important facts will take their place, but this approach will stay.

### Influence on Teachers

Most teachers agreed that the concept of a community of learners has affected their attitudes toward learning in a positive way. Examples of this have been provided throughout the study which are similar to Mary Burns' statement.

I feel that I've grown more here even though I got my master's degree in the past when I was in other buildings. I feel that I've learned an awful lot about philosophy here compared to other places that I was.



Fran Godfrey (teacher) added:

As for the staff, I don't think there has been a staff member who hasn't taken either summer courses or in-service courses or served as members of committees or task forces as mentioned.

Lou Davis (teacher) provided another perspective, however.

I feel that education needs to be held in higher esteem than it is now for a concept like this to really move ahead. I find I have very little extra time in my school day to think about the type of proposals Barth mentions in his materials.

Terry Francis (teacher) reflected on the negativity of a few members in the learning community.

I just feel as though negativity . . . it would be nice if people weren't that way. However, I guess in this particular school, I would say eighty percent of the people here are really on the way to becoming a community of learners. The other people I suppose are a good balance because they are good teachers. It's been positive.

Continuing in a positive vein, Fran Godfrey (teacher) noted:

I just want to say that I was really privileged to be part of this community. I don't feel that it would have been possible for me to grow as much professionally and personally had I not been a part of this community of learners. I feel that we're all trying to create the optimal environment for each member to grow and develop into a lifelong learner, truly excited by learning and thinking.

This, in fact, has been the challenge offered in the concept of a community of learners - - how to become lifelong learners.

## Influence on Parents

When participants were asked if the concept of a community of learners had influenced parent participation, they ranged from "Yes, very much so, absolutely" to "I don't think it has. Many schools have as much parent participation as ours." Some participants provided examples of how parent participation has grown. Terry Francis (teacher) commented:

Not in the beginning. Betty (principal) had to go out and find people who would be willing to help in whatever way. Now I believe she has a list in the office of people with skills. They are knocking at the door. There are a lot of people who have worked in this building. It is not unusual to find four or five parents anywhere doing something with the kids.

Chris Malone isn't sure whether parent participation is due to the concept of a community of learners, the kind of community it is, or the principal's personality.

There are a lot of volunteers, but I don't know if that's because of the kind of community it is here. Because in many cases the mothers of these families are not working. They can come into the school and do things, and they are very good about it. And in large extent they are a fairly well educated group so they can do many of the things. For instance, I have someone come in to check books and put them away. They have no fear of the computer. They seem to be computer literate because the media center is computerized. They don't seem to feel unprepared to come in and do an art program. . . . They seem very willing to do it. I don't know if that's because of community of learners or if that's because of Betty's personality that they seem to respond. She is a very gracious lady. . . . Whether they are responding to her or . . . her bag, I'm not sure.

The assistant principal answered:

The same thing that works for children and teachers works for parents that if you encourage them and you act upon the things they offer, be it positive or with adjustment, they're going to come back and offer more, I think. That's happened.

Mary Burns (teacher) commented on the financial supportiveness of the parents which reflected their feelings of trust.

I feel that the parents are very supportive in the school. I have been in other buildings where the parents would not give the principal funds for anything unless they had a written kind of logic or {it} had been brought up before a whole group of parents and discussed first. . . . In this building, Betty says she has an idea and needs X amount of dollars. Parents are very willing to fund if she doesn't have the money for that. . . . I feel there's a trust there. They have grown to trust the teachers and trust Betty that her reason for being here is to help the children.

Fran Godfrey (teacher) indicated that parent participation also goes beyond fund raising.

Parents are participating in a home-school evening program, docent art programs, special projects like quilt making, and recycling classes. We have set up a parent directory in our school where parents fill out cards that list their special interests, job skills, or whatever to share with the teachers or the students. Parents feel more comfortable in the school. They are becoming more of a partnership rather than adversarial relationships developing. It's interesting to see the first year we came to the building. Every year they'd give us this backlog of requests for teachers; parents wanted their kids in a certain teacher's room. We have gone from a large number of requests to virtually none at all. I think that's nice.



Pat Nadowski (parent) indicated:

I think the level of parent participation is lower than I would like to see it. I'm not exactly sure of how to bring it to a higher level, because it's rewarding on all levels, for the children, for the teachers, and for the parents themselves.

Ann Ballardo (parent) commented on the effect parent participation has had on her.

It's fun, from my perspective, it's fun! I really hate to miss a PTO meeting or whatever because I have so many nice friends. It's nice to work together with groups of people that want to work together for a purpose and have fun in the process.

The comments of Lou Davis (teacher) revealed a different perspective when asked about whether the concept of a community of learners had influenced the attitudes of the children and adults.

Overall I would have to say minimally. In most cases, the adults and children in the school already have a positive attitude toward learning. I feel many of the daily activities performed by teachers are done because they care about their students and enjoy what they're doing, not as a result of the community of learners' concept. Many of these activities would likely encompass this concept.

Lou's comments provide a caution in drawing wide sweeping conclusions regarding the impact of a community of learners. In the section which follows, a summary, conclusion, and recommendations will be given.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

This study focused on a descriptive analysis and evaluation of the evolution of a community of learners in an elementary school setting. The literature cited in Chapter 2 seems to indicate that if education reform is to be effective, it is essential that it involve the educators within the schools in the process. The premise is that students will learn, grow, develop, and achieve more meaningfully if they are educated in a community in which the adults are also learning. The current literature, however, tends to contain suggestions rather than concrete examples of a learning community in action. For this reason, the focus of this study has been on a particular school's evolution in living out this concept.

The process of living out the concept of a community of learners in this particular elementary school since 1987 seems to support what the literature indicates as being crucial factors in its development. These factors are leadership, vision, change, and culture. Although these factors are important individually, it is their interrelatedness, which has significantly affected the growth and development of the community of learners. A case study approach that utilized qualitative data from

interviews, participant observation, and supporting documents has provided the basis for the description and evaluation of the evolution of the concept of a community of learners. In the following sections, a summary of each research question will be provided.

### Research Question #1

How do members of the school define a community of learners?

It was evident from participants' responses that they share a common understanding regarding the concept of a community of learners. They view themselves as a group of people, comprised of adults and children alike, who share the common goal of learning together. The emphasis is on learning as an ongoing process which occurs not only in the classroom, but extends beyond it as well. Adults and children have many opportunities to share and learn together. The common concern for children has caused a great deal of dialogue among teachers, administrators, parents, and the extended community.

Being a community of learners has involved risk-taking. People have been encouraged to view mistakes as part of the learning process. In actuality this remains hard to do in the total school setting.

The evolution of a community of learners has provided the staff, principal, and parents the opportunity to act as role models for the children. Children see that their teachers, principal, and parents are learners, too. Having this emphasis has led to more parental



involvement in the school. Participants referred to this as the “open door” policy whereby parents are invited to come in and share their learnings with the children. The feeling is that “we’re all in this together.” The underlying theme of openness recurred throughout the study as being necessary for the living out of a community of learners.

Parental involvement has not been without its problems, however. Historically, teachers have been ambivalent about inviting parents into their classrooms, and this school has been no different in this regard. However, as the teachers developed their common vision and goals, their self-confidence increased so that they felt more comfortable to include parents as learners, too. Although much effort has been expended in this area, it should be noted that some ambivalence still remains.

### Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:

- commitment to shared beliefs and values?

Participants noted the unique opportunity occasioned by the reopening of the school. The principal was able to share her vision of a community of learners with staff before school opened during a summer workshop. What was built, was built together. Before the process of shared values could be developed, however, the diverse experiences and backgrounds of both staff and students needed to be acknowledged.

As one participant stated:

To come away with a kind of unified vision of taking this eclectic group and making it one community with a shared vision was pretty difficult.

The “seeds” of a culture supportive of everyone’s learning and development were planted at that opening workshop and continue to grow to this day. Participants expressed their initial excitement at being part of the reopening, but also a corresponding uncertainty and ambivalence. Instrumental in alleviating this anxiety has been the spirit of openness in the school’s culture which has increased people’s comfortability and allowed for risk-taking. The building of trusting relations has been influenced by the shared belief that everyone is a learner, and the corresponding respect of diversity in the living out of this belief. Through everyone’s participation, a sense of collegiality has developed that enables people to share ideas, modify them, and in that sense change results from people working together. Two of the teachers who were interviewed questioned whether members’ shared values were a result of the concept of a community of learners or were due to their dedication to learning and teaching.

It is important to note that there were a few teachers who did not share the value of everyone’s learning/working together and chose to transfer to another school. It appears that the emphasis on collegiality, although cited as important for learning, is still not common for those in schools.

## Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:  
- empowerment of members?

In discussing empowerment, many participants referred to the principal's openness and willingness to share power. The principal has encouraged open communication and people's respecting of differences. This has supported an honoring of people's wants and an honest sharing of ideas. The principal has also modeled empowerment through learning. By being a learner and risk-taker herself, she has encouraged others to try new programs, take courses, and be receptive to university and parent participation in the school.

With empowerment comes responsibility as expressed by some of the participants. One teacher stated:

Ideas and proposals are suggested, investigated, and then adopted or not, depending on the consensus of the group.

This same point of view was echoed by a parent who said:

I think there's a lot of freedom to express your ideas. Whether you get turned down or they are accepted.

Empowerment with responsibility has not been easy, however. The desire to shut the door and "do what you want to do" was expressed by one teacher participant. This teacher also indicated how it can be difficult to share that power with parents as well. The principal has also experienced the difficulty of keeping a balance regarding empowerment.



## Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:

- trusting, collegial relationships?

Once again the influence of the principal was evident in participants' responses. One participant stated that there was an innate feeling in the building that if someone wanted to do something, the opportunity was there. The view was also expressed that collegiality was helped in the beginning by the newness of participants being involved together. What sustains the collegiality, however, is the openness of the principal and staff to new ideas and programs.

In addition, the staff have been encouraged to share with one another through summer workshops, staff meetings, classroom visits, and informal opportunities as well. Parents have benefited from staff's collegiality and approachability which in turn has increased their comfortability level. The openness that is demanded in trusting, collegial relations, although desirable, has not been easy to achieve.

## Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:

- experimentation and risk-taking?

Participants agreed that the encouragement of experimentation and risk-taking involved several interrelated factors, such as empowerment, trust, openness, and comfortability. A culture supportive of these factors

encouraged staff's participation in an inquiry-based science effort, an enrichment program, a school-based staff development emphasis as well as a collaboration with other schools and school systems. Parents, too, commented on the relationship of empowerment and trust to risk-taking. They used the beautification effort as an example. The principal had to trust and take a risk that parents' efforts would actually beautify the school grounds.

The openness of administrators and staff has been significant to experimentation and risk-taking. Participants commented on the principal's willingness to listen to staff's ideas regarding new approaches/programs and finding the means to support them. People need to feel comfortable before taking a risk and this has been supported. As staff and administrators have worked together, they have adapted to change. One example of this was the curriculum and materials being in place when the school reopened. During the six years since the school's reopening, the staff have adapted to change and have involved the curriculum that teachers and children initiated.

Children have also been encouraged and supported as risk-takers. The culture supports everyone's enrichment and staff utilize problem solving approaches to learning that encourage children's risk-taking.

Two participants contributed somewhat different perspectives. One commented on the reflection given by staff before deciding to do something, which is not necessarily incompatible with risk-taking. The

other communicated the outside pressures involved in risk taking. This participant felt that the new legislation regarding education reform could affect teachers' and administrators' willingness to take risks.

### Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:

- respect for diversity?

Participants agreed on the school culture's honoring of diversity. A prevailing attitude was that the culture not only accepted the differences of children, staff, and parents, but celebrated them as well. One participant felt that respect for diversity was a natural outcome of having a culture supportive of openness and empowerment. In addition to the school's providing different programs with a multicultural emphasis, it also pursues deeper understandings through classroom studies of different cultures and their contributions.

### Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:

- balance between individual and collaborative efforts?

Once again participants indicated the importance of openness in balancing individual and collaborative efforts. Some commented on the principal's openness to individual's ideas, and how others as individuals felt free to risk and share with one another. The opinion was also



expressed that neither approach is valued over the other, although one participant felt the staff preferred to work individually rather than collaboratively. Several examples were given of collaborative efforts involving both staff and students. The superintendent commented on "everyone's efforts to equalize opportunities for all students."

It was evident from participants' responses that the balance between individual and collaborative efforts has been difficult to maintain at times. The group is comprised of people with strong personalities and capabilities. Power struggles have occurred and been dealt with periodically. However, a climate of openness has helped people address these concerns, whether at a particular grade level or schoolwide. The school's vision and goals as benchmarks have helped to depersonalize confrontations at times. They have also been instrumental in maintaining a balance between individual and collaborative efforts. Although there has been freedom to try new ideas, this is part of an overall plan because the shared vision and goals provide the framework for what occurs.

For individual and collaborative efforts to be successful, much time and effort on everyone's part has been necessary. It has been important for the principal to listen, encourage, and be a team member as well as a leader. Despite these efforts, one participant referred to the reluctance of some members to accept others' suggestions and/or offer their own.

Parents provided examples of their involvement in individual and collaborative efforts. One example given was the important part they play in kindergarten orientation. Another example was the school's outreach to the community through the principal's parent aide in education program.

### Research Question #2

How does the school culture contribute to:

- personal and professional growth of members

Participants believed that the school culture supported both personal and professional growth. Although levels of participation varied according to individual's choices, the influence of the principal and other staff members was evident throughout the responses. The superintendent cited the efforts of both individuals and teams of people from the Jefferson School who are providing leadership both in the school and school system. This leadership is in both curriculum and service areas, such as an intergenerational program.

The school culture with its vision and goals encourages people to be learners. One participant stated:

The administration recognized that staff development is the key to improving the caliber of the community itself.

People have been encouraged not only to be learners themselves, but also to share their learning with colleagues. The principal has been an

active participant and learner herself in workshops attended by staff. The support provided by the staff and the principal's working together has been evident.

Parents felt that the culture has supported their personal and professional growth as well. They commented on the positive learning opportunities provided by the school's special programs and speakers. They also felt that notices, such as the principal's monthly calendar, provided information about monthly events and the principal's message also helped them grow personally and professionally.

### Research Question #3

What leadership practices have been supportive to the development of a community of learners?

Participants' responses to the principal's leadership practices revealed the interrelationship of vision, culture, and change. The principal shared with all constituencies her vision of a community of learners which was based on her personal and professional beliefs. The process of developing the vision has been slow. It was necessary for the principal to take into account and respect the differing personalities and life experiences of those involved. In order to build a community, respect for these differences had to be built. The principal recognized the need for staff to expand upon the vision and provided many opportunities to work together and to plan both short and long term goals.



Some participants commented that by setting up short term goals during summer workshops and discussing how they could be accomplished during the nine months of school, they learned how to discuss, dialogue, and interact with one another. One participant indicated: "This has been a tangible way of making the vision of a community of learners operative." The same kind of sharing has occurred at staff meetings during the school year. All staff members have been involved in the process of developing goals reflective of the vision. Because of this, they feel a vested interest in the vision and goals of the school. In implementing these goals, they are encouraged to continue their own professional growth and share their learnings with colleagues.

Parents also provided examples of the principal's sharing of her vision with them. She has done this through such vehicles as personal meetings and letters to parents, the sharing of symbolic things, such as T-shirts, posters, and placards, her treatment of people, and the way the school operates. One parent remarked:

It's not just the principal at the helm and the teachers are under her. She does reiterate the vision. . . . I think the more she says it, the more we see it. . . . It's not just a lot of verbiage; it's a reality.

The school's Open House was also cited as a vehicle for children to teach their parents about the learning opportunities in the classroom.

Although parents were not involved in the development of the vision, they felt welcome to become involved in its implementation. They commented on how the involvement has grown and changed over the

years and how each new person has made a unique contribution. This dynamic quality of vision which is affected by culture and change is what keeps the community vital. In a similar way, the assistant principal commented on the cumulative effect of a vision which encourages learning. The principal's openness to new ideas from others, has led to changes, adjustments, and the creating of programs. This has necessitated continued trust and respect, not only from the principal, but very importantly with all members of the staff as well.

Participants agreed that vision has played a significant role in the school's culture. The vision of a community of learners has affected the events, activities, ongoing programs, and the personal and collective views associated with the school. Both teachers and parents indicated the aspect of fun involved in living out this concept. One teacher said: "It's a very upbeat place." By having her doors open, she has grown professionally. She continued: "It makes it fun because we are all learning together." A parent echoed this sentiment regarding her involvement: "It's just been fun!"

Participants also felt that the principal had encouraged their personal and professional growth. Their responses were very similar to those concerning the culture's promotion of personal/professional growth, which is another example of the close relationship between leadership and culture. The principal has continually shared professional articles, information on course offerings and workshops, and provided speakers

for community members. Both teachers and parents cited the opportunities to share ideas together on an equal basis.

The emphasis on personal and professional growth has influenced teaching/learning practices in the classroom. The leader's openness to change and respect for the individual have encouraged staff to feel free to explore different learning opportunities and practices in the classroom. Children have also become more independent in seeking out ways to continue classroom learning on their own. Parents, too, have been invited to participate in learning opportunities in the classroom in various ways. They also have received instruction on school programs at PTO meetings.

Participants revealed that the principal's encouragement of collegiality has been essential to the progression of the community of learners. Many participants referenced this previously, particularly in their comments on vision and culture, which once again illustrates the interrelatedness of the factors. Some participants indicated their belief that collegiality is part of the principal's nature and her way of doing things.

Collegiality has had a positive effect on decision making. Each person's view is respected and decisions are made on the basis of how they will help implement the vision and goals of the school. Parents have also felt that the principal has encouraged collegiality in the sense of their being able to share as parents. Of particular importance to them



was the feeling that they have a vital role to play in contributing to the community of learners. Time and collaboration have also been essential for collegiality to thrive. Collegiality, however, has not been without a price for both the principal, staff, and parents as they have worked through controversial issues which occur when people collaborate.

#### Research Question #4

Can factors be isolated that hinder or enhance the development of a community of learners?

Participants felt that the interrelated factors of leadership, vision, culture, and change contained aspects which could be viewed as enhancing and inhibiting the development of a community of learners. While these will be considered separately, there will be a necessary overlap at times. Individual's own mindsets and interpretations of issues and events contributed a great deal to how these factors were viewed.

#### Enhancing Factors

The underlying theme which recurred during the study as being essential to the development of a community of learners was openness, whether it was referred to as, for example, the "principal's openness," "staff openness," "open forum," "open door policy," or "openness to ideas." The superintendent discussed the significant role of the principal in defining and living the concept of a community of learners. Other participants commented on the principal's openness to look at things

from different perspectives, ranging from budgets to programs for the enhancement of the community of learners. Parents felt that it took vision, trust, and courage for the principal to open the door to parents. Staff also have exhibited openness in their pursuit of this concept at summer workshops, meetings during the year, and sharing of ideas throughout grade levels.

Staff commented on the principal's acceptance of them as professionals and her corresponding support of their innovative efforts. They also felt supported in their pursuit of learning opportunities, such as courses, university affiliations, and awareness of new educational trends. In turn, the principal has recognized individual staff member's achievements through informal get-togethers with the staff. Participants also felt the principal's support in their personal lives, particularly during times of transition and loss.

The constancy of the staff was also viewed as an enhancing factor. This has led to a bonding process as staff have worked together over a period of time to develop their goals and the means to achieve them both individually and collaboratively. An outgrowth of the constancy of staff has been the constancy of children's programs. Although adaptations are made, programs are not being changed constantly. In this way, children experience a continuity in their schooling from kindergarten through fifth grade.

A significant factor in the development of this community of learners has been the commitment and caliber of its members, whether it be the principal, teachers, parents, students, or community groups. Participants felt that the principal's leadership exhibited an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the community as a whole and of individual members. She has kept informed of her changing role and the personal and professional skills she needs to accomplish her mission. The vision, which is long term and may never be reached totally, nevertheless, has provided a positive focus and direction as members strive together to enrich each other's learning.

#### Inhibiting Factors

Just as openness has been an underlying theme contributing to the enhancement of the community of learners, the lack of it or the misinterpretation of its meaning, has also been an impediment. The Open Forum, which was previously indicated as enhancing factor, was also viewed by a few participants as inhibiting the purpose for which it was intended. The problem seems to have stemmed from a misunderstanding of some individuals regarding its purpose. It became negative when the focus turned from ideas to personalities.

The human factors of personal relationships and compatibility of people have been essential to the development of a community of learners. However, there have been times, as there are in any group, when problems have surfaced in this regard. Being a community of



learners has intensified these problems, but when people have been open, they have been able to address them. One participant referred to the negativity of three or four staff members who she feels are threatened not so much by change, but by change they cannot control. Strong personalities can inhibit as well as enhance the community of learners. When these personalities involve issues of control, the progress of the community is impeded. Another participant indicated that some staff members felt threatened by having monthly meetings in individual classrooms. This was cited in previous sections as being a positive aspect of the community of learners. The balance between individual and collaborative efforts has been difficult to maintain. When does individuality become teacher isolation and correspondingly, when does collaboration interfere with a teacher's involvement in his or her own work? The principal, too, needs to keep a balance in her openness, and determine when closure is necessary in decision making.

From the parents' perspective, human factors have also been impediments in involving more parents. Of particular concern is the need not only to improve communications with the non-English speaking population, but also to motivate the entire parent community to become involved. One parent also indicated that she felt some parents' traditional ideas of schooling can be a negative factor for a school that is trying to innovate.

In addition to the human factors cited, participants also felt that certain external factors have been impediments to the development of a community of learners. Both the inadequacy of financial resources in the system and the local school's control over spending have been detrimental to the community's progression. Some participants also indicated that lack of time has impacted on the community of learner's development. A final inhibiting factor indicated by one participant referred to the changing role of the principal under the recently passed Education Reform Act. She felt that in light of this legislation perhaps principals would not be so willing to empower teachers in the future. She also questioned whether the new legislation would be a deterrent to a concept like the community of learners which empowers people from within to determine how to improve their school.

### Conclusions

It is evident that the reopening of the Jefferson School in 1987 provided a unique opportunity for its members to build together a community of learners. The data from the study indicate that the vision of a community of learners originated with the principal who was influenced in its formation by her personal and professional beliefs. She sought a vehicle to unite the four disparate groups of children, teachers, and parents who came from different parts of the city. In the beginning, the

emphasis was not so much on the vision, but rather on building a culture which was supportive of everyone's growth and development. At the time, the principal did not realize the interrelatedness of leadership, vision, change, and culture. This realization came later as she did more reading and living out of the concept with others. None of this would have been possible without the willingness of members to expand upon the vision, to work together to understand its meaning, and most importantly to strive to live it.

Living out this concept has evolved over a long period of time and has been enlarged by a participative process involving all members of the school community. What began as a very "fuzzy" vision has become the framework from which the goals, objectives, and activities of the school originate. Learning is the school's main concern and all the members, adults and children alike, are learners. Role modeling has been a powerful force in this community. The focus has provided for a great deal of dialogue among members: teachers, administrators, children, parents, and the extended community outside the school.

The data from the study also indicate that a significant factor in this community of learners has been the collegiality of its members. Although the newness associated with the school's reopening was instrumental in its initiation, the spirit of openness has kept collegiality alive. It has allowed participants to engage in honest confrontations, but not until the development of trusting relationships based upon the shared belief that



everyone is a learner. A culture of collegiality involving honest confrontation has not been the norm for teachers historically. Rather the practice has been to complain behind closed doors or in the teachers' room. Although progress has been made in this area since the school's reopening in 1987, there is still much to be done. Collaboration has taken much time, effort, and energy on everyone's part. Participants are beginning to realize that with empowerment comes the responsibility to work collaboratively to address conflicts and find ways to continue to grow and develop as a community of learners. In the process, there is a continued need to respect individuality, since it is as Fullan and Hargreaves indicate: "The key to personal renewal which in turn is the foundation for collective renewal" (1991, pp 43-44).

The process of becoming a community of learners has not been easy. The data illustrate the interrelated roles that leadership, vision, culture, and change have played in its initiation, but its development and application have demanded much time and energy of participants. The underlying theme of openness has exerted both positive and negative influences on this community. Key to the development of a community of learners have been the personal and professional qualities of those involved and the context in which this concept has been and continues to be lived out. The principal, as an active participant, has witnessed the growth of children, teachers, and parents as they have become active learners through inquiry, experimentation, and problem solving together

in their everyday lives. Whether or not this is a result of the concept of a community of learners, no one can be sure, but it certainly has been and continues to be worth the effort!

### Recommendations

#### Jefferson School

Although the Jefferson School has made much progress in becoming a community of learners, it is evident from the data that the living out of this concept has taken much time, effort, and willingness on everyone's part. For this reason, it is essential that all members continue to explore the implications of learning and growing together. The openness which has characterized this community needs to continue to be expanded upon to include all constituencies. The principal should continue to enlist collaboration as members reflect upon how best to actively engage children in the learning process. The spirit of collaboration which has begun to take root will not thrive without the continued support and encouragement of all members.

Learning opportunities need to be continued, not only in the areas of current learning theory and its application, but also in group process skills and creative problem solving techniques as members work together. At the same time as members collaborate, it is necessary for them to respect and value the uniqueness of each individual. In the

process, however, a few negative individuals cannot be allowed to prevent the group's moving forward in the accomplishment of school goals. The balance between individual and collaborative efforts has been and continues to be a great challenge for this community's development.

Parent and community involvement needs to be increased through a continued outreach on the part of all members. A good start has been made in this area, but the principal and teachers need to expand upon their risk-taking efforts to include parents and community members in the learning situation. A vehicle needs to be developed to increase participation, particularly of the non-English speaking parent members. The larger community's involvement, such as business partnerships, needs to be expanded upon as well. In this way the openness within the school will continue to be developed outside the school for the benefit of all members.

In addition, the influence of outside contextual factors, such as the Education Reform Act, need to be acknowledged and dealt with both realistically and creatively. While some contextual factors may not be able to be changed, they can very often provide fresh approaches to challenging situations.

The findings of this study are particular to one elementary school which has been involved in becoming a community of learners. This model can provide an example of one school's efforts in living this



concept. Although these findings seem to support what the literature indicates regarding the interrelationship of leadership, vision, culture, and change in its development, the way in which it has been lived out is unique to this school. There is a need for further study and application of this concept in other school settings.

### Additional Studies

Among the kinds of study that could be explored for the application of the concept of a community of learners are the following:

1. A comparative study of other schools involved in living out the concept could be conducted to determine what factors have been significant to its development.
2. The perceptions of staff who have been involved in living out the concept of a community of learners over a period of time could be compared with perceptions of members who are new to the school.
3. Leadership practices of a team of people as opposed to one person (principal) striving to become a community of learners might be considered to determine similarities/differences.
4. The application of the concept of a community of learners in schools that are newly opened might be compared/contrasted with its application in schools that have been in existence for many years.

5. A study could be done which would investigate the strategies utilized by a principal newly appointed to an existing school in implementing the concept of a community of learners.
6. A qualitative study might be conducted in which all the members of a staff would be interviewed regarding the factors applicable in implementing the concept of a community of learners.
7. A combined qualitative/quantitative study might be undertaken to determine teachers' attitudes toward parental involvement in living out the concept of a community of learners.
8. A study might be conducted which would focus on the commonalities of those who are advocates of the concept of a community of learners and those who are reluctant to become a community of learners.
9. A study could be undertaken to determine what effect the recently passed education reform act might have on those who are living out the concept of a community of learners.

Schools cannot reform alone, but certainly a valid place for beginning is within the school itself. Barth (1990) issues the challenge for principals, teachers, students, and parents to work together and "create within their school an ecology of reflection, growth, and refinement of practice - a community of learners" (p.162).

## APPENDIX A

### OPEN INVITATION TO STAFF

June 21, 1993

To: Staff  
From: Betty  
Re: Status of My Doctoral Work

I am writing to update you regarding the status of my doctoral work. As you know, I presented an initial draft to my committee last fall. I was able to utilize their suggestions during the past year as I worked on my proposal mainly on weekends and during vacations.

Since I was concerned about the possibility of having any staff member feel pressure regarding participating in the study and the fact that as the principal, I would also be the interviewer, I discussed this with my committee. The committee recommended that I hire someone else who was trained in qualitative analysis and the interviewing process to do the interviewing. This person would tape the interview and then mail it directly to a second person who would then transcribe it. The tape would be returned to the interviewee and the transcription sent to me with a pseudonym. In this way, the anonymity of teachers interviewed will be preserved. In addition, pseudonyms will also be given to the school and school district.

The committee also advised me to have a sample of approximately three classroom teachers and one specialist. They also suggested interviewing two administrators (superintendent and assistant principal) and two parents.

When I asked for volunteers initially, I did receive the required number. However, at this time, I would like to extend an open invitation to any teacher who might be interested in participating in this study to let me know. I also will check with the people who volunteered initially to see if they may still want to participate.



The interview would last approximately forty-five minutes to one hour and would be conducted the week after school closes at a time convenient for you and the interviewer. I realize that this is not ideal timing, but I also felt it was essential that I not infringe on people's work time. Since the interviewer also works in a school setting, he was not free to conduct the interviews before this. In essence, I guess there is no ideal time and I appreciate your willingness to participate if you can spare the time. I would introduce the interviewer and provide a cool space for the individual interviews in one of the basement offices. I would also provide an interview guide beforehand. Most importantly, I will share with you the necessary information regarding your consent, your rights, etc. and a copy of my abstract and anything else you may want to read beforehand. In no way will material gained from your participation in this interview affect your current job status.

Please let me know by Friday if you think you may be interested in participating. Inquiring about the process does not in any way place any responsibility on anyone to participate. In fact, anyone who volunteers is also free to withdraw before, during, or after the interview without prejudice on my part. **MANY THANKS!**

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FORM

#### A Case Study of the Evolution of a Community of Learners in an Elementary School Setting

I. At this time, I am completing doctoral studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. As you know, my research has focused on the concept of a “community of learners” which is defined as a coherent group of people who are bonded by shared beliefs and values in order to derive meaning not only from information and experience, but also from the enhancement of the capacity to act and keep on learning. A major premise has been that students will learn, grow, develop, and achieve more meaningfully in a community in which the adults are also learning. The present research on the concept of a community of learners, although limited, seems to agree on its importance to school improvement. The concept supports the growing recognition that if education reform is to be effective, it needs to involve educators within the school in the process. A suggested focus is the total school and the total teacher as these relate to the learning of students.

Current literature, however, tends to contain suggestions rather than concrete examples of a learning community in action. For the past six years, our school has been involved in becoming a community of learners. Through a case study approach using naturalistic inquiry, my aim is to describe how the concept of a community of learners as cited in the literature compares and contrasts with its evolution in an elementary school setting. The results of this inquiry not only will assist us as we continue to develop our community of learners, but they also might inform the planning and/or implementation efforts of educators in other public elementary school settings who are interested in implementing the concept of a community of learners as they work to improve their schools.

II. As part of this study, you are being asked to participate in one interview of approximately one hour in length, which will be scheduled at your convenience in a setting that will be free from interruption. The interview questions will focus on the following areas: (1) your understanding of the concept of a community of learners; (2) factors

which may inhibit and/or enhance the development of a community of learners; (3) the relation of school culture to the evolution of a community of learners; (4) the role of leadership in its development.

III. Since the researcher is also the principal of the school being studied, the interviews will be conducted by an impartial interviewer trained in qualitative research methods. This is important for protecting anonymity and enlisting honest responses. The impartial observer will also mail the tapes to a second person who will act as the transcriber and assign pseudonyms and return the tapes to the individuals interviewed. The researcher, in turn, will receive the transcriptions with only pseudonyms indicated. The transcriptions will be analyzed in light of the recent literature on the concept of a community of learners.

Although I plan to use direct quotations where applicable in my dissertation, at no time will you be identified by name. Instead pseudonyms will be used with the representative sampling of nine volunteers who have had varied involvements with the development of the community of learners in the study. In addition, the city and school where the study occurs will also be given pseudonyms.

IV. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary without prejudice on my part. Furthermore, if you choose to participate, in no way will the material gained from the interviews affect your current job status. While consenting at this time to participate in these interviews, you may at any time withdraw from the actual interview process. Please feel free to contact me at home or in the office with questions or concerns.

V. Furthermore, while having consented to participate in the interview process, and having done so, you may withdraw your consent to have specific excerpts from your interview used in the study if you notify me within thirty days of the final interview. Once the study is complete, you will receive a summary of all results and conclusions. I will also be happy to share my dissertation with you.

VI. In signing this form, you are agreeing to the use of the material from your interview as indicated in III. If I want to use the material in your interview in any way not consistent with what is stated in III, I will contact you to get your additional written consent.



VII. In signing this form, you are also assuring me that you will make no financial claim on me for the use of the material related to your involvement in the study.

---

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the above statement and agree to participate as an interviewee under the conditions indicated.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### Purpose of Interview:

As you know, this interview is conducted as part of a research project. The interview with you will help to gather information on the impact of the evolution of a community of learners in an elementary school setting.

#### Ethics:

With your permission, I would like to tape record this interview to provide an accurate account of our conversation. The tape recording will be heard only by the interviewer and transcriber. In addition, your name will not be used in any report.

#### Topics to be Addressed:

My questions will focus on four main topics: 1) your understanding of the concept of a community of learners; 2) the relation of school culture to the evolution of a community of learners; 3) the role of leadership in its development; and 4) factors which may inhibit and/or enhance the development of a community of learners.

#### Demographics:

1. What is your relationship to the school?

- teacher
- administrator
- parent

#### Understanding of the Concept of a Community of Learners:

2. How would you explain the concept of a community of learners to someone who is new to the school?

3. What values does this community of learners share?

#### Influence of School Culture in Development of a Community of Learners

4. How has the school culture (the way we do things around here) contributed to shared beliefs and values?
5. How has the school culture contributed to the empowerment of its members?
6. How has the school culture encouraged experimentation and risk-taking?
7. How has the school culture encouraged respect for diversity?
8. How has the school culture promoted a balance between individual and collaborative efforts?
9. How has the school culture been supportive of the personal and professional growth of members?
10. What practices have most influenced the collegiality (professional sharing of ideas/interactions of staff, etc.) in the school?

#### Leadership Practices:

11. Has the principal shared a vision for the school? If so, how?
12. Have your ideas been enlisted in the development of this vision? If so, how?
13. Does this vision influence the culture of the school? If so, how?
14. Has the principal involved staff in establishing schoolwide goals? If so, how?



15. Has the principal encouraged your personal/professional growth? If so, how?
16. Has this influenced the teaching/learning practices in your classroom? If so, how?
17. Has the principal encouraged collegiality in the school? If so, how?

Factors Which May Inhibit/Enhance Development of a Community of Learners:

18. What factors have been most significant in the evolution of a community of learners?
19. What factors have impeded the evolution of a community of learners?
20. Has the concept of a community of learners had a positive effect on the school? If so, how?

Impact of a Community of Learners:

21. Has the community of learners' concept influenced the attitudes of the adults and children in the school setting toward learning? If so, how?
22. Has the concept of a community of learners influenced parent participation in the school? If so, how?
23. Is there anything else you would like to add?

The interview is over. Thank you for taking the time to share your comments.

APPENDIX D  
ACTION PLAN

COMMONWEALTH LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

1987-1988 Leadership Institute # 2 : Leadership in Supervision and Evaluation

Name: Elizabeth Bostrom School : \_\_\_\_\_  
District: \_\_\_\_\_

ACTION PLAN

Vision: The \_\_\_\_\_ School will be known for encouraging learning for everyone in a caring, collegial environment. Students, staff and parents will be viewed as a community of learners.

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Goal Statement: To develop with staff a positive school climate which will promote academic excellence for students. Clinical supervision of staff will reflect our goal to establish an environment which is conducive to learning.

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Year One Objectives: To determine with staff a clear, articulated vision of what the School stands for, a vision which includes core values and purposes.

Long Term Objectives: To develop a school culture which will promote the strengthening of teachers' skills, the systematic development of curriculum, the promotion of each learner's potential, and the involvement of parents/citizens in responsible school/community partnerships.

A C T I O N   P L A N

TIME CHART

Year 1987

	Mo	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J
<b>Objective I: school culture with staff</b>												
Activities: 1. Weeklong school workshop		x										
2. Share/discuss articles on school culture		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3. Brainstorm ways to establish school culture			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Objective II: Relate school culture to clinical supervision</b>												
Activities: 1. Elicit volunteers for clinical supervision		x	x									
2. Clinically supervise using school culture as one component				x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
3.												
<b>Objective III: Involve students in school culture</b>												
Activities: 1. Determine special monthly activities			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
2. Design logo which reflects school culture—display/discuss				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3. Plan, prepare for Rededication Ceremonies			x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
<b>Objective IV: Involve parents in school culture</b>												
Activities: 1. PTO Meetings - Parent Volunteer Program			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
2. Elicit support of parents in logo contest			x	x								
3. Plan, prepare for Rededication Ceremonies			x	x	x	x	x	x	x			



## APPENDIX E

### VISION STATEMENT

In order to help students respond effectively to the ever expanding concept of what it means to be human, it is important that the learning site be a true community of learners. The Jefferson School community realizes the importance of promoting all aspects of development - physical, intellectual, social, and moral. In our community, adults and children interact and support each other's learning, thereby creating a caring, nurturing environment for everyone's continued growth. Our school logo, **Up, Up And Away With Learning**, designed by one of the children, reflects the value of continuing to learn about self, others, and our world.

### FIVE YEAR GOALS

- A. To continue to provide for the development of the whole child through mutual respect and appreciation of individuality
- B. To develop an integrated approach to the implementation of the curriculum through:
  - 1. The utilization of a problem-solving approach to learning with an emphasis on critical/creative thinking for the enrichment of all students
  - 2. The implementation of a hands-on, inquiry-based approach in math and science

3. The continuation of a process approach to literacy, i.e., being knowledgeable of and able to utilize the various genres of spoken and written language to effectively interact in society
4. A true integration of multiculturalism into all aspects of the curriculum, a multiculturalism that values the similarities and differences that enrich our learning community
5. A continued process of assessment and evaluation that is reflective of children's learning experiences

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