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ABSTRACT

A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY DESCRIBING THE SUPPORT  
CULTURE FOR THE CHANGE PROCESS IN A SMALL  
PAROCHIAL, BOARDING SECONDARY SCHOOL

by

Stanley M. Rouse

Chair: Duane M. Covrig

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY DESCRIBING THE SUPPORT CULTURE  
FOR THE CHANGE PROCESS IN A SMALL PAROCHIAL, BOARDING  
SECONDARY SCHOOL

Name of researcher: Stanley M. Rouse

Name and degree of faculty chair: Duane M. Covrig, Ph.D.

Date completed: June 2009

Problem

History acknowledges that change in education is difficult. Literature suggests that the educational system plays a critical role in individual school-change initiatives. Educators need to seek for better understanding of the influence that system issues have on the change process. This study describes a change process experienced by one small boarding school in a parochial school system. It describes the change process as experienced by teachers in the school, administrators at various systemic levels, and parents of students in the school. Their story brings greater understanding of how culture of the system impacts school change.

## Method

This research used a qualitative single-case design in order to gain insight from the experience of the educators connected to the school in order to achieve greater understanding of how a system reacts to a school making significant change. The case was a small boarding high school in the Northeastern United States. The school is a part of the Seventh-day Adventist system of education, which is the largest Protestant system in the world.

Data were collected by interviews, focus groups, observation, and from documents. The data were analyzed for themes, connectedness, and constructions that did or did not intertwine, affirm, or conflict with each other. The stories were then retold in a chronological pattern describing the school's experiences from as many perspectives as possible.

## Results

The participants in this study described a system conflicted in its quest to maintain and improve on the quality of Adventist education. Five characteristics were revealed in the system as it related to the process of change.

1. The system tended to operate primarily from a well-established paradigm of holding schools accountable.
2. The system did not demonstrate a thorough understanding of what is known about change.
3. The system revealed that it lacked effective communication mechanisms and processes.

4. The system demonstrated some understanding of its role in school change, but events revealed it still had much to learn.

5. The system revealed a growing desire to facilitate positive educational change.

### Discussion

Education leadership within the system seemed to realize a need for change in order to bring improvement, yet frustrations remained from many who observed continued pressure for the school to operate within traditional approaches to education, only to do it better and more diligently. As the change was measured against established expectations, concerns were increased. When the change brought a level of chaos and a level of dissatisfaction among students and parents, the system responded by imposing greater accountability. The school's response to the expressed concerns from various stakeholders was to scale back the change. There is a need for the development of processes to facilitate change where there is demonstrated understanding and support of change experiences that are usually chaotic.

This education system like many others found its structure to be a hindrance to effective communication. There was a recognition that different support mechanisms were needed to develop better practices in education—beyond just verbal directives that proclaim support of change. This recognition came primarily from the administration level immediately responsible for the school. At this level in the system there was a measure of collaboration created in the change process. However, overall, the system did not provide deliberate, ongoing collaboration to develop new frames of references for

all

educators in the system. The result was an organization that had not created a context supportive of change.

There were times that leaders from various levels of the system stepped in to provide a collaborative solution to problems. When that happened the change process was energized. Leadership also acknowledged weaknesses in the system's support process for change, yet no dramatic changes were visible as the study ended. The process provided information demonstrating that education leadership within the system could know how to better facilitate change and, it was clear, they desired to learn the lessons provided.

Andrews University

School of Education

A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY DESCRIBING THE SUPPORT  
CULTURE FOR THE CHANGE PROCESS IN A SMALL  
PAROCHIAL, BOARDING SECONDARY SCHOOL

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Stanley M. Rouse

June 2009

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This dissertation is dedicated to:

Donna, my wife, who continued to love me anyway, would not let me quit, put up with piles of books and papers, and was alone more than she should have been.

Tricia, my daughter, who supported me through the process and listened to me rant and rave from time to time.

Garrett, my grandson, who did not have Papa around nearly enough and missed out on much wrestling.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background to the Problem**

There have been many voices calling for education reform. “Anyone familiar with the history of education in the United States is well aware that it is replete with reform efforts” (Marzano, 2003, p. 157). The efforts to reform public education “go back to the creation of the system itself” (Bodilly, Chun, Ikemoto, & Stockly, 2004, p. 3). “One of the constants within K-12 education is that someone is always trying to change it—someone is always proposing a new program or a new practice” (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 65). These calls for change are especially evident in the political arena.

The United States has had a steady stream of “education presidents” and the “public debate on educational reform is often feverish” (Thornburg, 2002, p. 4). Danielson (2002) wrote, “Every recent U.S. president has made education a top priority, and virtually all candidates for political office have policy recommendations to address the problem, as they interpret it” (p. vii). Education.com (n.d., a) described the issue of education as “proving to be a worthy sideshow in the 2008 presidential campaign” (para. 1). And, “according to research conducted by ED in '08, a whopping 89 percent of the

public wanted the candidates to spend more time talking about education”

(Education.com, n.d., b, p. 1).

Though there have been efforts to change, dissatisfaction with what takes place in schools continues to be heard. The No Child Left Behind Act is the latest effort by the government to bring a higher level of accountability to the nation’s public schools and has raised the stakes on schools being able to demonstrate higher levels of student learning (Bodilly et al., 2004; Marsh et al., 2005). However, some, such as Thornburg (2002), believe that many of these “proposed solutions are often offered only from the perspective of existing education models” (p. 4).

What some say is required is a “revolution” (Cossentino, 2004, p. ix). Senge (1999) states, “We must revolutionize the school experience” (p. 40). Fullan (2001) describes the revolution as “*reculturing* the teaching profession” (p. 136) and “‘reculturing’ schools” (p. 147). There is a need for change “not only in what is taught but also in how it is taught (Cohen, McLaughlin, & Talbert, 1993, p. 2). Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) express the need as “fundamentally rethinking the very core of what we teach and how we teach it” (p. 8).

### Challenges to Change

It would seem that, as in the business world, change could be made one classroom at a time, or one school at a time. As success is experienced individually, the trend would be for the innovation to spread throughout the system. However, public education is wrapped in bureaucracy—some see it as a bureaucracy that tends to maintain the status quo

rather than encourage change (Fullan, 2001; Senge et al., 2000). The established system tends to mandate what teachers are to teach and how they are to teach it. The latest example is the No Child Left Behind Act “which greatly expanded the role of the federal government in determining what goes on in the classroom” (Armstrong, 2006, p. 7). However, even before No Child Left Behind, public schools were set up to be controlled by larger social systems such as districts and states that set their policies and standards (Fullan, 2001; Senge et al., 2000).

The organizations that control public schools—the infrastructure—argue some, tend to be weak and inflexible in the support of change, send mixed messages with initiatives and directives, and tend not to support local initiatives (Fullan, 2001; Marsh et al., 2005).

Beyond the infrastructure of the system is the influence of parents who have very definite ideas of what and how their children should be taught (Senge et al., 2000). Parents may resist proposed changes because the changes cause classrooms and schools to look very different from when they went to school (Cossentino, 2004). Parents are part of the “power structure” of the community whose support is critical and without which “the chief executive officer [of the school district] is powerless as anyone else, and in fact will likely become the convenient scapegoat” (Fullan, 2001, p. 180) when the proposed change fails, as it often does without community support (Lambert, 2003).

The critics of change tend to create an inertia-hindering change by actively supporting what has been. Senge et al. (2000) summarize the strength of this inertia, “Coming to recognize how much the industrial-age school lives in each of us can be sobering” (p. 34). They contend that until we come to believe and face the liabilities in

the

“core assumptions upon which the industrial-age school is based” (p. 35) it is unlikely that we will encourage dramatic change.

Keefe and Amenta (2005) describe societal pressures on secondary schooling today as causing it to move “away from comprehensive renewal.” They believe, “Contemporary school standards, high-stakes testing, and accountability have more to do with politics, wealth, and power than they do with building consensus in the best interest of students” (p. 543). Armstrong (2006) argues that all these “politically” supported pressures have “deleterious effects” on students (p. 142).

Change can also be messy. Often things get worse before they get better. In the process, those attempting change are often not given needed resources or may not be willing to grapple with the challenges of the change (Fullan, 2001). Therefore, what appears is resistance and dissatisfaction (Cossentino, 2004) and after a time it is decided that the innovation should be rejected (Hall & Hord, 2001).

So, in the midst of a society where voices are heard calling for educational reform, teachers can feel as one voiced, “I guess we don’t believe significant change can occur under any circumstances” (Senge et al., 2000, p. 33).

Yet, some do believe dramatic educational change is possible. Fullan (2001) says: The *pressure* for reform has increased, but not yet the reality. The good news is that there is a growing sense of urgency about the need for large-scale reform, more appreciation of the complexity of achieving it, and even some examples of partial success. (p. 6)

Danielson (2002) adds, “The early 21<sup>st</sup> century is an exciting and challenging era for education. Many stars are in alignment: heightened awareness, legislative mandates, and validated approaches” (p. xiv). Wallis, Steptoe, and Miranda (2006) have found “enterprising administrators around the country [who] have begun to update their schools, often with ideas and support from local businesses” (p. 2).

### Complexity of Change

Fullan (2001) says, “Educational change depends on what teachers do and think—it’s as simple and as complex as that” (p. 115). As we have seen, there are those who believe the change required calls for deep-down-inside-the-heart fundamental reform. Teachers must change their beliefs and understanding, and all the while face tremendous diversity, complexity, and uncertainty—“a daunting and inescapable challenge” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 8).

Teachers, working alone, cannot bring about such dramatic change in lasting and meaningful ways. These changes require dependence on a school culture that facilitates and supports teachers (Cossentino, 2004). Then, supportive schools must themselves be supported.

Researchers have observed that change is accomplished more effectively by teachers who work within schools that collaborate. Collaborative schools remain collaborative only with the support of the district. “If the district does not foster professional learning communities by design, it undermines them by default” (Fullan, 2001, p. 165). Senge et al. (2000) have seen a small number of highly innovative public

schools that have made changes. But without the support of their districts, “few can sustain their innovations beyond the tenure of a few innovators” (p. 33). Lambert (2003) has observed how districts affect schools: “Excellent schools in poor districts implode over time, whereas poor schools in excellent districts get better” (p. 80). “Classrooms require an organizational infrastructure to sustain them” (Senge et al., 2000, p. 14).

The infrastructure of the public school system goes well beyond the districts. Governments must also be involved if dynamic change is to occur in the public schools. They should require accountability, provide the incentives of pressure and support, and must foster “capacity-building” (Fullan, 2001, p. 220). In other words they must provide resources, expertise, facilitation, and time for professional growth and strong collaboration to create the best opportunity for deep and lasting change (Fullan, 2001). Fullan states, “We have come to the conclusion that the larger infrastructure matters” (p. 219).

The districts and governments are all democratic political organizations where the constituencies of those entities have a say in how they operate. This brings us back to the parents and local citizens. If dramatic change is desired, the parents and citizens who make up the constituency of the school will need to acknowledge and give support to the idea that schools may look “very different from the schooling they experienced themselves.” And if they expect teachers to change “they must show they are willing to change too” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 27).

If a school is expected to be successful in bringing about dramatic change, it must be supported by a system that is willing to adopt and support deep changes in the fundamental philosophy of education. This system must understand that though change is

often messy and frustrating, support must be provided that will build the capacity of teachers and local school administrators to hang in there until the change becomes well established. It must understand and value the importance of the teacher—the one who makes the change a reality. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) contend that society must understand “that until it realizes that the quality and morale of teachers is absolutely central to the well-being of students and learning, all serious reform efforts are bound to fail” (p. 4).

Fullan (2001) concludes, “We have learned over the past decade that the process of educational reform is much more complex than had been anticipated” (p. 17). In order to realize effective dramatic reform in the classroom, it must be accomplished by the teacher with the support of a change culture throughout the system.

### **Statement of the Problem**

History acknowledges that change in education is difficult. Literature suggests that the educational system plays a critical role in individual school change initiatives. Educators need to seek for better understanding of the influence that system issues have on the change process.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study describes a change process experienced by one small boarding school in a parochial school system. It describes the change process as experienced by teachers in the school, administrators at various systemic levels, and parents of students in the school. As the story is retold from these perspectives it brings greater understanding of how

culture of the system impacts school change.

### **Research Question**

How do key stakeholders describe their experience of change within their education system?

### **General Methodology**

This research used a qualitative single-case design. It is qualitative because I sought “insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 2001, pp. 28, 29). I used this narrative design because I desired “to focus on experience and to follow where it leads” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 188). It is a case study because I wanted “to achieve as full an understanding of the phenomenon as possible” (Merriam, 2001, p. 28).

Data were collected by interviews, focus groups, observation, and from documents.

I analyzed the data for themes, connectedness, and constructions that did or did not intertwine, affirm, or conflict with each other. The stories were then retold in a chronological pattern describing from as many perspectives as possible the school’s experiences.

### **The Case**

The Seventh-day Adventist system of education is the largest Protestant system in the world. In North America it has three levels to which a school is accountable and by which the school is given directions as to how to educate. There is the conference that is



directly responsible to oversee the school (comparable to a public school district), the union that facilitates the education in several conferences (comparable to local or state government), and a division that oversees all schools in North America and administers a nationally recognized accreditation process (comparable to the national government). Established requirements imposed on the school by these various levels, political concerns and consequences, and parental influences, all impact what a school may accomplish. The research and literature described above have validity as we consider the challenges faced by an Adventist school seeking to make change.

Though the Seventh-day Adventist system of education has sought to provide a uniquely Adventist education, it is significantly influenced by the philosophy, goals, and requirements of the public education system. The education code of the union within which the school studied in this dissertation operates states:

It is the responsibility of the conference Office of Education to be informed of current national/state/country requirements which affect the curriculum and to inform schools of these requirements. These requirements must be met when determining the course offerings. (Atlantic Union Conference, 2009, p. 108)

Classroom instruction methods, time requirement of classes, general division of classes, the structure of grades, classroom management techniques, and required curriculum and textbooks used within the Adventist system have all been influenced by the public school arena. It is also true that education innovation within public education has impacted the education of this system.

As there are calls for educational change in society as a whole, there is also a recognition within the Adventist system of the need for change. From the North

American Division (2003) office of education, the highest level of the organization's educational system in North America, comes this proclamation, "*Journey to Excellence* is about change—innovative change that will result in school improvement" (p. 3). It also acknowledges the importance of infrastructure to the process of change by stating, "When all aspects of the educational environment foster ongoing innovation, quality schools will emerge" (p. 3).

*Journey to Excellence* (North American Division, 2003) encourages leadership to actively pursue change. "This publication should empower educational leaders to embark on a journey to excellence" (p. 3). It goes on, "However, excellent schools are not . . . the result of a single change event. Excellence is an organizational culture that encourages continual, planned improvement" (p. 3).

In order to understand how the Seventh-day Adventist system of education relates to change, the case for this study is a small Seventh-day Adventist boarding high school in the Eastern United States. It was chosen primarily because it is a school that undertook dynamic change. The school had been in financial difficulty for many years. When faced with changing or closing, it went through a process of restructuring to obtain a balanced budget with a limited number of students.

In the process of reorganization the methods of education delivery were discussed. The vision developed included the ultimate goal of an individualized curriculum where students would advance at their own pace with the learning process based in real-life experiences in the context of a spiritual, character-building education.

This school's process of change went from trying to survive, to building a

cutting-edge learning environment that provided the best methods possible for educating high-school students.

As the desired change has and will continue to develop over a number of years, this dissertation began by covering the experiences of school leadership finding ways to allow the school to survive, then describes in detail the first 2 years of the process in changing the academic delivery. I describe the school's journey into the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of this change.

### **Theoretical Framework**

My research was guided by the lenses of two theories. The first was the theory of organizational learning. Collinson, Cook, and Conley (2006) contend, "In the practical world of schools and school systems, organizational learning provides a sustainable avenue for change and an opportunity for continuous renewal from within." They go on to assert, "Organizational learning encourages a proactive stance instead of a reactive position" (p. 109). Within "the sociology of teaching literature, as well as conceptual and empirical work from education literature" they have found "interrelated conditions that may foster organizational learning in schools and school systems" (p. 110).

Fullan (2002) emphasizes the importance of educational organizations that promote learning. He says, "Change leaders work on changing the context, helping create new settings conducive to learning and sharing that learning" (p. 411). He contends that sustained improvement in schools "is not possible unless the whole system is moving forward" (p. 415). He emphasizes, "Professional learning communities are essential" (p.

415).

I sought to discover indications demonstrating that the Adventist system of education has characteristics of a learning organization. I also endeavored to uncover characteristics that may hinder their development into an organization that collaborates to bring professional learning.

The second is the theory of interventions. Hall and Hord (2001) remind us that most reformers “don’t have the opportunity to carefully and methodically design a self-changing approach.” It is especially difficult “if the innovation is one vastly unfamiliar” to those who will implement it. They propose that reformers need facilitators “to support implementors.” They continue, “Facilitators provide the interventions that can increase the potential for the success of change or allow it to fail” (p. 105).

“An intervention is an action or event that is typically planned or unplanned and that influences individuals (either positively or negatively) in the process of change” (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 106). From educational literature, Hall and Hord have identified intervention functions that are “deemed necessary for making change happen” (p. 108). In retelling the experiences of this school, I discovered interventions made by the system. I sought to help provide understanding of how these interventions impacted the change process.

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that narrative research relates to theory, I began “with experience as expressed in lived and told stories” (p. 40). The stories told included my “autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the *research puzzle*

(called by some the research problem or research question)” (p. 41). I focused on the experience and followed where it led, uncovering what it told through the lenses of the theories described. Merriam (2001) says, “The theoretical framework defines the research problem” (p. 44) as it defines how one looks at the experience and what one seeks to discover. The theoretical lenses helped determine the questions asked and gave form to the investigation. I attempted “to build the essence of experience” (Creswell, 2003, p. 133). I attempted to create “a kind of conversation . . . between theory and the stories of life contained in the inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41).

It was also my desire to create “a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 41, 42). I sought to give such a rich descriptive, heuristic account of the experiences that it offers “readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications” (p. 42).

### **Significance of the Study**

From 1979 to 2003 enrollment in Adventist secondary schools declined from 18,563 to 15,334. During this time the number of boarding high schools decreased from 51 to 35. Of those 35, ten of those boarding schools had less than 100 students in 2003 (Epperson, n.d.). It is imperative that Seventh-day Adventist schools, especially small boarding high schools, are facilitated in making changes that may help reverse the trend of decreasing enrollment through improved education even with smaller numbers of students. This urgency along with the philosophy of the North American Division (2003) encouraging educational change makes it essential that we purposefully discover how

dramatic change is received in the Seventh-day Adventist system of education.

Fullan (2001) says, “We must change existing conditions so that it is normal and possible for a majority of people to move forward” (p. 269). We cannot know what existing conditions need to change until we can document the present condition of the system. If current conditions encourage change, we would not want to alter them. If current conditions discourage change, we must identify them and seek to correct them. From telling the story of this case, perhaps others will have the opportunity to maximize successes and minimize hindrances in their change processes.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

I chose to study one school (or case), interviewing those designated as full-time teaching staff, the principal who also teaches, the vice principal responsible for public relations and development, two teachers who taught at the school during the first year of the change and who have now taken other employment, three administrators of organizations within which this school operates, and three parents randomly chosen from a list of those meeting criteria I will describe later. The interview data primarily sought for information of the experiences during the first 2 years of the academic delivery change. Information shared about the years before this and a short time after was obtained through personal experience, incidental information from the interviews, and other documents.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study was limited by how well each individual remembered events, their

awareness of the circumstances encountered, their willingness to share the details they remembered, and the honesty with which they recounted the events and their involvement with those events.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Boarding high school:* A school that provides education for Grades 9-12 where most students live on campus in dormitories.

*Conference:* The administrative organization directly responsible for the administration of the school. The members of the conference make up the constituency of the school. Most conferences cover areas somewhat related to state boundaries.

*Direct Education:* This is the name the school gave their new academic delivery paradigm. *A Handbook for Parents and Students* defines it this way: “Direct Education is education that asks the student to learn from the sources of information directly. The instructor plays the role of mentor, coach and guide.” It explains that students collect the information, analyze, evaluate, and organize it in “a manner which can be presented to others. Direct Education is teaching a process for learning above and beyond learning the facts and skills required in various fields of learning.”

*Division:* The national level of the educational system of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is responsible for 400 day-care centers, 1,100 K-12 schools, and 14 colleges and universities across North America. Within this organization is a nationally recognized accrediting association responsible for the accreditation of the K-12 schools.

*Executive Committee:* The committee established by the conference constituency to administer the affairs of the organization between constituency sessions.

*K-12 Board:* The board established by the school's constituency to oversee the administration of all conference schools, including the case for this study.

*Union:* The organization directly above the conference that sets the policies for which the school is answerable. The Union facilitates and supervises the education of the conferences within its territory. The Union director and associate director serve as Ex Officio members of the conference board of education, but beyond that have no direct administrative authority over conference and school personnel. The Union directors serve on accreditation committees for the school.

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction explaining why this study was undertaken and described the study. Chapter 2 reviews literature describing the dominant educational philosophy in America, why there are some calling for change, what the calls for change include, and how the Seventh-day Adventist system parallels the literature. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 tells the story of how the school decided to change and how the system related to the experiences of that change. Chapter 5 summarizes findings and gives some of my observations and conclusions.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

In the last chapter I documented the calls for educational change. In this chapter I take a brief look at the history of education in America, discover concerns of those calling for change, document changes being called for, and describe organizations that have attempted to facilitate change. I look more in-depth at two key components of the changes the school studied is making: individual learning and project-based learning. I verify that the academic philosophy to which this school is aiming is supported by both current literature and the literature within the Adventist system. The chapter concludes with an in-depth description of the complexity of change and what is being discovered that is needed to establish institutional change.

#### **American Education**

In this section I provide a brief history of American education and describe concerns addressed in the literature of the system's current state that bring calls for change.

## A Brief Recollection of American Education History

Wallace and Graves (1995) describe formal schooling in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as a “hodgepodge endeavor” with most people expecting “merely that their children learn the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic” (p. 65). An effort to organize the learning took place when in 1892 the National Education Association (NEA), then a professional group rather than a union, gathered 10 leading American educators called the Committee of Ten who developed a plan that gave high schools a common curriculum. “The plan’s strength lay in its high expectations for all students, but it was flawed in requiring all students to meet them in the same way” (p. 71). Senge et al. (2000) say, “In the nineteenth-century industrial world, a one-size-fits-all educational system was a boon that reduced the abusiveness of child labor and brought opportunity to the world” (p. 9).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Gauss’s law of normal distribution, or the bell curve, and Darwin’s theory of natural selection were published, educators then had the “scientific authority they needed to justify sorting students for different destinations” in the education process (Wallace & Graves, 1995, p. 77). Sorting students became more acceptable when in 1913 the NEA established a new committee called the Commission on Reorganization of Secondary Education. Five years later that committee issued a report stating students should be allowed to pursue different educational courses based on their ability. Though this sounds like movement away from a standardized approach to education, some historians argue that “the system was designed to prepare human capital for the large-scale corporate state and to preserve class distinctions” (p. 78). Whatever the intent, no longer was high academic achievement expected of all students.

In the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there developed an emphasis on mass production in industry and it became the model for educating the masses. Taylor, “the time-and-motion guru of the era” (Wallace & Graves, 1995, p. 78), heavily influenced industry organization—and educational organization.

He argued that management should control decision making and the workers’ responsibilities should be reduced to simple tasks on an assembly line. Schools could be organized like factories with students moving through an assembly line.

Administrators could control the lessons, textbooks, and curriculum. Teachers would be like assembly-line workers, delivering prescribed lessons from textbooks. They also could be standardized and used as interchangeable parts, easily moved from one classroom or school to another without disrupting the continuity of the instruction machine. (Wallace & Graves, 1995, p. 79)

Thus, Thornburg (2002) says, “the industrial age decontextualized work” (p. 93). He continues, “At the same time that work was being decontextualized in factories, the same was happening to education” (p. 93).

Goddard, who helped develop the intelligence tests; Terman, who developed the intelligence quotient (IQ); and Brigham, who introduced the Scholastic Aptitude Test, “gave educators the tool[s] they needed to sort students” (Wallace & Graves, 1995, p. 79). Soon followed the norm-referenced tests based on the bell curve to measure student ability and the success of education.

Though standardization became the dominant philosophy in education, there were efforts to break the standardization mold. “Dewey’s proposals for a more individualized

and fluid system of education gained acceptance after World War I in what was called the progressive movement” (Wallace & Grave, 1995, p. 75). However, historians believe individuals involved in this movement such as William Kilpatrick, a professor at Teachers College in New York, damaged it by removing academic rigor in an effort to make education fun. Again in the 1960s and 1970s schools “experimented with more individualized systems” (p. 83). However, teachers were not trained to individualize and tended to use standardized methods of instruction. There was a tendency to relax the educational process, and in the 1970s test results of even college-bound students showed a decline in academic achievement. In 1983 a presidential commission “issued *A Nation at Risk*, warning that problems in education jeopardized the nation’s economic future and security” (p. 84). There followed an urgent move to raise educational standards and improve schools.

The Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, the latest effort to require states “to encourage local public schools to improve,” measures student improvement by “standardized test scores” (Keefe & Amenta, 2005, p. 536). Politicians and policy makers “want strict accountability in the form of current test scores that can be used to determine the comparative status of all schools” (p. 536). So, standardization of the educational process continues to dominate American education.

### Concerns About Current Education Conditions

As shown earlier, there are voices of concern about the current dominant philosophy of standardization and the belief that it is not meeting the needs of 21<sup>st</sup>-century

students. Senge (1999) says that the concern over what is perceived as weaknesses in the educational system cannot be solved by only going “back to the ‘3Rs.’” He says, “We must revolutionize the school experience” (p. 40). Yet, according to some, our schools continue to become “increasingly obsolete” because the “curriculum and structure of the typical American school are more than 100 years old” (Keefe & Amenta, 2005, p. 537).

On February 26, 2005, Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft and one of the richest people on earth, addressed governors, CEOs, and leading educators at the National Education Summit on High Schools held in Washington, D.C. In his address, Gates called the American high school obsolete. (Armstrong, 2006, p. 135)

Wallis et al. in an article published in *Time* (2006) used an illustration familiar to educators contending that if Rip Van Winkle were to wake up today he would be confounded by everything he encountered in society except the classroom. Rip would say, "We used to have these back in 1906. Only now the blackboards are green" (p. 1). They go on to say that the schools have not been “entirely frozen in time,” though most students sit in classrooms that feel much like their grandparents’ in the methods used and the material taught. “A yawning chasm (with an emphasis on yawning) separates the world inside the schoolhouse from the world outside” (p. 1). Thornburg (2002) adds, “The fact that our grandparents would recognize virtually every aspect of today’s schools should shame us into making the radical transformations that the needs of our students demand” (p. 100).

The evidence of the obsolescence of most present-day education, according to Donohue (2007), is in how “large groups of students with the same birthdays move from

subject expert to subject expert in incremental blocks of time. . . . Success is measured by seat time and rote return of information,” and by how quickly what is learned is forgotten (p. 15). There are those who argue that we have not come to terms with this “factory system” of education that encourages “depersonalized interactions between students and teachers” (Cossentino, 2004, p. 26) as it divides “by a grading system that separates teachers from students, by departments that fragment fields of knowledge, by competition that makes students and teachers alike wary of their peers, and by a bureaucracy that puts faculty and administration at odds” (Palmer, 1998, p. 36).

We continue to measure students by the bell curve that does quite accurately describe student learning “under certain conditions—namely, traditional instructional approaches and fixed amounts of time” (Danielson, 2002, p. 15). The bell curve does still show what happens when students are assigned a grade level based on age alone. “Under these conditions, a few students will excel, many others will grasp some of the material, and a few others will not understand it at all” (p. 15).

The education driven by the bell-curve structure is “geared to students performing at average levels, which tend to be mediocre” (Wallace & Graves, 1995, p. 18). It judges students more on “how they compare to the average than on what they know” (p. 19) and views the bell curve as “prescriptive rather than descriptive” (Danielson, 2002, p. 16). This philosophy does not recognize that “human accomplishments are more a function of will and effort than of inherent, naturally occurring qualities such as intelligence” (Wallace & Graves, 1995, p. 17). Today, the NCLB still reduces school health to a single criterion,” standardized testing, that has little to do “with school improvement and,

regrettably, nothing to do with helping individual students to learn” (Keefe & Amenta, 2005, p. 536).

“In the homogeneous classrooms of yesterday a strict well prepared teacher could at least reach those interested in learning” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 8). Today, things are different; we cannot reach today’s youth by using industrialized educational concepts of the past (Senge et al., 2000). “It has always been the case that teaching means reaching the student. It is just so much more difficult to do it these days” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 8). Armstrong (2006) states, “Our high schools *are* obsolete to the extent that they are not preparing students to live as successful and independent adults in the real world” (p. 136).

Senge et al. (2000) describe current conditions in education:

The assembly-line education system is under stress. Its products are no longer judged adequate by society. Its productivity is questioned. And it is responding in the only way the system knows how to respond: by doing what it has always done but harder.

(p. 32)

Sizer (1996) states bluntly, “The traditional assembly-line metaphor for schooling does not work” (p. xiii). Fullan (2001) adds:

Although the source of blame varies, it is now an undeniable conclusion that the educational system and its partners have failed to produce citizens who can contribute to and benefit from a world that offers enormous opportunity, and equally complex difficulty of finding your way in it. (pp. 6, 7)

Wallis et al. (2006) question “whether an entire generation of kids will fail to make the

grade in the global economy because they can't think" the way today's society demands (p. 1). "The U.S. Chamber of Commerce weighed in with its grading of the states on academic performance in conjunction with business metrics" and found that the states "need to do a far better job of monitoring and delivering quality schooling" ("Chamber of Commerce," 2007, p. 3). According to Bolman and Deal (1994), academics, parents, and business leaders are combining their voices with those of the general public, policy makers, teachers, students, and administrators, demanding "that something dramatic be done to improve the nation's schools" (Bolman & Deal, 1994, p. 78). They complain about a "litany of problems facing our schools" and suggest "countless recommendations for improvement" (Thornburg, 2002, p. 4).

Keefe and Amenta (2005) argue, "Unfortunately, secondary schooling today is moving away from comprehensive renewal" (p. 543). Elkind in the Foreword of Armstrong's book (2006) gives this explanation, "What we do in our schools has nothing to do with what we know is effective pedagogy for children." He believes education is being driven by "social, political, economic, and cultural considerations" (p. viii). Keefe and Amenta (2005) echo the belief that the driving forces in education are "politics, wealth, and power" more than "building consensus in the best interest of students" (p. 543). Many call for a revolution, a reculturing, a reinvention, and a fundamental change to how we educate America's youth (Cohen et al., 1993; Donohue, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2001; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Marsh et al., 2005; Sizer, 1996).

Donohue (2007) states, "Rather than continuing to try to improve our existing education 'systems,' we need to fundamentally rethink how we organize to educate many



of our citizens. And we'd better do it soon" (p. 15). Wallis et al. (2006) report that a "high-powered, bipartisan assembly of Education Secretaries and business, government and other education leaders" called the "new Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce" released "a blueprint for rethinking American education from pre-K to 12 and beyond to better prepare students to thrive in the global economy" (p. 1). They said, "There is . . . a remarkable consensus among educators and business and policy leaders on one key conclusion: we need to bring what we teach and how we teach into the 21st century" (p. 1).

Though there seems to be a realization that today's education does not adequately meet the students of today, while researching a "democratic educational renewal" project in a Cincinnati, Ohio, inner-city high school during the 1990s, Carlson (2005) found indications "that the gulf between theory and practice in public education is as wide, if not wider, than it ever has been" (p. 43).

Danielson (2002) gives educators this challenge:

In the medical profession, the average time that elapses between a conclusive finding and its widespread application is five years; in education, the comparable number is 50 years. There are many explanations for this phenomenon, including the highly political nature of schools and school governance. However, any profession worthy of the name must ensure that its practices are supported by current research, and that its practitioners are prepared to change their practices as the research evolves. (p. 30).

Thornburg (2002) concurs, "The greatest challenge in crafting the new school is going to be human, not technological." It is time, he says, that we "examine the validity of

assumptions that have remained unchallenged for generations” (p. 97). Danielson (2002) admits, “This effectively means that in addition to *knowing* the right way to improve schools, educators and the public must truly *want* to do so” (p. viii).

### **Proposed Remedies to Improve Education**

This section describes calls for change in the fundamental delivery of education, some historical examples of those who have attempted such change, and some current proposals for school learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **A Call to Change the Educational Discourse**

Armstrong (2006) believes education today is dominated by what he calls the “Academic Achievement Discourse” where, simply put, education’s purpose is primarily “supporting, encouraging, and facilitating a student’s ability to obtain high grades and standardized test scores in school courses, especially in courses that are part of the core academic curriculum” (p. 10). He says it is time to change the discourse and enter the “Human Development Discourse,” which he defines as addressing education issues “primarily in terms of supporting, encouraging, and facilitating a student’s growth as a whole human being” (p. 39). If that is the purpose of high school, he continues, “to prepare students for independent life in the real world, then the more time students sit at cramped desks in fluorescent-lit classrooms, the less time they have to spend engaging in this key developmental task” (Armstrong, 2006, p. 141).

Corporate America is helping to drive the educational agenda to change in order to better prepare students for real life in the real world. As I mentioned earlier, Senge (1999), among others, believes it will take a revolution to accomplish this transition. A revolutionary change to the discourse of education must provide experiences for students that “nurtures and deepens [their] love of learning, develops new skills of integrative or systemic thinking, and helps [them] learn *how* to learn, especially together” (p. 40). Thornburg (2002) states that just as education “mirrored the dominant paradigm of decontextualization during the industrial era,” now it must contextualize learning because “information devoid of context is meaningless” (p. 93). Elkjaer (2003) calls for education to use “pragmatic learning theory” which makes learning meaningful by developing “experience and knowledge” (p. 490).

Perhaps the name that embodies a philosophy that drives much of what Armstrong (2006) calls the “Human Development Discourse” (p. 39) is Dewey. Senge (1999) stated that Dewey “canonized the simple fact that all real learning occurs over time, as we move between the world of thought and the world of action.” It is not “simply an intellectual exercise, nor is it a matter of changing behavior” (p. 36).

According to Wallace and Graves (1995), Dewey worked against the standardized, dehumanizing schools of his day. He tried to help the individual students find their places in the world rather than assigning them. He emphasized tying lessons to individual student’s interests. “He engaged students in group work, projects, and hands-on learning based on experience rather than abstractions” (p. 75).

## Trump and the Model Schools Project

According to Keefe and Amenta (2005), Trump, who in the 1960s and 1970s was seen as a leading authority on secondary education change, continued the efforts for change within the Dewey philosophy of what Armstrong calls the human development discourse.

His early work to redesign secondary schools became known as the Trump Plan.

Thousands of schools in the U.S. and Canada implemented its basic elements: team teaching, use of teacher assistants, large-group instruction, small-group instruction, independent study, flexible scheduling, and attention to the individual differences of students and teachers. (p. 538)

Trump became the project director for the Model Schools Project (MSP) which was the “first comprehensive school reform venture of the second half of the 20th century” (p. 538).

MSP provided an alternative to the dominant philosophy of education which was: Students were assumed to be ready for graded subject matter solely on the basis of age; blocks of information were assembled in textbooks geared to a nine-month school year; teachers were presumed to be universal experts in dealing with groups of 25 to 40 students. Such assumptions ignored the facts that students learn at different rates and in unique ways, that learning should relate to the actual maturity and readiness of the learner and provide some personal satisfaction, and that, like students, teachers have special talents and weaknesses. (Keefe & Amenta, 2005, p. 538)

Understanding the role of the teacher in MSP is key to understanding the real meaning of this school reform:

As content facilitators, teachers prepared large-group presentations, supervised small-group discussions, and arranged their schedules to coach students in their subject-area fields. As teacher advisors, they served small groups of students as both academic advisors and “friends in court” during their entire time at a school. Students, in turn, were expected to take more responsibility for the success of their own education and generally to be more mature in their use of time, materials, and equipment. (Keefe & Amante, 2005, pp. 538, 539)

Keefe and Amante (2005) believe, “Much that is good in contemporary schooling can be traced to the influence of the Model Schools Project” (p. 543).

#### The Learning Environments Consortium International

When MSP ended, the Learning Environments Consortium (LEC) International, an independent, nonprofit organization, was conceptualized in 1975 “as a self-help consortium of *schools* and *districts*” assisting interested schools “in redesigning themselves and in developing personalized instructional programs” (Keefe & Amenta, 2005, p. 539). In 1996, its Forum was created and it broadened its mission “to include interested *individuals* with knowledge of and experience in the research and practice of school renewal” (p. 539).

LEC’s mission included:

- 1) A diagnostic/prescriptive model of education; 2) a leadership-team approach to

school administration, with the principal serving as principal teacher and instructional leader; 3) a personalized strategy of instruction, with teachers acting as learning facilitators and teacher advisors; and 4) a systematic and performance-based evaluation of students, teachers, and program. (Keefe & Amenta, 2005, p. 539)

Their personalization of instruction includes: (a) Teachers as coaches and advisors to the learning process; (b) a spirit of collegiality in the schools where teachers and students work collaboratively to provide student-involved learning; (c) an interactive learning environment that includes small learning groups, thoughtful discussion, learning processes that provide student activity, and student achievement that is meaningful in the real world; (d) flexible scheduling and the ability for students to progress at their own pace; and (e) assessment that demonstrates complete learning (Keefe & Amenta, 2005, p. 539).

### Sizer and the Coalition of Essential Schools

Also, from the influence of the MSP, came Sizer (1985) and his Coalition of Essential Schools (CES). Sizer believes there are five imperatives for better schools:

1. Give room to teachers and students to work and learn in their own, appropriate ways.
2. Insist that students clearly exhibit mastery of their school work.
3. Get the incentives right, for students and for teachers.
4. Focus the students' work on the use of their minds.
5. Keep the structure simple and thus flexible. (p. 214)

Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools established in the 1980s now has a network that includes hundreds of schools and over two dozen affiliate centers. On their web site,

CESNationalweb (n.d.), they describe Essential schools as “places of powerful student learning where all students have the chance to reach their fullest potential” (para. 1).

Schools that join the coalition develop programs unique to their situation and patterned to meet the needs of their students and community. However, “all Essential schools share a commitment to the CES Common Principles” that are to guide the examination of priorities and the designation of instructional practices that support: (a) instruction that addresses individual needs and interests, (b) small schools and classrooms that allow teachers and students to know each other in a trustful atmosphere including high expectations, (b) “multiple” assessments that are based on the performance of “authentic tasks,” (c) “democratic and equitable school policies and practice,” and (d) partnerships with the community (CESNationalweb, n.d., para. 4).

### Making Learning Meaningful for Life

Critics are concerned that America is not educating citizens to be learners, and therefore it is impacting the quality of productivity in America—of developing organizations that are willing to learn (Senge, 1999). According to Senge (1999), Deming, the man who brought quality control to Japanese industry; Hall, an anthropologist; and “many educators” believe that businesses will not truly become learning organizations until our schools change. Senge states, “If at some basic level we do not genuinely value and truly desire to live life as learners, it will not happen” (p. 39). He says, “The young child in school quickly learns that the name of the game is not learning, but performing. Mistakes are punished, correct answers rewarded. If you don’t

know the right answer, keep your mouth shut” (p. 39). That philosophy in school tends to provide workers who are more concerned with performing than with learning how to make life and work meaningful. That is why he (and others) believe we must “revolutionize the school experience so that it nurtures and deepens our love of learning” (p. 40).

For instance, if what is expected as the end product to demonstrate learning is an exam, “a student’s simple memory work will suffice. She can dream in class, cram the night before the test, ace it the next day, and forget everything about it within a week” (Sizer, 1996, p. 88). On the other hand, “serious secondary education requires the commitment of its students. They have to work hard; they are not merely genial empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge” (Sizer, 1996, p. 146). Sizer believes that schools must be able to justify to all concerned that their learning expectations are “worthy of serious effort” on their own terms, more than something for which the goal is getting a good grade and then discarded (p. 85).

William Blake (as cited in Palmer, 1998) suggests, in “Auguries of Innocence,” that we can “see a World in a Grain of Sand” (p. 122). Palmer suggests that in education there are grains of sand that reveal worlds if we help the students look closely enough. “So why,” he asks, “do we keep dumping truckloads of sand on our students, blinding them to the whole, instead of lifting up a grain so they can learn to see for themselves” (p. 122). He believes we can teach more by teaching less at a deeper level. Sizer (1996) agrees, “*If students are to understand deeply, less is more*” (p. 86).

### The Prepared Graduate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

In the April 2007 issue of *Educational Leadership* entitled “The Prepared



Graduate,” Levine described methods he recommends to strengthen “not only traditional academic and technological competencies, but also the equally important attributes of a successful adult that U.S. schools often overlook” (p. 17). “At the very least,” he says, “every student should experience active mental engagement in a particular, individually chosen domain” (p. 19). He adds, “Productivity in adulthood increasingly takes the form of projects” (p. 20). Selling a plan to install an air conditioning system in an office building, putting together a business plan, or conducting a medical trial for a drug are examples of projects “that can make or break an individual ascending a career staircase” (p. 20). Therefore, “we should infuse a project mentality into the minds of all high school students” (p. 20). Why? Because “such sustained, goal-directed, monitored activities demand the coordination of multiple elements to accomplish a significant long-term aim” (p. 20).

The process of education should help students carefully look at their lives in order to discover what is becoming a passion for them that may provide a life work worth pursuing. Levin (2007) puts it this way, “We must help them look backward and forward, review their recurring autobiographical themes, and uncover the consistent assets and proclivities that could blossom into fulfillment for them” (p. 21).

He adds that high-school education should help students begin to understand the reality of work in the real world. Such things may include understanding that wanting to be a scuba diver requires extensive mathematical skills, that English professors need to know how to write grants, and that the path from trial attorney to judge or senior partner will involve hundreds of late nights grinding out research on government regulations and

past judicial decisions. By allowing them to explore the reality of the real world such knowledge will be gained (Levine, 2007, p. 22).

#### Another 2007 Proposal

In 2007, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) gave its proposals for high-school reform. These included, “*Personalized learning*,” where students assume more ownership for their learning; “*Flexible use of time and structure*,” where time is used according to student needs as they master subjects—making learning more important than time spent; “*Professional development*,” providing professional growth for teachers that will enable them to learn how to do education in ways they have not done before; and “*Business and community engagement*,” connecting the learning to real life, either inside or outside the classroom (p. 95).

#### Overview of Proposed Remedies

Cossentino (2004) encapsulates a result of changing the discourse to individual development rather than meeting only academic goals: “I used to teach kids history. Now I teach them to be historians” (p. 15). Danielson (2002) adds, “If the bell curve mentality is abolished in schools, and if schools are organized to promote high-level learning of all students, the consequences can be dramatic” (p. 16). According to Thornburg (2002), much can be gained within the education process if teachers are willing to “foster independent lifelong learning among their students” (p. 106). However, Cossentino (2004) adds that teachers will need to come to an understanding that they must “do more than lecture if they are to teach effectively; that guiding, facilitating, and structuring

learning is more important than transmitting knowledge” (p. 14).

In all of the above examples of efforts to change the discourse these educators tried to break from a standardized approach to education in order to make learning more meaningful for each student individually. There were efforts to bring flexibility to the process, of making learning more relevant to real-world requirements, and to help students understand the importance of learning instead of meeting school requirements.

### **A Closer Look at Individualized and Project-Based Learning**

Because two key elements in the education reform of the school that is the case for this study are individualized learning and project-based learning, I take a closer look at what the literature says about these two methodologies of learning.

#### **Individualized Learning**

According to Sizer (1985), high schools are to develop students’ “powers of thought, of taste, and of judgment.” He continues, “Such undertakings cannot be factory-wrought, for young people grow in idiosyncratic, variable ways, often unpredictably” (p. 4). It is that idiosyncratic, variable, and unpredictability of the educational process for which traditional education does not provide that has caused many, from the Model School Project (Keefe & Amanta, 2005) to ASCD (2007), to call for a more individualized process to the learning provided by high schools. Donohue (2007) says that the level of

success we have in reinventing schools will be determined in part by how well we use

technology to “personalize student engagement” (p. 15).

When we take the individualized approach to learning, according to Tomlinson (1999), we will have to intentionally develop independent learners—students who know how to learn without being spoon-fed. Teachers will have to systematically help students develop curiosity, learn how to pursue topics that interest them, identify intriguing questions, develop plans for exploring those questions deeply, manage their time, set goals and criteria for their work, assess their learning progress based on their goals and criteria, present what they learned to appreciative audiences, and then begin the cycle again (p. 92). Individualization, according to Sullo (2007), will enhance the learning experience for students. As students are allowed to join with teachers in creating a shared vision for what is to be learned and how they will learn it, students will be “internally motivated to engage in high-quality academic work” (p. 156).

Palmer (1998) asks teachers to abandon their professional autonomy to set the educational agenda and make themselves as dependent on their students as their students are on them. When this is done, “obstacles to community will begin to fall away, teachers and students will meet at new depths of mutuality and meaning, and learning will happen for everyone in surprising and life-giving ways” (p. 140). He says that teachers must learn to open a learning space rather than fill it. When teachers realize that “opening a learning space requires more skill and more authority than filling it up,” then they will be able to win the battle with guilt because they are teaching differently from how they were taught.

If teachers fail to understand this, their “teaching will default to covering the field” (pp. 132, 133).

In the end, education must truly be about what helps each student learn and learn what is needed to be successful in their life. When Reeves (2007) visited Shamambo School in Zambia, he discovered that when students entered school they were not asked what grade they were in, but what they needed to learn. Because of the challenges caused by a lack of funding in the Shamambo School, 12 teachers were serving 550 students, yet they taught students what they needed to learn. The challenges of resources are not that severe in any school in America, so Reeves contends that American schools should be able to teach a student what he/she needs, not what the grade expectations are.

### Project-Based Learning

Donohue (2007) says that we should “establish wider varieties of educational experiences by demanding experimentation that goes beyond improved classroom-based models” and provide for “learning in real-world settings as the norm rather than the exception” (p. 15). “It seems,” according to Thornburg (2002), “that one of the easiest ways to recontextualize learning is to focus on student projects.” These projects need to be long-term and sufficiently complex to provide opportunity “for students to explore every subject area within the context of a single theme” (94).

DiMartino and Castaneda (2007) write of what they call “authentic assessment” as a way to realize effectiveness in the educational process. Authentic assessment requires what “employers value, such as effective self-management, communication, and problem

solving” (p. 38). They say that authentic assessment is hampered by the Carnegie unit—the educational measurement of a neatly divided school day by disciplines and time. Examples of authentic assessment include “senior projects, exhibitions, portfolios, and capstone projects [which] require multidisciplinary, extended learning time” (p. 39).

Pursuing learning through a project setting and developing an exhibition to be presented to an audience that demonstrates what has been learned are very difficult tasks. Sizer (1996) says that nothing is more difficult in the learning process for his Essential School people. “It demands thinking about learning and the curriculum and teaching and assessment differently from the ways in which most of us were trained” (p. 86).

Cossentino (2004) concurs, “Even on a small scale, exhibitions present logistical, pedagogical, and cultural challenges.” Teachers must learn “to formulate, judge, and teach with exhibition rather than a final exam. And this requirement makes demands on the culture of the school as well as on individual teacher’s expertise” (p. 5).

Projects developed and presented through exhibition do provide an integrated learning experience for students. “The human brain works best with information presented not in the form of isolated data bits but in patterns of meaningful connection, in a community of data, as it were” (Palmer, 1998, p. 127). If instead of a test the end result of learning must come in the form of an exhibition of a project, one must gain understanding in order to have a thorough grasp of the material. The student’s preparation “must involve closely engaged work and experience in answering questions about what they know and why they know it” (Sizer, 1996, p. 88).

Projects may be developed around service-learning programs that place students in community activities related to their field of study. Students involved in such activities become more “personally and substantively engaged with the course” because “the great things” they encounter by being involved with real life made the book work relevant (Palmer, 1998, p. 118). However projects are designed, “this approach to learning places students in the active role of solving problems in much the same way adult professionals perform their jobs” (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 92).

#### Assessing Individualized, Project-Based Education

According to Danielson (2002), “research by the NTL Institute for Applied Learning (1998)” shows learning and retention rates have enormous variations depending on learning methods used:

Students who learn through the lecture method retain about 5 percent of their lesson—10 percent when they read along with the lecture; audiovisual presentations increase the retention rate to 30 percent, and discussion groups to 50 percent. The most effective approaches—resulting in 75 percent and 90 percent retention rates, respectively—are learning by doing (such as through the inquiry method) and learning by teaching others. (p. 24)

Newmann and Wehlage (1995, as cited in Danielson, 2002) write in *Successful School Restructuring: A Report to the Public* that data from over 1,500 schools, elementary through high school, in the United States were analyzed by researchers at the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools at the University of

Wisconsin-Madison. They discovered “that students who participated in ‘authentic instruction’—in which they engaged in high-level understanding and application of information to the world beyond school—outscored their peers on traditional assessments” (p. 23).

We may also refer to the service-learning programs mentioned earlier where one-fourth of a large political science class at a state university were assigned community, field placement responsibilities in addition to the normal syllabus assigned to the rest of the class. Rather than suffer academically because of the extra work and time spent, they “did *better* academically and became more personally and substantively engaged with the course” (Palmer, 1998, p. 118).

Sullo (2007) contends that when teachers and students create a shared vision for learning and how it is done, students become internally motivated and produce high-quality academic work. “In such an environment, achievement increases and behavioral problems decrease” (p. 156). Traditional measurements seem to demonstrate that individualized, project-based approaches to learning done well do increase student learning. However, perhaps traditional academic measurements do not assess some of the most important aspects of learning.

Armstrong (2006) says he has not checked to see how students in schools he described as addressing human development needs rather than academic achievement needs performed on standardized academic tests. He believes testing to see how well students are doing academically and putting pressure on them to excel by purely academic



measurements hurts students. The point he seeks to make is that we have been speaking, verifying, and defending a purely academic paradigm of learning. It reminds us that it is time we “try speaking a different language—the language of human development—for a refreshing change” (p. 152).

Armstrong (2006) did not try to defend the human development discourse by “statistical results showing that you can promote children’s growth and development and *still* raise test scores and maintain adequate yearly progress.’ [He] did not write such a chapter because it would have sent a message that human development goals in education are important *only if* they promote academic achievement” (pp. 151, 152). Donohue (2007) calls for assessment measurements “that complement or eventually replace current narrow testing regimens with measurements that effectively gauge individual progress and competency through evidence and demonstration” (p. 15).

### **Seventh-day Adventist Education**

I have briefly summarized important events in the history of American education and calls for change from the traditional culture that now dominates the schools. I have described innovative practices with special emphasis on individualized, project-based instruction. Now I look at these issues in relationship to the Seventh-day Adventist system—the system within which the school being studied operates.

There is evidence that Adventist literature supports learning philosophies such as those I have been describing. The North American Division Office of Education (NAD,

2003) supports flexibility in the learning process: “Educators may create programs allowing students to progress toward graduation by demonstrating competency/mastery instead of fulfilling seat time” (p. 16), and student assessment may include “performance-based assessments” such as “demonstrations and performances,” “peer assessments,” “portfolios,” and “simulations” (p. 22). From the very foundation of the establishment of education within the Seventh-day Adventist church has come concepts by White (1913), one of the important founders of this denomination, such as, “The system of grading is sometimes a hindrance to the pupil's real progress” (p. 177). She describes how some students start out slowly and blossom later and some look brilliant, but then have that brilliancy fade. She then says, “The system of confining children rigidly to grades is not wise” (p. 177).

White (1903) describes an educational process that does not force a curriculum, but inspires interest individually when she says, “True education is not the forcing of instruction on an unready and unreceptive mind. The mental powers must be awakened, the interest aroused” (p. 41). She advises no lockstep process: “Let students advance as fast and as far as they can” (White, 1913, p. 394). And, the learning is not to be only that which can be measured by written tests. She supports projects connected to life: “By faithfully putting to a practical use that which they have learned they will increase in ability to use their knowledge” (p. 545).

*The Journal of Adventist Education* describes itself within its masthead as the periodical that “publishes articles concerned with a variety of topics pertinent to Adventist

education.” In its February/March 2007 issue emphasizing “Choice Theory,” William Glasser’s explanation of how humans are motivated and behave, is an article by Glasser in which he states that a strong aspect of his Quality Schools and one vital to educational success is the framework of “the competency-based classroom” where no one is permitted to advance until demonstrating competency (p. 8). This of course can be accomplished only in an individualized learning environment.

### **The Change Philosophy of the School Being Studied**

The school studied in this dissertation used the book by Littky (2004), *The Big Picture: Education Is Everyone’s Business*, to help faculty develop their educational changes. Dennis Littky, who was director and cofounder of the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The MET), established that school to provide what Sizer (1996) considers educational changes needed for students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The MET was the first to become part of the Coalition of Essential Schools (p. 18). “With a radically different approach to education, this high school in Providence, Rhode Island is fast becoming a model across the country” (Symonds, 2006, p. 1).

In a school publication called, *Direct Education: A Handbook for Parents and Students*, this school described its educational program:

Learning will be organized using project-based learning. The learning is to be as real-life and practical as possible. Their learning will not be limited to the classroom but encompass their entire community.

Direct Education is chosen to develop independent thinking and personal creativity. The greater variety will allow the student to individualize the program to meet their needs. It will develop their ability to make choices for themselves and develop their understanding of personal responsibility for their choices.

The students will show this by completing many projects each year. These projects will ask them to gather information, evaluate and analyze the information, then organize the information so it can be presented to others.

In learning this process they will become supportive of other learners, mentoring those newer to the process. This learning process will become a life skill which can be used in any area of service the student chooses. The student will become a life long learner. (p. 1)

### **The Complexity of Educational Change**

I have documented literature calling for educational change. I have also documented specific changes for which the literature calls and examples of attempts at such changes. There have been hints of the difficulty in making these changes. This section looks more deeply at educational change. I show from the literature that change is difficult and complex, that there are significant political and social pressures influencing the process, the impact of mandated change, the importance of entire organizations being involved in the learning required for change, and the required leadership philosophy. I end with two examples of successful change cultures.

### **Most Change Not Successful**

Seeking to make change has proven to be difficult and most organizational change has not been successful. Bolman and Deal (1999) writing about “all organizational change” in business say that it is understood that we need to “get better faster” (p. 7). However, they continue, “Business experience suggests that about two thirds of all

organizational change efforts fail to meet their goals” (p. 7). It does not seem to matter what kind of change is attempted, “the record is equally dismal for quality initiatives, re-engineering, self-managing teams, enterprise computing, or the latest flavor of the month” (p. 7). The change idea may seem right, everyone may agree change is needed, and the CEO may support the change. Yet, “why,” they ask, “does the change parade so often slide into a ditch” (p. 7)? From an education perspective, Marzano et al. (2005) echo Bolman and Deal’s description of business change by describing change proposals in programs and practices to improve education as “well thought-out, well articulated, and even well researched. Yet many, maybe even most, education innovations are short-lived” (p. 65).

### The Complexity of Change

Research addressing educational change concludes that we still “know little about the extent to which innovations are sustained over time and what factors influence their sustainability” (Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, & Liebert, 2006, p. 317). For instance, there are those who have concluded that the solution to the problems involved in transforming schools does not lie solely in a strong leader and his or her vision (Timperley, 2005), yet others say that leadership at the school level is key to success in the complex and difficult process of change (Retallick & Fink, 2002).

Successful educational change does seem to require more than what many may expect is necessary. Hannay, Erb, and Ross (2001) studied school systems where the schools were to make site-based structural change with the “caveats that the status quo was

not acceptable and that the context-specific models were to be programme based and revised annually” (p. 274). Some hinted that the process of these changes should have taken only a year or two since it involved only changes in the structure. Yet, even these changes were found to require reculturing—a significant overhaul of the culture—which is a complex process.

### Political and Social Influences

Research suggests that political and social influences can have a negative impact on change initiatives and cause regression, modification, and hindrance by cultural norms, local beliefs, and local political power (Hannay et al., 2001; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000; Retallick & Fink, 2002). Oakes et al. (2000) state, “In the face of resistance from within and outside the schools, educators in most schools compromised and scaled back their reform practices” (p. 575). Keefe and Amenta (2005) concur that without support from the school board, superintendent, and community, schools “were not able to sustain the new vision” (p. 540). They describe trouble for “Big Picture’s first high school in Denver” created by the state’s “political environment” (p. 2). Thornburg (2002) states that the “transformations” for education he proposes “cannot be implemented without the full support and understanding of the entire community” (p. 106). John Kotter, Professor at Harvard Business School, is quoted in Bolman and Deal (1994) as stating bluntly:

The most fundamental barrier to leadership is the culture of the education system itself.

If you haven't created an environment that is supportive of what you are ultimately trying to create, it will find a way to stomp it out. (p. 83)

### The Impact of Mandated Change

Though the political and social influences are important to change, there is a limit to how these influences can mandate change. In seeking to discover how culture affects change, it was interesting to discover the results of a study by Hargreaves (2004) where he “looked at teachers’ emotional responses to educational change” in a variety of schools, “not just those in innovative schools” (p. 304). As he probed teacher reactions to many different kinds of change, he found that most mandated changes received bad reviews. The overwhelming emotional response of teachers to mandated change was frustration because they felt that mandated change hindered their ability “to achieve their own purposes, to fulfil their own missions and to have them heard and respected” (p. 304).

Senge (1996) concurs. He says, “Little significant change can occur if it is driven from the top.” Because, he continues, “top management buy-in is a poor substitute for genuine commitment at many levels, and it can make such commitment less rather than more likely” (p. 36). People usually want the support of top management, but “they also don’t want it telling them what to do” (p. 36).

Little and Bartlett (2002) looked at teachers involved in major innovations or reforms and found mixed emotions in what they called the paradox of teachers’ experience during times of change. These change experiences might bring rich professional growth opportunities, yet, with the passing of time may plant seeds that grow into career disappointment. They go on to state:

The significance of this paradox derives in part from repeated observation that reform has had a short half-life, especially in the high schools. It acquires still greater import in an evolving policy context that portrays teachers as reform workers, establishes tighter controls over teaching even while advocating an “expanded role,” and sums up the work of reform under the banner of “standards, testing, and accountability.” (p. 352)

Hargreaves (2004) suggests, “This may mean that, after a decade or so of large-scale reform, the existence and opportunities for self-initiated change are objectively shrinking, that the self of the teacher has been subdued by the demands of the system” (p. 304). Yet he also discovered that almost half of the examples the teachers described as self-initiated change actually had “a legislated, mandated origin.” He concluded, “More important for the experience and management of change, therefore, is not so much whether change is external or internal in its source, but whether it is inclusive or exclusive in its design and conduct” (p. 287).

#### The Importance of Learning at All Levels of an Organization

An inclusive change process means that all levels of an organization are learning to realize the need for change, understand what it takes to be successful in change, and realize what is needed for appropriate change. Senge (1999) describes the roots of the “quality movement”—the label given Demming’s philosophy of quality management in business—lying in the assumption that people, organizations, and management must make “continual learning a way of organizational life, especially improving the performance of the organization as a total system” (p. 34). He believes this can be achieved only “by breaking with the traditional authoritarian command-and-control hierarchy—where the top



thinks and the local acts—and by merging thinking and acting at all level” (p. 35). Bolman and Deal (1999) support this inclusive learning culture: “Without support, training, and chances to participate in the change process, people become a powerful anchor, making forward motion almost impossible” (p. 8).

Collinson et al. (2006) describe one definition of how to change the culture of a school and the system within which it operates as developing “organizational learning.” They say, “Organizational learning is not a quick fix solution or fad. It requires collective attention and learning from members as they seek continuous improvement for students, themselves, and the organization” (p. 114). In other words, it is important to gain the support of all levels of a school system if a culture that builds “organizational learning” for all, including the teachers, is established to “better transform the demands of change into opportunities for improvement” (p. 115).

Schmoker (2006) calls organizations with this type of learning, “professional learning communities,” stating that they “have emerged as arguably the best, most agreed-upon means by which to continuously improve instruction and student performance” (p. 106). Though these communities require learning at all levels, they must be established understanding that local classroom teachers are of “central importance” and should function as “small, instructionally focused teacher teams as the basic unit of professional learning communities” (p. 107).

#### The Leadership Philosophy Needed to Reshape Organizational Culture

Hannay, Manning, Earl, and Blair (2006a) describe successful senior

administration who have shaped new organizational cultures as, among other things, reshaping their own roles to include “working collectively and collaboratively” and “creating knowledge and systemness” within “a common vision” at all levels of their districts (p. 21). They describe its power: “This collaborative learning strategy undertaken by senior administration influenced other levels as it became a template replicated by principals and school staffs” (Hannay, Manning, Earl, & Blair, 2006b, p. 16).

Even in the construction industry, leadership of what Chinowsky, Molenaar, and Realph (2007) call an “organization learning entity” is expected to set a *shared* vision, create an environment “that promotes the sharing, seeking, and adopting of knowledge,” empower “learning at all levels,” encourage well-managed and focused risk taking, and build a culture “that places learning as a foundational element of the organization practice” (p. 30).

It seems Sindelar et al. (2006) support the conclusions that the leadership culture of an organization is important to sustaining positive change. They found sustained changes “when districts recognize[d] schools for adopting new practices and [took] measures to ensure that principals follow[ed] through” (p. 318). The principals would then take their teachers and build toward the adoption of the new practices within a framework “consistent with teachers' beliefs or teaching style.” They devoted time to developing the innovations with the teachers which resulted in teachers who were “committed to its practice” (p. 318). Through this process, teachers, who were being asked to take on greater demands, did so realizing the benefits to students' learning if the innovation was sustained.

Leadership became involved as more than those who mandated change; they became involved in facilitating the change. Hall and Hord (2001) describe this involvement as providing interventions—actions or events that influence individuals in the change process. They proclaim, “Appropriate interventions reduce the challenges of change” (p. 15). A culture must be developed that supports change. It includes a shared vision, communication, “shared decision making, and schools that involve teachers in the design of an innovation” (Sindelar et al., 2006, p. 318).

Timperley (2005) adds that it is important that more than just the leader be expected to give leadership to schools and school systems engaged in change. It is important that the “distribution of leadership” include expecting teachers to lead. However, she does emphasize that to be successful the quality of all leadership activities must positively contribute to assisting teachers in providing “more effective instruction” for the students (p. 417). In the end, teachers must believe that the changes they are being asked to design and implement actually bring positive results to students and, therefore, energize the teachers professionally. Hargreaves (2004) found that the changes teachers viewed as self-initiated, involved “collaborative engagement and outside support” (p. 294). These changes brought “enthusiastic and effusive emotional responses” as the teachers were “energized and motivated by the benefit of fulfillment and accomplishment they [saw] in their students and themselves” (p. 304).

In order to understand the culture of success for change, Retallick and Fink (2002) chime in that we must look beyond just one leader and the abilities of that leader. They see effective leadership as “more about the overall effect of the capacity of leadership

teams and their combined strengths and weaknesses” (p. 103). It is in looking at the “interrelationships and interconnections between and among formal and informal leaders” that we will understand how best to improve schools during these times of change (p. 103).

“Involvement matters especially in the systemic, political perspective” (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 305), for in the end, each classroom and school operates within an educational system. These systems and the culture that permeates them can support or undermine any change effort (Schmoker, 2006; Sindelar et al., 2006). Schmoker (2006) contends, “Many talented but tentative principals will be newly focused and emboldened where district leadership energetically and explicitly supports the work of professional learning communities (by whatever name)” (p. 151).

It is also important to realize that learning organizations with effective leadership teams do not operate on a “set of static processes and methods.” There is a constant sharing of new, “dynamic knowledge” used “to create new practices and . . . [serve] as the basis for enhanced solutions” (Chinowsky et al., 2007, p. 27). In other words, it is unwise to manage and develop change based on policies established before the change. However, there continues to be the concern, as stated by Retallick and Fink (2002), of whether the “contextual pressures . . . are so overwhelming that sustaining school improvement activities is impossible” (p. 103).

### Examples of Successful Change Cultures

Norfolk, Virginia, a school district with 37,000 students in nearly 50 schools, has

tackled major change with its goal, "World Class by 2010" (Thompson, 2005a, p. 16). Characteristics of the process included the central office supporting local schools and intentionally seeking to build trust, encouraging taking risks, and schools and central offices working and learning collaboratively. "The district's accomplishments have attracted national attention. The district was awarded the prestigious Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2005 and had been a finalist for that award in the two previous years" (p. 3).

In 2004 the superintendent who began the process left. The district was then led by an interim superintendent for 1 year. During that time "the district continued to make significant changes while staying the course of continuous improvement that" the former superintendent had established (Thompson, 2005b, p. 2). A new superintendent began his tenure in 2005 and many of the cabinet members who helped begin the process left to become superintendents in other districts. At that time, Thompson stated, "Only time will tell how deeply and broadly rooted is the transformation of Norfolk's organizational culture" (p. 2).

Stephen Jones, the new superintendent in 2005, in his State of the Schools Address on January 31, 2008, stated, "The bottom line is that Norfolk Public Schools is a national model" (p. 1). He went on to say, "As a school system, we are exceeding expectations every day" (p. 2).

It seems that the organizational culture was supportive enough and strong enough to withstand leadership change while maintaining long-term progress.

Here is another example of what seems to be successful culture building. "The West Alabama Learning Coalition (WALC) is a multi-institutional partnership that seeks

to improve schools, teacher education, and the community” (Mullen & Kochan, 2000, p. 183). This organization “offers a unique perspective on [a] . . . collaborative network that might serve to assist others in establishing similar inclusive environments” (p. 183).

Members joined and remained in the coalition because their goals are consistent with the coalition’s goals. The synergy created by these matching goals appears to inspire “members to think and operate creatively” (Mullen & Kochan, 2000, p. 194). Those who have joined this coalition have experienced “heightened leadership capacity” as they felt “empowered within the coalition and . . . [felt] valued and more self-assured” (p. 193).

By

the sharing of responsibilities “individuals appear to feel a stronger sense of control over their destiny and the future of the profession” (p. 194).

Just as this interconnectedness among and between strands and circles brings wholeness to the web, the coalition has brought a blending of organizational network and national goals to create a unified but incomplete and constantly evolving whole. The soul of the coalition—synergy, empowerment, and transformation—are outcomes of membership in the coalition while also functioning as elements in creating the network. (Mullen & Kochan, 2000, p. 197)

Mullan and Kochan (2000) describe members as saying their participation has led “to a clearer understanding of what is needed to be done to make educational reform happen. They talked about themselves not as passive observers but as change agents” (p. 193). These members felt connected to something larger than themselves, “which [gave]

them guidance while they strive[d] to make a significant contribution” (p. 195). “We believe” they stated, “that it is through energetic work with others that webs of connection can be created to bring personal and institutional wholeness to our profession” (p. 198). They conclude that the “implications of this study underscore the value of a multi-organizational approach to educational reform” (p. 198). They were developing a culture of change rather than just a project of change.

### A Summary of Educational Change

Fullan (2001) reminds us, “Educational change depends on what teachers do and think—it’s as simple and as complex as that” (p. 115). Teachers are the key. However, the literature indicates that they must be challenged, supported, energized, empowered, trained, and held accountable by an education system dedicated to using all within the system to discover and implement that which will help students learn better. There must be a systemic culture of support in order to expect successful school change. It must also be remembered, “The road to change is never easy, no matter how good the intentions or far reaching the support” (Bolman & Deal, 1999, p. 11).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter gave a short overview of the development of education’s dominant culture in America today. It documented calls for reform that emphasized individual learning and project-based instruction and gave a few examples of those attempting reforms. A brief description of the relationship of the Seventh-day Adventist system of education to the change philosophies followed. The chapter concluded by documenting

the difficulty of making changes in education.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

I believe it has been adequately established that change in education is difficult and that the educational system plays a critical role in individual school change. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to bring better understanding of the impact that systemic cultures have on the change process of schools. I bring this better understanding by describing the experience of one parochial boarding high school.

This chapter will describe the research design, the selection process of those who participated in the research, the researcher's role in the process, how the data were analyzed and the results written in order to preserve reliability, validity, generalizability, and how research ethics were maintained.

#### **Research Design**

I have chosen a narrative case study methodology because as Yin (2003) states, "In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1). He goes on to say, "In brief, the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful

characteristics of real-life events—such as . . . organizational and managerial processes” (p. 2). In this study, I sought to discover “how” the system within which the school functions supports or hinders an effort to produce dynamic change.

MacPherson, Brooker, and Ainsworth (2000) say that “case study research is capable of creating thick descriptions and rich understandings of social contexts that have relevance and resonance across social sites” (p. 49). Yin (2003) concurs that the case study method should be used when one wants to “deliberately . . . cover contextual conditions” (p. 13). “Case study approaches” have the ability “to gain rich understandings of . . . school contexts,” add MacPherson et al. (2000, p. 50). I described the experiences of the school studied in order to uncover the context of the system within which the school operated.

Creswell (1998) says that we obtain thick descriptions and rich understanding by exploring a “‘bounded system’ or a case . . . over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). This method provides information beyond how the researcher perceives the state of affairs by adding what others believe and how they see “the underlying motives, feelings, and rationales leading to those beliefs” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 181). This approach expresses in linguistic forms the themes provided by the participants as they shared their descriptions of their environment (MacPherson et al., 2000).

According to Merriam (2001), “Ideally . . . the design of a qualitative study is emergent and flexible, responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress” (p. 8). Eisner (1998) contends, “It is simply not possible to predict the flow of events as they

unfold, so researchers must adjust their course of action based upon emerging conditions that could not have been anticipated.” He goes on to say, “Flexibility, adjustment, and iterativity are three hallmarks of qualitative ‘method.’” He says that the researcher needs to be able to put a “premium on the idiosyncratic, on the exploitation of the researcher’s unique strengths,” and that the style of the research must be personal (that which is minimized in quantitative studies).

I used the data collected, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe, to “keep in the foreground . . . a narrative view of experience, with the participants’ and researchers’ narratives of experience situated and lived out on storied landscapes as our theoretical methodological frame” (p. 128). It was these data that guided the construction of the narrative from the participants’ perspective, combined with my experience that was used to guide the direction of the results of this study.

### **Selection Process**

The sampling process for qualitative studies is commonly called “purposeful sampling” (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2001). This process is not a random sampling, but a purposeful choice because “the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2001, p. 61). Merriam says that to begin purposeful sampling one must decide on the criteria essential to the case being studied and why that criteria is important.

The criteria that caused me to choose this case included:

1. This school has chosen to do more than bring in a new math program or

rearrange the class schedule, it has chosen to make a major overhaul of the academic delivery system to its students. This made the case an “extreme” or “unique” case (Merriam, 2001, p. 62; Yin, 2003, p. 40) among Seventh-day Adventist boarding schools. I know of no other boarding school within this denomination intending to remain open that has taken on a more dramatic academic change.

2. It is a small boarding high school within the Seventh-day Adventist educational system that has had reduction in attendance and financial difficulties over the years and has faced considering closing on a number of occasions. It seems that the change it has undertaken has put it on a road to more solidity of its operations. Within these parameters we may be able to call this a “representative” or “typical” case (Merriam, 2001, p. 62; Yin, 2003, p. 41). Many other small boarding schools within the Adventist system face the problems this school faced and therefore I believe we can gain important information from this school’s experience.

3. If I had not been able to study this case I do not believe it would have been studied. I believe vital information for this educational system was obtained because of my unique situation and the unique situation of this school. In other words, this case may be identified as “revelatory” in that circumstances are such that what was studied was unavailable (Yin, 2003, p. 42) because no such dramatic change had been attempted when there was the possibility for research study.

There is also a second level of sampling that must take place within a case (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2003). Since I could not “interview, observe, or analyze *all* the

people, activities, or documents within” this case I had to choose a sampling (Merriam, 2001, p. 65). My sampling included:

1. All full-time teaching staff, the principal (who also teaches), and the vice principal (who is also responsible for public relations and development) – a total of six – were provided the opportunity to participate in the study. All six chose to participate.

2. Two teachers who had been employees of the school during the first year of the academic change and had taken positions in other schools before the data collection took place were asked and agreed to participate.

3. I randomly chose three parents from a list of those compiled by the school’s administration who were direct constituents of the school and had been involved in parent activities during the first year. When the random selections were made, some selections were eliminated to avoid participation from two members of the same family and provide a sampling from three different areas of the conference. I did not know anything beyond what is stated above about the parents chosen until we met for the focus group. The first three parents chosen all agreed to participate.

4. In order to bring a wider systemic view to the data, the two educational administrators at the Union and the Vice President for Education at the Division were asked to participate. All agreed.

5. I used information I deemed relevant from minutes of meetings of the school’s board, the administrative committee of the conference, and sub-committees. Public documents produced by the school, visiting committee reports, and my personal

observations while participating in various events during this time period were used to verify and gain information to provide a broader base for the story being told.

### **Researcher as Primary Research Instrument**

A characteristic of all forms of qualitative research “is that *the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis*” (Merriam, 2001, p. 7). This form of research “is interpretative research, with the inquirer typically in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (Creswell, 2003, p. 184). Without this intensive experience the interpretive process would be hindered. “Objections that humans are subjective, biased, or unreliable are irrelevant, for there is no other option” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 175). “We all, novice and experienced researchers alike, come to inquiry with views, attitudes, and ways of thinking about inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 46). It is from within this understanding that, in this case, narrative case study research gains the information for which it searches. It is the hands-on human element that allows qualitative research to probe where quantitative research cannot.

I am the superintendent of education and the president of the conference within which this school operates. This allowed me to be more than “merely a passive observer.” I may be called a participant-observer—one who assumes “a variety of roles” within the “case study situation and may actually participate in the events being studied” (Yin, 2003, pp. 93, 94). Yin recognizes major advantages to this position in research including the ability “to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone ‘inside’ the case study rather than external to it.” He states that “many have argued” that an insider

perspective “is invaluable in producing an ‘accurate’ portrayal of a case study phenomenon” (p. 94). He does also recognize disadvantages including the potential for bias. Yin says, “The opportunities and the problems” must be “considered seriously” when one determines to assume the dual role of participant-observer (p. 96).

My participation in this research also has characteristics of action research, “an approach to research which is based on a collaborative problem-solving relationship between researcher and client which aims at both solving a problem and generating new knowledge” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 9). Researching one’s own organization through an action research approach “is a neglected subject in the research literature” (p. xi). Yet, Coghlan and Brannick contend that the practice of “insider action research” has increased and “the consolidation of doctoral action research in universities around the world has contributed considerably to the legitimization” of this type of research “by practitioners in all sectors of organizational life” including education (p. xi).

I am not suggesting that the research of this dissertation fully meets the definition of “action research.” However, I do have an advantage that Coghlan and Brannick (2005) recognize as the “valuable knowledge about the cultures and informal structures” an insider has of the organization (p. 61). This insider information required me to guard against the tendency to assume too much and therefore “not probe as much” as one who was “an outsider or ignorant” of this knowledge (p. 62). There is no question that in my position my knowledge of the context of this school’s experience is extensive—beyond that of anyone else who would have been outside this organization.

In an effort to retell the interactive stories described by the teachers, parents, and administrators involved with this school, I tried to do what Coghlan and Brannick (2005) describe as part of action research: “It examines everything. It stresses listening. It emphasizes questioning” (p. 70). My involvement had the potential of being viewed by the participants as “more like an alliance of interested partners rather than the interpretive situation where the researcher attempts a neutral stance devoid of engagement” (MacPherson et al., 2000, p. 54). I hope that having the leader directly involved and interested in telling their story may have encouraged the participants to meet more boldly the challenges of change. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) say that action research “fosters courage. It incites action. It abets reflection and it endorses democratic participation” (p. 70). Another study will have to discover if these results became reality over time.

I believe this process helped me provide a unique understanding to the descriptions of the contextual conditions that would not have been discovered if I were not involved in this school’s leadership.

The qualitative researcher is the key instrument in the design process, continually deploying reflexivity and evaluative skills to data analysis and to the decisions concerning the direction of the next step in the study. The design of each qualitative research study might therefore be considered unique. (Lloyd-Jones, 2003, p. 2)

I attempted to tell the experiences of all of us connected to the changes within this school so others may be benefitted and we may learn to collaboratively advance farther and faster by what was discovered. This study was processed carefully, realizing my bias and unique perspective. I believe my perspective brought knowledge that would not have



been gained from other sources of investigation.

### **Data Collection**

In the data collection, I attempted to obtain what Merriam (2001) describes as “*understanding the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). Merriam quotes from Patton in describing qualitative data which “consist of ‘direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge’ obtained through interviews; ‘detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviors, actions’ recorded in observations; and ‘excerpts, quotations, or entire passages’ extracted from various types of documents (Patton, 1990, p. 10)” (p. 69).

Merriam (2001) explains that qualitative research collects data through interviews, observations, and documents. In other words, it is “about asking, watching and reviewing” (p. 69). Yin (2003) says, “Evidence for case studies may come from six sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts” (p. 83).

### **Interviews**

Interviews, the method Yin (2003) calls “one of the most important sources of case study information” (p. 89), were my primary source of data. I sought to accomplish what Eisner (1998) says is the “need to listen to what people have to say about their activities, their feelings, their lives” (p. 183). The interview structure was established to encourage a process Yin (2003) calls “guided conversations rather than structured queries” (p. 89).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) say a conversation should include the researcher in effect saying, “Tell me the questions I ought to be asking and then answer them for me” (p. 178).

During the interviews, the goal was to encourage conversation that allowed us to accomplish the task of the constructivist investigator, teasing “out the constructions that various actors in a setting hold” (p. 142). I believe these interviews were “good conversations” comprised of “listening intently and asking questions that focus on concrete examples and feelings rather than on abstract speculations” (Eisner, 1998, p. 183).

I interviewed both former employees—one in person and the other by telephone, the two educational administrators at the Union, and the Vice President for Education at the Division. These interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Every session was recorded, and the entire conversation was transcribed and became part of the database. The interviews were held between February and April 2008.

### Focus Groups

In order to reduce pressure they may have felt, current employees and parents were interviewed in a focus group setting. This allowed individuals to volunteer information only when they were comfortable within a group process. The teachers were interviewed together in a focus group without any school administrators present in order to provide what may have been a safer environment for sharing sensitive information. The two administrators were then interviewed together in their own focus group. These two focus groups were facilitated by an objective, outside educational professional. I conducted the

focus group with the three parents.

The focus groups lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Every session was recorded, and the entire conversation was transcribed and became part of the database. The focus groups were held in March 2008.

### Personal Observation

During the months covered by this dissertation I spent time on campus, was intimately involved with the committees that made guiding decisions for the school (I chaired most), and often formally and informally met with the school's administrators during the course of my normal responsibilities. All of these activities provided experiences and a context for understanding the overall tone and context of the school. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) say, "Context is necessary for making sense of any person, event, or thing" (p. 32). The data collection included my reflection of these experiences.

### Documents

I accessed documents such as committee meeting minutes, documents created by the school, accrediting visiting committee documents, constituency meeting minutes, and etc., "to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin, 2003, p. 87). Data from these documents, including the accreditation visit and report, were collected up until September 2008.

### **Institutional Review Board Approval and Ethics**

I made a thorough effort to accurately describe to everyone concerned the purpose

of this study, the methods used to obtain data, and how the data would be reported. I received formal approval from the school's board to conduct the study in a letter dated October 4, 2007. After the proposal for this study was approved by my dissertation committee, there followed an involved process of requesting approval from the University's Institutional Review Board and I received approval from the board on February 5, 2008.

As guided by the Review Board, I created informed consent forms that were signed by all but one individual before the interviews took place (the individual interviewed by telephone did not send in her signed form until much later, though it was in her possession and we read through it before the interview) and procedures and questions that guided each interview and focus group. These consent forms (Appendix A) and procedures (Appendix B) provided explanations to each participant of the purpose of the study, the fact that their participation was completely voluntary, and that personal identities would be protected. I openly and honestly presented to participants that my approach to this study was not to expose or evaluate individuals within the school, but to discover the culture of the system encountered.

### **Data Analysis and Writing the Case**

The transcribed data were carefully and iteratively analyzed as I looked for themes, connectedness, and constructions that did or did not intertwine, affirm, or conflict with each other. After teasing out the constructions, my "major task" as a "constructivist investigator" was to, as far as possible, "bring them into conjunction—a joining—with one

another and with whatever other information can be brought to bear on the issues involved” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 142). I supplemented the transcribed data with my experiences and information gleaned from minutes and other school documents. I sought to discover the story constructions that would most accurately tell the story of this school and the educators involved.

I wrote the case as an unfolding chronological story. There were times throughout the telling that I did back-track in time to set the stage for the chronological event about to be described. The story was constructed and retold as described within the data of the interviews, focus groups, and supplemented by written documents. I included sections containing my reflections separated from the retelling of the story to clearly distinguish my viewpoint in the telling.

### **Validity and Reliability**

There continues to be an unresolved debate as to how to bring validity and reliability to a qualitative study. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) say that narrative inquiry “is in a state of development” and relies “on criteria other than validity [and] reliability.” They claim the criteria are “under development in the research community” and may include “apparency” and “verisimilitude” (p. 184).

Eisner (1998) contends that in the complexity of social science “we can secure no unmediated grasp of things as they ‘really are,’” and therefore, “we are always ‘stuck’ with judgments and interpretations” (p. 109). According to Merriam (2001), “Wolcott (1994) takes yet another direction, arguing ‘the absurdity of validity’ (p. 364). Instead of

validity,

what he seeks ‘is something else . . .’ (pp. 366-367). For Wolcott the ‘something else’ is understanding” (as cited in Merriam, 2001, p. 201).

Creswell (2003) contends, “Validity . . . is seen as a strength of qualitative research, but it is used to suggest determining whether the findings are accurate from the stand point of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account” (pp. 195, 196). He says terms abound to support this “idea” such as “trustworthiness,” “authenticity,” and “credibility” (p. 196).

Merriam (2001), after describing how reliability has traditionally been considered as the “extent to which research findings can be replicated” (p. 205) and that reliability in this sense is problematic in social sciences because humans are ever changing, states, “The question then is not whether the findings will be found again but *whether the results are consistent with the data collected*” (p. 206).

Narrative inquiry, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “is a kind of inquiry that necessitates ongoing reflection, what we have called wakefulness. . . . A state that asks us as inquirers to be wakeful, and thoughtful, about all of our inquiry decisions” (p. 184). This wakefulness is important because as Macpherson et al. (2000) explain, “To ensure that the products of case study research are believable and authentic representations of the social environment, in which the research was conducted, the ways in which we present the findings is crucial” (p. 57). They go on to point out that “there are tensions and dilemmas in studying the parade of which we are a part” (p. 81).

Being an insider does bring additional challenges to the process especially if what is discovered is not flattering to the organization represented by the researcher. Carlson (2005) states, “Researchers and collaborators are rarely rewarded for telling stories of failure, or stories that suggest the system is not open to change.” An individual who tells the story “with an outsider’s as well as an insider’s eye” will tell “a different story” than an individual who is limited by a totally biased insider’s view (p. 27).

It has never been my intention to take the approach of a protective insider constructing “a more hopeful” narrative of the project (Carlson, 2005, p. 27). Instead, it is important to me that I tell an accurate story enabling change agents to gain a valid and reliable picture of the state of the system in order to know how to bring significant improvement and growth. I have been able to “speak as both insider and outsider, with a form of double consciousness that crosses back and forth between” (p. 27) the view from the school’s position and that of those who must hold the school accountable.

Here is how I safeguarded the process so as to be wakeful, trustworthy, authentic, and credible in the understanding discovered and presented by this research:

1. I used multiple types of data and/or sources of data to support or contradict possible interpretations. Eisner (1998) calls this “structural corroboration” (p. 110); Merriam (2001) calls it “triangulation” (pp. 204, 207); and Yin (2003) calls it “construct validity” (p. 34). Having multiple evidence sources develops “*converging lines of inquiry*,” making conclusions “likely to be much more convincing and accurate” (p. 98).

2. I had my construction of the story reviewed by the professionals from whom the data were obtained (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Merriam (2001) calls this

“member checks” (p. 204). I was also able to involve the individual who facilitated the teacher and administrator focus groups in reviewing the findings. This is a form of what Merriam (2001) defines as “peer examination” (p. 204). Both of these are labeled “consensual validation” by Eisner (1998, p. 112). Merriam (2001) also refers to this process as creating an “audit trail” (p. 207) and Yin (2003), “a chain of evidence (explicit links between the questions asked, the data collected, and the conclusions drawn)” (p. 83). Merriam (2001) quotes Dey (1993, p. 251) who says, “If we cannot expect others to replicate our account, the best we can do is explain how we arrived at our results” (p. 207). Then others will be able to authenticate the findings.

3. I used “*rich, thick description* to convey the findings” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). The purpose of this is to provide opportunity to allow the readers to share the experience, bringing convincing authority.

4. Throughout the reporting I clearly articulate the positions I hold relative to this school and the bias I have as an educator who has sought for change for many years. I try to clearly show the cultural environment within which this school has attempted to make significant change. Merriam (2001) calls this recognizing “researcher’s biases” (p. 205) and “the investigator’s position” (p. 206). Coghlan and Brannick (2005) believe a sense of objectivity may be attained within such potential for bias “by testing assumptions and interpretations” (p. xiii). I have given specific, direct evidence for any conclusions I have drawn to demonstrate the support outside my bias involved in each. My self-reflections are clearly indicated and provided in an effort to create “an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196).



5. I relied on the interview transcripts and other specific data as I wrote the final constructions of what was discovered in the research. Keeping within what was supported by the data I believe provided believable and trustworthy research. The interview transcripts and other documents were used as a descriptive record of “events, happenings, attitudes, and feelings,” freezing “specific moments in the narrative inquiry space.” These were used to help me “step out into cool observation” of these events in which I have been closely involved (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 83).

Validation of the information reported was of paramount importance, not just for this study, but for the continued development of the mission of this school and the system within which it operates.

### **Generalizability**

There also remains debate as to how one case study can be generalized to other situations. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to Guba’s (1985) “transferability” to other situations, which, they say, takes the “emphasis off generalizability” (p. 184). Eisner (1998) speaks of generalizing being regarded as “transferring what has been learned from one situation or task to another.” In order to make such transfers, he says, “a person must recognize the similarity . . . between one situation and the next and then make the appropriate inference” (p. 198).

Eisner (1998) continues to explain that what can be generalized, or transferred, is what one learns from a study. This learning can be categorized as:

1. *Skills*. Eisner defines these as “forms of performance” that may be learned

and applied to another situation (p. 199).

2. *Images*. These are “constructed” and “generated” from word pictures. We may then “appropriate” these images to other circumstances (p. 199).

3. *Ideas*. These are “predictions, or at least . . . expectations, about the future” (p. 200).

Stake (as cited in Merriam, 2001) describes that which makes such learning available as “‘full and thorough knowledge of the particular’ allows one to see similarities ‘in new and foreign contexts’” (p. 211). I endeavored to retell the story of this school’s experience in a manner that would allow readers to understand the experience well enough to apply the learning to future situations faced. It allows the reader to “determine whether the research findings fit the situation in which they work” (Eisner, 1998, p. 204).

### **Summary**

This chapter described the narrative case study research design, the characteristic of the case selected, and the researcher’s role as the primary research instrument. It describes how the data were collected through interviews, focus groups, observation, and other documents. Details of the approval process were given, with a description of research ethics that were maintained. It describes how the data were iteratively analyzed, as I looked for themes, connectedness, and constructions. The final two sections described how results were written to preserve reliability, validity, and generalizability.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCOVERING HOW AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM RELATED TO A SCHOOL MAKING CHANGE

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I retell the story of a school forced to either dramatically change its operations or close its doors. My purpose is to describe the experiences imposed on the school by organizations and individuals as the school made significant changes. The story reveals the culture of the educational system within which this school operates by describing how stakeholders intervened as they related to the change efforts. I give details of what is taking place on the campus, not to analyze the campus atmosphere or events, but to set the stage for the interventions imposed in response to the circumstances encountered by the school.

The story begins in 2001 when the interventions by the conference and the constituency brought the school to significant crossroads. The story begins there, though the interview data do not significantly describe such early events, to lay an historical foundation provided by information from minutes and other documents. The recounting of the story ends in the fall of 2008.

I divide the retelling into chronological sections. In each section I describe the interviewees' perceptions of events and circumstances based on the data gleaned from interviews supplemented by written documents. I tell the story as objectively as possible based on the interview data, often using direct quotes. Though I am a main character within the story, I describe my involvement as though anonymous and from the perspective of the data. I include sections containing my reflections, as a leader and facilitator of the changes, in conversation with the literature. I have separated my descriptions and recollections from the others' to clearly distinguish any perceived bias.

### **Dealing With the Crisis and Gaining Stability (2001-2006)**

#### **The Crisis and Initial Interventions**

In the fall of 2001 the school was several hundred thousand dollars in debt. From 1996 until 2001 the enrollment had dropped from 94 to 63. Some of the budget shortfalls had been made up by conference subsidies and constituency donations at unsustainable levels.

#### **Addressing the Crisis**

It became obvious to conference administration and constituent leadership that outside intervention was needed to confront the crisis. A special constituency meeting was called on December 2, 2001. After a lengthy debate the constituency intervened by giving the school one last chance to stay open—albeit, a slim chance. They voted, “That in order to secure the operation of [the school] for the remainder of this school year and for

the 2002-2003 school year, a commitment totaling \$635,000 must be raised by February 28, 2002” (Special Constituency Session, December 2, 2001, p. 2).

Many constituents, alumni, and conference personnel did not see how such a large amount of money could be raised in such a short time by a constituency that had already given more to the school than should have been expected. However, each church was given a goal, personal contacts were made with alumni and constituents by the school’s development director, and before February 28 the funds were raised.

The school remained open. At the next regular constituency meeting in April 2002, the constituency again intervened as they voted to set conference subsidies for the school at a permanent level, required the school to have a “realistic balanced budget” (based on solid enrollment projections and historically reasonable fund-raising projections) presented and approved by the school’s board in March of each year, and mandated that “no new debt can be accumulated under any circumstances” by school administration or the conference “for the operation” of the school (Constituency Session, April 21, 2002).

### **The Crisis Continues**

During the 2002-2003 school year, the school failed to meet the parameters set by the constituency. Opening enrollment dropped to 60, the school did not operate within budget, and at the school’s request the Executive Committee voted “to extend the deadline for this year until June 12, 2003 to present a realistic balanced budget” for the next year (Executive Committee Minutes, February 13, 2003).

On June 12 the school’s administration presented the 2003-2004 proposed budget

to the Executive Committee—a budget that increased expenses over the previous year. The administrators explained the need for the increased expenses, shared reports of recruitment and development activities, and reported on the school’s indebtedness status. After the reports the committee members engaged in “a lengthy discussion, brainstorming, and a careful consideration of the options before [them].” They voted to allow the school to budget on a projected enrollment of 68 and that the school must report to the committee at the October meeting where a decision would be made as to whether another constituency meeting would need to be called (Executive Committee Minutes, June 12, 2003).

When the 2003 school year began only 53 students registered (The Quarterly Report, Fall 2005, p. 2). In August 2003 the school board voted to eliminate one full-time and several part-time staff positions. The next board meeting was moved up “in order to address the direction we are heading with [the school] before the next Executive Committee” (Board Minutes, August 28, 2003). It seemed that within 2 years the last chance had become just that—school as usual was not working.

However, at the June 12 Executive Committee another process began when the members also voted to establish a committee “to look at creative ways to provide secondary education . . . with a balanced budget” (Executive Committee Minutes, June 12, 2003).

## **Alternative Solutions Provided**

The newly created committee established “non-negotiable elements” that must not be sacrificed in the search for creative solutions. These elements included “high-quality Christian education, working with a balanced budget, educating students to be ambassadors for Christ, and having a well-balanced program.” The committee then considered several non-traditional methods for providing secondary education in a school with small enrollments. Two plans were developed: (a) Significantly reduce staff, requiring teachers to hold multi-subject certification, teach more than one discipline, and perhaps teach more than one class during the same time period in the same classroom (much as takes place in multi-grade elementary and junior high classrooms), and (b) create an individualized approach to academic delivery based on established competencies, provide an educational experience not relegated primarily to classrooms and 50-minute periods, but develop various instruction and learning situations driven by individual student needs (Educational Proposal, October 2003).

The superintendent presented the committee’s proposals to the school’s board on October 14. After considerable discussion, the board voted “to move forward with a reorganization” of the school’s program as described in plan “a,” resulting in a drastic reduction of expenses for the next school year (K-12 Minutes, October 14, 2003). However, the immediate changes were only to be a first step in developing long-range creative solutions for a viable education program beyond consolidating classes, recruiting harder, and doing more fund raising to salvage the established academic program. The board also specifically recommended moving in the direction of “a competency/portfolio

based approach” to education (Educational Proposal, October 2003, p. 5; K-12 Minutes, October 14, 2003).

The school board created its own committee “to formalize the plan” (K-12 Minutes, October 14, 2003) in order to put the finishing touches on the proposal before it was presented to the Executive Committee. Three current teachers and one administrator from the school, a college professor, two former secondary teachers, four current elementary teachers, a junior high teacher, and two former elementary teachers all became involved in developing the final document (Educational Proposal, October 2003, p. 1).

On October 23, the proposal was presented to the Executive Committee, but not before the president of the conference shared information of demographics for boarding schools across the United States, demonstrating the difficulty this small conference would face if it tried to maintain the school. A lengthy discussion about the proposals and their ramifications followed.

Because the committee members determined the proposals were worth further consideration and because time was of the essence, the committee voted to meet again in 1 month. The members asked the conference administration to obtain additional information before the next meeting including: (a) discovering whether or not the Union and Division would support the proposals, (b) thoughts of all the school’s staff about the proposed plans, (c) an update on the proposed budget, and (d) the cost of closing the school (Executive Committee Minutes, October 23, 2003).



## **Union and Division Involvement**

In seeking to gain support from the Union and Division as requested by the Executive Committee, the conference superintendent became involved in an e-mail dialogue with the Union education director. Several days after the proposal was sent to the Division, the director wrote in a memorandum, "There are some concerns that need to be addressed in order for you to maintain your accreditation." Six concerns were itemized. These concerns were formulated by the Union director, the Division Vice President for Education, and the Division's educational associate without discussing the proposal with the conference superintendent who had chaired its development, though they did consult with a conference administrator who was not an educator.

The list of concerns included the following:

1. "An assessment plan and explanation needs to be presented that would allow for students transferring to other schools and colleges to have easy entry."

The superintendent's response included, "At this point in the process individual class requirements, Carnegie units, etc. will not be altered."

2. "If the principal is expected to administrate, teach, and possibly dean, who handles emergencies?"

The response began, "It has never been proposed that the principal carry all of the above duties. He/She would be a teaching principal which is common in schools with much larger enrollment."

3. "A copy of the block schedule must be submitted, we need to understand how this will work."

The response: “[The school] has been operating with a block schedule for the last seven years. I do not understand why this would be an issue at this time.”

All six items questioned had been considered and addressed by the committees. The memorandum went on to state, “New programs that are approved need to be piloted on a small scale before they are fully implemented. . . . You have not demonstrated a method of making your proposal work.” The school was budgeting for a student body of 46 students. The superintendent did not understand how a pilot could be smaller or what demonstration before trying the program would have convinced them that the proposal would work.

The superintendent’s response included, “It is either find a way to be effective with smaller staff size or close the [school]. Surely you would like for us to find a way to stay open.”

“The curriculum is not changed, the class time is not changed, class structure may not even be changed. . . . Further growth will be done in an orderly manner.”

“This proposal is not that drastic. It has been used in elementary education for the life” of education in this system. “It would seem to me that the Union and [the Division] would want to do all they can to encourage creative/effective education as indicated in the document, *Journey to Excellence*, where it is proposed that new ways of managing time and classroom experience be pursued.”

The superintendent went on to warn, “If too many hoops are expected, the process will not take place and we will lose yet another [boarding high school].” He continued, “It would seem to me that educators would trust professional educators to find solutions to

maintaining high standards while discovering a way to do secondary education that has not been tried before” (Memorandum, November 11, 2003).

After sharing additional scheduling information and holding more short phone conversations, support to move forward with the changes was obtained from the Union and the Division without the establishment of any additional follow-up accountability process.

### **The Teachers Respond**

As requested by the Executive Committee, each of the school’s teachers was interviewed in order to explain to them the details of the proposal and obtain their thoughts on the proposed changes. Several teachers said that they were fearful primarily because the proposal included major change. Some emphasized that they would ultimately need help to learn how to teach in a competency-based, individualized program. Eight of the 11 “saw some positive aspects to the changes,” and 4 were characterized as “excited about the possibility” (Issues, December 4, 2003).

### **The Decision Becomes Official**

At the December 7 Executive Committee the conference administration reported on what would be involved in closing the school followed by all that had been requested about the proposed changes. The minutes simply state, “**VOTED** to operate [the school] according to the plan proposed” by the school’s board (Executive Committee Minutes, 2003).

## **The Next 2 School Years (2004-2006)**

Before the 2004-2005 school year began, the former principal had resigned and a new one hired. The teaching and auxiliary staff had been cut, reducing expenses by over \$225,000. The staff now consisted of seven full-time employees and five task-force workers. Teacher class loads were consolidated and some teachers had to pursue certifications that had not been needed before. The overall academic process continued to take place within the structure of traditional classroom settings.

In late August the new principal reported that enrollment was 51 (the budget had been set at 46), “staff morale is high and the students seem happy.” The enrolled students included “31 of the 34 students eligible to return from last year” (Executive Committee Minutes, August 26, 2004).

In the spring of 2005, the school began to plan for the next school year. For the first time in at least 3 years, they made these plans knowing for sure that the school would be open.

The year ended with the school having very nearly operated within budget for the first time in many years. The next year’s budget was created based on the current year’s ending enrollment, and income and expense projections were balanced.

The school was on a solid financial footing as the 2005-2006 school year began. The principal reported, “Enrollment is at 65 and a good spirit pervades the campus and staff morale is very positive” (K-12 Board of Education Minutes, September 8, 2005). Enrollment had grown for the first time in 9 years and, after school began, the budget was adjusted upward.

The academic change that had been voted was still waiting to be developed. But at least now it had a chance.

### My Reflections on the Crisis and Initial Interventions

A reason to provide interventions is to develop, articulate, and communicate a “shared vision of the intended change” (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 108). I was not in attendance at the first constituency meeting, but my understanding from some who were was that it was obvious that the desired vision being promoted was of a closed school. The requirements imposed on the school in order to remain open were, as Nehring (2007) describes, “the tendency to impose plans that look great from above and make little sense at ground level” (p. 427).

No help was given to change the process of spending or receiving money, but the rules resulting in less financial assistance from the conference and requiring balanced financial budgets to be created earlier each year increased the obstacles the school faced. To me it seems the conference was shouting louder, “Have a reasonable budget and stay within it or we will close you down!” The conference constituency and leadership seemed to be expecting that the louder shouts and harsher requirements would solve the problems when, in reality, nothing had changed.

After the money was raised and the new regulations put in place, and when during the next year the insufficient funds problem reappeared, the conference’s administration again shared a vision—a vision of how hard it would be to stay open. Even when the

committee was convinced to begin looking for alternative solutions, still information was requested describing what it would cost to close the school.

Nehring (2007) describes the consequences of imposing plans that make sense only at the top:

The danger of this way of thinking is that decisions made at the top that fail to take into consideration their effect at the point of impact are likely to have unintended consequences that are antithetical to an organization's central mission. (p. 427)

The constituents and committee members were not willing to lose this school, a resource they saw as central to the mission of the conference.

On the other hand, the sub-committee established by the Executive Committee and continued by the school's board did come up with a truly shared (though not by everyone) creative vision. Developing the vision involved educators from various fields who together discovered a vision of intended change.

One of the teachers from the school believed he was placed on the "change committee" because he was "an experienced teacher." Being on the committee allowed this teacher to do "quite a lot" of talking "about the changes that could be done." Another teacher proclaimed that he had "waited a long time for an opportunity like this" (Issues, December 4, 2003). According to the minutes from this sub-committee, the recommendation was voted "unanimously." The minutes go on to record, "The endorsement was given with much excitement and enthusiasm" (Futures Committee Minutes, October 2, 2003).

Then the Union and Division became involved. I suppose their suggestions made

sense from where they were sitting. However, I do not understand why they did not consult with any of the educators who had helped plan the proposals before they expressed their concerns. The only administrator they consulted was the one who had emphasized how difficult it would be to maintain the school.

Another reason for intervention, according to Hall and Hord (2001), is to create a “context supportive of change” (p. 112). They say research is increasing the attention given to how “the context, climate, and/or culture” influences “the professionals involved” and their “responses to change” (p. 112). After contending with the context, climate, and culture that appeared as we dealt with the crises, I was influenced to be more determined than ever to do all I could to facilitate successful change for this school. I was supported by many others who had significant influence—including those who donated over \$600,000. We were about ready to discover the details of the change that was developing.

### **Maintaining Advancement (2005-2006)**

#### The Next Steps

During the summer of 2005 a complete change in top level conference administration took place. The individual who had been the superintendent, spear-heading the change process with the school’s administration, was now also president of the conference.

In September 2005 (the second year after the restructuring) at the board meeting where the encouraging report of enrollment beginning at 65 was given by the principal, the superintendent revisited the basic principles that described the creative changes expected

of the school. It was time to look again at the ultimate goal of an individualized, competency-based program (Educational Proposal, October 2003; Executive Committee Minutes, December 7, 2003; K-12 Board Minutes, October 14, 2003). The board voted to re-establish the sub-committee “to evaluate, brainstorm, support, and continue to help facilitate the vision and training of staff” (K-12 Board Minutes, September 8, 2005).

This sub-committee’s membership included a current elementary school principal/teacher, a former elementary school principal/teacher, a former math teacher at the school, the superintendent, and the school’s principal; the sub-committee was chaired by a college professor who was a parent of students attending the school. Their charge: “Create a vision for how [the school] may deliver an exceptional educational atmosphere and the best personal growth opportunities for our youth” (Visions Committee, March 22, 2006, p. 1).

They read the book, *The Big Picture: Education Is Everyone’s Business*, recommended by Dr. James Tucker, Adjunct Professor of Educational Psychology at Andrews University. He promoted the book as a good source to give greater understanding of the practical aspects of the education philosophy the school was seeking to achieve. Over the next several months the sub-committee met to discuss ways to develop and articulate this new vision for education.

The sub-committee drafted a seven page document describing a vision for the school. The document included quotes from White (1903), a pioneer of Adventist education, such as: “Students have spent their time in laboriously crowding the mind with knowledge, very little of which could be utilized. The mind thus burdened with that



which

it cannot digest and assimilate is weakened” (p. 230), and “In all true teaching the personal element is essential” (p. 231).

It contained broad ideas of possible academic approaches including the traditional approach, *The Big Picture* approach, and one labeled “other.” The document stated, “Our focus should be on ‘student learning’ not ‘subject teaching’” (Visions Committee, March 2006, p. 1).

The document proposed possible philosophical perspectives including a description of an advisory system, how curriculum guides could be used to ensure individualized learning that is inclusive, and practical suggestions for implementation such as a possible daily schedule.

The chair presented the document to the school’s board “to give direction to the academic program of [the school] into the future.” After what the minutes call a “lengthy and in-depth discussion,” the board voted “unanimously” that the school “implement a learning system” that would include eight elements. Among these elements were: “individualized instructional approaches for the majority of the learning experience, an advisory system, . . . learning objectives that conform” to the system’s curriculum guides, “individualized progress reports/checklists/syllabi for each student,” and “an increased emphasis on exhibitions.” The final two elements asked for funding to cover the teachers either visiting a school that had such a program or to “hire a consultant for an on campus visit” and provide the funding for the teachers to work several weeks in the summer (all

teachers were paid for 10-month employment each year) as a “preparation period in order to begin implementation of this new process” (K-12 Board Minutes, March 30, 2006).

During second semester, the teachers began anticipating an academic delivery change by experimenting with projects as part of their class requirements. When the board’s decision was shared with the faculty, teacher dialogue about the change became even more purposeful and directed.

The developing plans were shared with the school’s constituency at the regularly scheduled meeting in April 2006. The principal wrote in the document given to the delegates before the meeting:

The K-12 Board and the Academy staff are working together to develop a unique, high quality-learning atmosphere for [the school]. The philosophy is a blend of original principles . . . with the proven cutting edge instructional methods. Each students [*sic*] learning will combine classroom learning with individualized, integrated projects and practical “real world” experience. (Report, 2006, p. 36)

After the principal described the plan to the delegates, the chair fielded questions and comments. There was a lengthy discussion including criticism that the program would lack the academic rigor required by a strong educational experience. However, those who took the floor in support of the proposal carried the day. In the end, the constituency voted their approval of the proposal by an overwhelming majority.

It was now in the hands of the school’s administration and teachers. The skeleton was in place; now the body parts had to be attached.

## My Reflections on the Next Steps

We had come through quite a significant crisis. The new school principal and teacher team had established a program that had gained the confidence of parents and students as demonstrated by the increased enrollment from 51 to 65 in the fall of 2005. I had become the new conference president and had been able to facilitate the hiring of a completely new conference administration. This new administration and the successful turn-around in the school made discussions of closing the school a thing of the past. However, I and other influential individuals were fearful that as the school continued to grow and gain more financial stability the school's administrators would be tempted to redevelop a traditional education program. It was important to us that we purposefully ensured that we were directing the adjustments the school was making toward our ultimate vision.

I asked the school's board to revisit the vision that was established and led them to intervene by developing further the shared vision, revitalizing the planning process, and providing additional financial resources for extra time for teachers—"time for planning, time for staff development, time for sharing, etc." (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 110). We sought to provide "the support of top management" that people often want while not going too far in "telling them what to do" (Senge, 1996, p. 36).

We tried to make the framework clear and empowered the faculty "to invest their own purposes and exercise their own professional judgement in the change process" (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 306).

## **Making the Vision a Reality (July-October 2006)**

Summer and Fall, 2006

The committees did their work. The constituency proclaimed their support. Now it was time to make the change become reality. The school now had an opportunity to build what they believed would be a stronger educational program (Issues, December 4, 2003).

### **The Faculty's Vision**

The faculty believed they were attempting “to implement a teaching philosophy that larger schools find more difficult” (Educational Proposal, October 2003, p. 1) in order to, as one teacher said, “do something that [was] the best for the students.” They were seeking to “create a unique experience that was not happening in other schools and be successful at it.” They hoped that one day their success would become a magnet to draw students to the school.

“The changes began because there was financial motivation,” reported one teacher. Yet, though it was “change triggered by crisis,” it became “a search for a better way.” The process “transferred more into, now we have a chance to do something.”

The process of developing the vision allowed the faculty to understand the principles of that which they were being asked to produce. They described the new vision in various ways including: “Teaching students not subjects”; not “feeling like they have to drag the students through the material”; “Shifting the responsibility for learning to the students”; not “just pumping the information into them”; “more hands-on, more depth, less

trivia, and less exposure, more mastery”; going beyond “just coming to class, listening to teachers, taking notes, and trying to pass tests”; having learning “be competency based”; letting “kids have some individuality in how they learned things or the speed they learned it”; allowing them to “customize their own education system”; create learning opportunities through “practical experiences—like projects”; changing “from a lecture based classroom setting to a project learning classroom setting”; “it is based on process more than contents.”

Yet, there were those still skeptical of this new direction. An administrator described teacher reaction when “this really great idea” that “everyone ought to love” was first presented to them as, “They kind of look[ed] at you cross-eyed.” One teacher said, “At first, I personally was totally against the system.”

Over time and with much discussion, the faculty came to understand the principles that were to guide the process. However, they “didn’t know and couldn’t talk about exactly what the teachers and students would be doing.” Not knowing all of “what was expected of them” made some teachers “insecure” enough that they decided to leave. They did not want to get involved “in something that was that nebulous.” So the staff now included only two of the original full-time teachers who had begun this change process. One of those original teachers was now the principal.

### **The Summer**

The faculty came to the first summer meeting after putting the finishing touches on the previous school year and “everyone sat around looking at each other.” Now what?

Collaboration on naming the new program was the first order of business. Settling on “Direct Education—teaching students instead of subjects” brought a great deal of excitement. The faculty believed it truly caught the essence of the vision they were developing and would communicate that vision well with others. They were gaining an understanding of the concept, and yet, though they had “heard about it,” talked about it “in meetings,” and had “actually implemented” projects on a small-scale basis, they still “did not see it,” had not experienced it, and really “did not even know what it was” to create the practical application of this vision throughout the entire curriculum. But, when school started, they were going to have to “actually teach it.”

The last two full-time teachers to replace those who had left were not hired until well into the summer. One of these new teachers had worked part time for the school and had some familiarity with what was going on. The other had accepted the position because “I was very interested in that kind of program, and I thought that it made a lot of sense.” These changes to the teaching staff and the fact that they were not on campus until well into the summer meant they had to be apprized of all that had taken place during the last few months.

They knew they had “to prepare the curriculum” before school started. It seemed “idealistic.” “How is this going to work?” They tried to “hash out what to do.” How do you fit “the same information” the students need into “a different way”? How do you give “every student everything they need to know” in a program like this?

The principal led the teachers in a process described as, “We would sit around and talk.” In that talking they would decide what each should do, and then they would “all go

do it.” When they had constructed what they believed would work, they would come back together and “talk about why we did it this way or that way.” By the time they came “back the third time” an agreement would be reached that “this is the best way to do it.”

One

teacher put it this way, “Basically we had to create this thing—and we did.” They “figured” it out on their own.

“It was encouraging” that they could come to such strong agreements at least “for the big changes.” It brought them together. “Everybody was learning how to do it at the same time, and really wanted it to be successful.”

They developed what they called the *C.O.D.E. Book*. The acronym “C.O.D.E.” stood for “Competencies of Direct Education.” They were proud of the title and of what the book contained. They described different levels of learning, expectations of competencies to master, and all based on the curriculum guides upon which their academic program was to be built.

### **Building the Program**

The progress made over that summer made the faculty feel good. However they felt as though they were “very much on our own little island.” There was no “help coming from anyone” outside the school. They believed outside leadership should have been able to spend time with them in facilitating the program’s development. They wished there had been help with some tangibles, “What do we do? What can we do?”

What do we need to do?” but none of that came from anyone. If only someone had been there to say, “We are not sure what is over the mountain, but this is the route we are taking.” They did not get any such help.

As one administrator searched for help, “nobody doing exactly” what we were attempting to do was found. Some of the teachers did “a little research” and “there were some internet sites that helped us understand the concept of the program.” The principal gave them “ideas and syllabi from other people’s courses who had tried this before,” and he was able to find books that showed other schools’ experiences. They also met with staff from another boarding high school that had tried something similar when they went to their national convention at the end of the summer. “They gave us advice and told us what didn’t work.”

The conference provided the funding for their extra work that summer and the support was appreciated. An administrator stated, “We wouldn’t be anywhere if we wouldn’t have had all the teaching staff working on the curriculum that summer.”

There was excitement because they were “getting to try something new,” but it was also “really hard.” The summer came to an end and though they knew they had not been able to get everything finalized the way they would have liked, one teacher stated, “We honestly thought we had a good program. We honestly thought that we did put together something that the students, parents, and anybody in education would buy into.” They were as ready as they believed they could be under the circumstances. School was starting and the students were coming—all 66 of them (K-12 Minutes, November 2, 2006).



## **Initial Student Reaction**

The teachers and administrators met the start of school with anticipation mingled with misgivings and anxiety. One administrator summarized the situation, “We were leaving the comfort zone . . . and it would be a lot more difficult.”

The students were given the *C.O.D.E. Book* and the faculty spent the first few days orienting them to the new program. The reaction of the students, however, was not positive. The faculty were convinced the program they were launching was “a great idea,” would help students “develop into more holistic people rather than just pumping the information into them and testing them,” bring more depth to student learning, help them better prepare for life and college, and had the potential of engaging students much more in the learning experience—as each student helped develop an individualized learning experience. But when it was presented, the students looked at the teaching staff “with horror.”

A power struggle developed over the next weeks and months. “We had a huge negative backlash,” said one teacher. The students believed that they could “actually turn this whole thing around if they failed and said, ‘the program stinks.’ They did everything they could” to sabotage the program. The school’s “hardest challenge,” as characterized by one administrator, was the students’ being “comfortable with the traditional way of education.” “They were used to figuring out what the teacher wanted and then giving it to them. When they had to figure things out themselves they didn’t like that.” Structure changes that gave the students more responsibility—responsibility they did not accept—were

viewed as less structure and interpreted “as more play time.” The students were not supportive, “but not all for the same reason.” It felt as though “there was no way you could solve the issues.”

The faculty knew they “didn’t have the structure in place” to best help the students be as efficient as possible with the individualized approach to learning. They had expected to have more time to help each student, but that was not the reality. They “were spending so much time” trying to figure out how to do the curriculum that they “didn’t have time” for the students. The learning environment was “too open ended” – not structured enough to facilitate the students within the process.

### **Parents Become Concerned**

The parent concerns about this new individualized academic approach that allowed each student to develop a unique program with very little traditional classroom time escalated as they “were listening to their kids and not getting enough information from” the faculty. Teachers believed the parents really “didn’t know what was happening,” but when they heard their children complaining even after a few weeks had passed, “they started to get concerned like any parent would.” Parents began to question if the new academic program was beneficial for the students.

There were efforts by the faculty to communicate with parents, but it was like trying to explain apples to someone who knew only oranges. What the teachers were saying the parents were “not hearing,” and what the parents were hearing the teachers were “not saying.”

Parents asked, “Where is this taking” the students? “What is this doing for” the students? Are the students being “challenged enough”? How will the students “do on the SAT”? “There was a lot of that discouragement and negativity floating around.” A teacher remembered “parents pulling their kids” out of school and other parents “saying the program [was] not working” for their children. It was still a developing program and the teachers and administrators were not ready to say, “Our program [is] right.” Questions were flying and not many answers were readily available.

When parents began to talk of taking their students elsewhere it was not yet possible to reply, “This is such a great program, and you are blowing it and are just a nervous parent.” In fact the teachers still “would get frustrated with each other” as they tried to discover how best to provide this education process in which they had come to believe. It got to the place where they “were wondering if” half the student body was going to “leave at second semester.”

### **Principal Leadership**

During those weeks and months the teachers became appreciative of the leadership of their principal. One teacher said they were “lucky” the principal “was here.” He had the teachers meet regularly each week. He was “wise enough not to mandate things” but make just “the changes necessary to keep the thing going.” The key to survival during that chaotic time was the adjustments developed during those weekly meetings. In those meetings, the faculty “hashed out what to do.” The principal would state, “This is the way I see it,” and then asked teachers to articulate their opinions. “We could disagree.

We could discuss and then he would pull us together and we'd" make decisions "and then move forward."

During this time, administration was "marketing and shepherding," leading to make "changes without being too hard-nosed about it." One administrator said, "We had to be flexible. We had to listen to parents." However, being flexible made things "a little frustrating, the first semester, because we were making a lot of changes."

### **Tackling the Problems**

One teacher felt the whole thing had "backfired." The faculty had hoped to create a "better education for the student and less work for the teacher," but it had become "chaos for the students and more work for the teachers." "We [had] created the system and put it in place and then learned the hard way what wasn't working."

We were all kind of feeling our way through it together, and that helped because the same problem that the history teacher was having the science teacher was having as well. We could bounce things off of each other and relate ideas to each other. That helped a lot.

Everyone "was learning how to do it at the same time." And, in spite of the struggles, they "really wanted it to be successful." "The administrators, the teachers, everybody was pulling for the process at the same time."

When the faculty described how they tackled the issues during that first semester, the pronoun "we" came up often. They recognized and appreciated the fact that they

worked hard *together*. However, they were going down a road none of them had traveled before.

Not only were we trying a new program that had never been done before in our [school system], but also we felt on our own. That was probably a huge challenge because there was nothing to go on. There was nothing anyone could give us that was of any help. The ground we were treading on was [like] Lewis and Clark. No one had ever been there before.

Some faculty stated, “We didn’t see [the superintendent], we didn’t hear from the [Union or Division].” “I don’t remember help coming from anyone. We had to work it out by ourselves.” They received no help from anyone outside the school during that first semester. The faculty felt isolated and deserted.

Halfway through first semester, faculty were asking “where have we come?” Problems were not going away. Changes they made did not seem to help connect students to the program. A teacher described how the situation was viewed, “We have just wasted (that word came up a lot) a number of students’ whole semester unless we kick it in right now. Something has to happen right now.”

In October the administration realized they “had to sit and analyze all the stuff that was going on and figure out if we couldn’t solve these issues.” If they did not, they feared there would be a “mass exodus” of students.

The faculty created and administered a survey that verified the parent and student concerns. “From their input,” modifications were developed. The faculty added more structure to the process, clarified how to develop and build projects, and listed the criteria

each project was required to meet. Once again they were energized to help the students gain the benefits of this student-centered learning approach to education. The faculty presented a “unified front” built on their frequent problem-solving discussions and were once again ready to continue their “solidarity” behind the program.

But the problems did not end. “Literally up until . . . Christmas it was more of a survival thing than an educational thing.”

### **Additional Faculty Perspectives**

Though most teachers talked positively of the faculty’s collaboration as they solved problems, one teacher described the experience this way: “It felt like I was floundering, trying to do this all by myself.” This individual continued, “I was doing something new” and “I wanted to use the minds of the people who had gone on before—the committees, etc.” Another put it this way, “We [had] each other and that’s about it.” It was obvious that they wished there had been more professional assistance from outside the school.

The administrators did not seem to feel so alone. One administrator felt “that there were a lot of people involved in the process.” School administration complimented their ability to “take for granted” the support of “their board and the conference.” Without that support there would have been “no way we could have made it this far.” However, they were “dealing with questions” for which they did not know whom “to ask for help” in finding answers. Other boarding high schools within the system were not

delivering education as this school was trying to do. Public high schools were “basically not in the same kind of position” as their school. Public schools operated from “a different philosophical approach to education—the kids who want it go to their school, if they don’t want it they go to the local public school.”

The faculty believed the issues faced were made more intense because they were “trying to deal with a population where the parents and students [were not] choosing this education, the school [was] choosing this education.” The students “did not have choice” and “the parents didn’t have choice.”

One teacher said, “Many of us feel [the superintendent] forced the issue.” The change came before the school was ready. It was “prematurely forced on the parents and students in the school when it shouldn’t have been.” Both teachers and administrators stated that if the stage had been better set, if the vision had been more clearly defined, if more work had been done to explain the changes, and if it had been implemented in stages, perhaps it would have come about more smoothly.

Finally, many believed that there were too few staff to pull off the change. An administrator put it this way:

This would have been much easier if they would have said, “Here’s a half million dollars, get all the teachers you need, and then all you have to do is work on making the change and having it happen.” And I wouldn’t have had to worry about all the other stuff.

Others agreed, “We didn’t have the structure in place because we were small—small staff.”

The staff cutbacks “made it harder for those who [were] left.” “Going through the

change, we could have probably used four more” staff. “We are too understaffed.” They believed the inadequate staff was the result of inadequate finances. There was the belief that as success came, the financial resources would grow and the job would get easier because more staff would be added. “Otherwise,” one faculty member stated, “I would not be investing the time that I have.”

### My Reflections on Summer and Fall 2006

#### **School Faculty Build the Program**

After the board voted to ask the school to change the educational delivery system to a student-centered, experience-based process, the teaching staff and administration were expected to be the driving force in designing and carrying out the changes. The broad principles were laid out, and it was now important to me that the educators on the front lines not be micro-managed in how to build the program. The operating decisions must not come “from the top,” but from the people who would actually be doing the educating.

Therefore, at my request, the Executive Committee voted to fund extra time—several weeks in the summer for the faculty to build the new program. Hall and Hord (2001) call this additional planning time “one of the most important, and most typically lacking, resources for change” (p. 110).

We knew the teachers and administration now on the staff were supportive of the new educational philosophy. It was clear they had the support of the conference administration, the school’s board, and the constituency. Now, it was important that “the burden on the people at the school site for creating a design and implementing it in all its



complexity” be “substantial” (Sizer, 1996, p. 104).

I knew the process would not be easy. To be honest, I was fearful of passing the torch when we were traveling into such an unknown. But, I understood that if the changes were to become reality I would need to trust the teachers. My trust in the ability of the teachers to make this transition increased when they arrived at what Bolman and Deal (1994) call “a representation of the vision—a memorable, almost poetic way of conveying a complex set of values in a compelling way” (p. 84). Naming the program “Direct Education” helped me know they understood the overall philosophy and were headed in the right direction.

Building the new program was not easy, and I knew it would take a great deal of time. “Making collective decisions” is “time-consuming” (Evans, 2003, p. 428). I watched from a distance and received reports from the principal. I was encouraged and proud of the work the faculty did. It was evident they had gathered around what Palmer (1998) calls the “great thing called ‘teaching and learning’” and explored some of its mysteries. They experienced firsthand what Palmer believes “is one of the few means” there are to becoming “better teachers.” They had gone “to the inner ground from which good teaching comes and to the community of fellow teachers from whom we can learn more about ourselves and our craft” (p. 141).

I believe they were building what Fullan (2001) calls a “professional learning community” as they searched “for new ways of making improvements” (p. 60). “As members of a community,” they met “in person” as they talked about what was really

important to them (Senge et al., 2000, p. 73). Their involvement seemed to be developing what Fullan (2001) calls “collegiality”—the effectiveness of which he measures “by the frequency of communication, mutual support, help, and so forth” among the teachers—“a strong indicator” of the potential for success (p. 124). I was encouraged as I knew they were meeting often.

They invested “their own purposes” and exercised “their own professional judgement in the change process” (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 306). They took “responsibility for the knowledge they organise[d], produce[d], mediate[d] and translate[d] into practice” (MacBeath, 2006, p. 45). They blended “pedagogical and universal questions: What do my students need to know? How do I know when they know enough? What is the purpose of this knowledge? What is my role in helping them grow? Why am I here?” (Cossentino, 2004, p. 5).

They experienced “collaborative interaction, teacher leadership, and empowerment.” I hope they will continue to support the “concept of change as an ongoing process” (Hannay et al., 2001, p. 278).

I was pleased that the leadership of the principal was recognized as important and valuable. He truly was “the lead teacher” who was “among colleagues and students” where “the most vital judgments in the life of a school must be made” (Sizer, 1985, p. 198). It appears that he gave inspiration, encouraged “candor,” and provided “restraint,” all of which are needed for a group of individuals to “work together effectively” (Sizer, 1996, p. 92). It was leadership without which, according to some, no school can expect to make significant improvement (Fullan, 2001; Sizer, 1996).

The teachers became that “core of determined faculty members” Sizer (1996) contends is needed to join a leading principal to bring about changes that break through the barrier of current, dominant education philosophy (p. 96). They were beating out a new path “by walking it” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 107). They discovered that “all of this was exciting, consuming, and brutally hard work” (Evans, 2003, p. 428).

I believed the change was taking place where all change must take place if it is ever to become reality. For:

Regardless of how big we begin, how grandiose and complicated our stories of reform may be, how many sponsors we identify, how much financial support we garner, and how high-minded and pure-hearted our purposes might be, we inevitably return to the individual as a knowledgeable and knowing *potential* change unit of one. (Craig, 2005, p. 204)

Or, as Fullan (2001) puts it, “educational change depends on what teachers do and think—it’s as simple and as complex as that” (p. 115).

### **No Help**

Since no organization or individual with responsibilities to oversee and guide this school made any interventions during this time beyond my periodic “checking on progress” (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 111), it did allow the educators at the school the freedom to develop the program as they saw best. However, it was evident that they truly felt isolated and alone in the process.

I had invested a great deal of energy and time over the last 2 years in leading the

development of a culture open to change and setting the stage and vision for the change. I also wore many hats, and since I knew that top management can often hinder the process of change by becoming too involved and prescriptive (Fullan, 2001; Nehring, 2007; Senge, 1996; Senge et al., 2000; Sizer, 1996) it seemed wise to step back and put my energies into other areas. However, I now realize even more the truth in Fullan's (2001) statement, "The enemy of improvement is inertia, and it is clear that districts must do more than just stay out of the way" (p. 175).

I met regularly, though not frequently, with the administration in person and by phone throughout those months. The data do not indicate that those administrators felt deserted by me. They knew they had my support, but I did not serve them actively during this time as protector, mentor, and thinking partner (Senge, 1996, p. 37). I did not know the depths of some of the problems the faculty were dealing with until after the fact. I wish I had developed a stronger collaborative relationship with the school's administration.

The sub-committee and I did push administration to obtain outside professional experts to provide in-service for the teachers. Money had been donated, so I knew we had the resources for the "simplistic" point made by Bolman and Deal (1999) "that investment in change call[s] for collateral investment in training" (p. 8). Yet, I believe our change was weakened because we did not use this money to give our teachers added skills and knowledge.

We asked the teachers to create a design and implement "it in all its complexity" (Sizer, 1996, p. 104) without giving them opportunity to develop a new professional

framework that would have prepared them to (among many other things) “formulate, judge, and teach with exhibition rather than a final exam.” We knew this teaching and learning delivery system we were developing would make great “demands on the culture of the school as well as on individual teacher’s expertise” (Cossentino, 2004, p. 5), yet no outside professional assistance was provided to help teachers understand how to meet these demands.

Giving the teachers a book to read, determining guiding principles, and asking the principal to lead in the development of a new program was not enough. I should have been constantly reminding myself “that educational change is a *learning experience for the adults involved*”—including the teachers and administrators. We had provided for “one-to-one and group opportunities to receive and give help and more simply to *converse* about the meaning of change,” but we had not allowed them “to participate in skill-training workshops” (Fullan, 2001, p. 124). We failed to demonstrate that the professional development of our teachers “must be at the center of the enterprise” (Cossentino, 2004, p. 128).

Even when I did not agree with all of the details of how the program was being developed, I tried hard not to second-guess or undermine the “sensible plans they put forward” (Sizer, 1996, p. 96). One administrator described me, the school’s board, and sub-committee as “very supportive—letting us make our mistakes and doing our changes and trying not to get too involved with all the detail.” However, it is not surprising that the confidence of teachers ebbed when we did not effectively help them discover and learn how to develop and use the tools for this new way of educating.

Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) give a good summary:

Don't . . . bluntly demand [teachers] do better—but actually invest time and resources in professional development and opportunities for collaboration (within a clearly defined framework of standards that teachers have helped develop themselves), so that teachers are provided with the means to improve over time. (pp. 122, 123)

I was a key facilitator of this change. I should have met with the principal regularly to intentionally look at the process with an eye to brainstorm and problem-solve. I did not provide the continuous interventions during this time period that Hall and Hord (2001) say should have included “assessing and assisting,” also called “coaching, consulting, or follow-up” (p. 112).

Since no outside expert resources in-serviced the teachers, I should have met periodically with the teaching staff, listened to their concerns, allowed them to describe what was planned and why, and participated in the dialogue as they wrestled to solve problems. Perhaps the sub-committee of the board should have met with the teachers once during the summer and once during the first quarter, allowing the faculty to use the minds of the committee members to help discover practical applications for the vision that had been established.

### **Change Is Hard**

Though the first few months were traumatic, experts on change would not have been surprised. Bolman and Deal (1999) see change bringing “loss of clarity and stability,” confusion, and chaos. Such a state of things requires what it seems the faculty

did during this time, “Communicating, realigning, and renegotiating formal patterns and policies” (p. 8). Bolman and Deal go on to say, “The road to change is never easy, no matter how good the intentions or far reaching the support” (p. 11). Fullan (2001) says ambivalence will pervade the transition” (p. 31). He adds, “Things get worse before they get better” (p. 92).

Hannay et al. (2001) characterize the environment of change as “unpredictable” (p. 278). It is this uncertainty, the moving into the unknown, being asked to do that which “we did not experience . . . ourselves before we had to actually teach it” that can cause people to naturally resist change. “No one likes feeling anxious and incompetent” (Bolman & Deal, 1999, p. 8).

It was stated and implied often that if there had been more staff the transition would have been easier. It is interesting that they felt that way when according to their “Self-study Report” the “ratio of students to FTE [Full Time Equivalent] instructional staff” was “7.25” to one (p. 7). Many schools would love such a student to teacher ratio. Making dramatic change—change of any magnitude, really—is hard, no matter how many teachers a school has.

When a change is initiated it “may feel like extra work and effort, in the same way that learning any new sport or set of skills at first feels awkward and slow” (Collinson et al., 2006, p. 114). One individual described change as “‘like building an airplane . . .’ and her smile became explosive as she finished her statement, ‘while you’re flying it!’” (Michaelis, 2001, p. 1). One of the teachers in this school understated the challenge, “Professionally, it initially took a lot more time. It was a little exhausting to start out.”

Sizer (1996) describes schools that transition to “public Exhibitions” as often being “at once interesting and turbulent places” during their first few years. He continues, “We knew from the start, from our own personal experience, that progress would be tortuous and slow” (p. 104). So, this school’s chaotic experience appears to be in good company.

One teacher realized, “I think to some aspect [*sic*] all growth is uncomfortable.” Yet, when the chaos became worse than anticipated, I believe all involved sought to find explanations. This brought what may have been overstatements such as, “It was more of a survival thing than an educational thing,” or, the fear that there would be a “mass exodus” of students.

Others, such as Evans (2003), have also confronted critics who have predicated disaster to those making change with statements such as, “The school [is] coming apart at the seams” (p. 432).

### **Student Resistance**

Student resistance in an unsettling process of change has appeared before, specifically when the culture shifts “from one that makes demands of selected groups and tolerates mediocre work from others, to one that fosters genuine self-respect and insists that everyone learn” because it “runs against the entire tide of students’ lives” (Evans, 2003, p. 431). Sizer (1996) calls the situation “agonizing” to a student who “did well on simplistic tests” but “flounders when confronted with a demanding Exhibition” (p. 90).

He encourages tenacity:

In Essential schools where the faculty steadfastly keeps to its objectives, the crunch for



these students is unavoidable. As one ninth-grade teacher in an Essential school reported to me, “The kids are off the wall until February,” when the reality of the need for serious work kicks in. (p. 90)

I wish we had helped the faculty be better prepared to expect the chaos and negative student reactions.

Would it have been better if the parents and students had been able to choose this school between two alternatives? In reality they have that ability because there are schools, in some cases as close or closer to the homes of these students and parents, that do have traditional forms of education. I would pose an alternative question, “Did these parents and students choose the educational program that this school had before the changes?” The answer is, “No.” They inherited that program too. I believe parents expect educators to continually seek to improve the education process.

In reality, this was not some experiment or an off-the-wall stab-in-the-dark risky venture. This was, as teachers described, the result of “a search for a better way,” of doing something “that is best for the students.” Another teacher stated, “The theory behind everything is phenomenal.”

Yes, the parents and students did choose—66 of them (K-12 Board Minutes, November 2, 2006)—to come and be a part of a school that was improving its educational product.

### **Change in Stages or All at Once**

Did we change too much too fast? Would it have been better if we had

implemented the change in phases? Marzano (2003) seems to support gradual change:

Although the benefits of an incremental approach were certainly known in the early days of U.S. school reform, this approach frequently was not taken. Thus, administrators and classroom teachers are often overwhelmed by the sheer amount of change attempted and the work involved. (p. 159)

But many, as do I, disagree. “Limited, small-scale change is much easier to plan and implement in schools, but the record of more than nine decades of piecemeal efforts bears witness to its lack of success” (Keefe & Amenta, 2005, p. 537). Bill Gates, in his 2009 annual letter, reported on how many small schools that his foundation invested in “did not improve students’ achievement in any significant way.” He explained why: “These tended to be the schools that did not take radical steps to change the culture” (p. 4). “A little change is no change at all” declares Sizer (1996). “Gradual reform might be easier in the short run, but it serves the ultimate goal badly” (p. 100).

Sizer (1985) explains why small changes do not remove the difficulties: “Trying to change one piece affects every other, causing all sorts of political flak.” Because of these dynamics, “things remain the same because it is very difficult to change very much without changing most of everything” (p. 211).

We took 2 years to adjust to the financial crises and from the beginning of that 2 years had determined that the individualized approach to education was our ultimate goal. As an administrator stated, we had processed the change “through the board and discussed it with everyone.” We “made sure we had everyone on board so that . . . it’s not without

some discussion with people and people are aware that some changes are coming.” We were not able to describe all the changes as perfectly as we would have liked, but “they knew that changes were coming.” We had involved a lot of people in the process, and as we discussed this on the board and with school administration we believed any more delay may have permanently halted the process.

Evans (2003) had a superintendent who asked her to slow down several times. She explained that she could not. “If we were to redesign the school, we needed to move quickly” (p. 433). She said she knew “that a year or two of waiting and exhaustive discussion would be more likely to encourage opposition than foster support” (p. 435).

No, we did not have all of our ducks in a row when the change started—with this type of change, that may never be possible. Yes, we moved before the faculty truly understood what the final product would look like. If we had waited until they did, we would still be waiting. And yes, we still have far to go to make sure our communication with parents and other interested stake-holders becomes more effective. We, like others, will continue to battle the structures and cultures inherent in our schools that “are ill designed for teachers to meet the needs of all students, to have worthwhile discussions with parents, and even to work with each other.” It remains “agonizingly difficult for schools to respond effectively to what’s ‘out there’” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 24). And it is even more difficult when you are a small school reaching out to a large constituency—a constituency that stretches beyond the borders of the organization for which you are immediately responsible.

I believe that if I and others from organizations above the school had been there to

listen to the frustrations of the educators on the front lines, to remind them of how we got to where we were and why we had come, and to allow them to brainstorm with us solutions to problems they were facing, perhaps some of the concerns that made their job more difficult would not have become such issues. Perhaps they would have understood better that they were indeed doing something really hard, and for the most part, they were doing it quite well!

### **The Division Intervenes (Early November 2006)**

#### The First Visit

This school operates within a national system that we will call the Division. This organization is “responsible for 400 day care centers, 1,100 K-12 schools, and 14 colleges and universities” across North America. Within this Division is a nationally recognized accrediting association responsible for the accreditation of the K-12 schools. With the accreditation comes an expectation that a school will maintain a high quality of education.

To ensure the maintenance of quality, the present Vice President for Education developed a policy requiring a “Substantial Change in Program Visit” for schools in transition. He describes the reasoning behind the policy as intending to help schools making substantial change “develop policies and procedures to make that change in a systematic and successful way.” Specifically, those who make the substantial change visit act as “agents for the accrediting association,” ensuring that the new delivery system “is still a valid delivery system” from “an accrediting point of view.” They are to verify “that quality education” is still taking place, that the change is “not hurting students,” that

students are learning, and that the faculty understand what they are doing.

### **Scheduling the Visit**

It was quite “by accident” that the school’s administration made contact with the Division and received help in preparing for the substantial change visit. A Division administrator was on campus for a speaking appointment in the spring of 2006, before the changes took place. Since this individual had recently been at another school involved in significant change, the school’s administration arranged a “spur of the moment meeting.”

The principal gave a description as to where the school was “trying to head” for the next school year, the Division administrator “shared the parameters that the [Division] would insist” be incorporated for a change to be acceptable, and “a Substantial Change in Program Visit” was set up “for that fall.”

### **Preparing for the Visit**

The school’s administrator stated, “If I hadn’t had that conversation we could have run into a lot more trouble” than we did. There were times, over the summer, when administration would redirect changes by statements such as, “If we don’t want to get into trouble with the [Division] we have to include this.”

The “parameters” required by the Division were viewed by administration as setting generous limits within three points: (1) “We had to justify the learning,” not have it be “just willy nilly,” (2) grades “of some sort” were needed, not, “I think they did a good job,” and (3) transcripts “listed by subject area” must be included so they “would have

transportability” to another school.

The administration of the school anticipated this change of delivery visit to be “more informal than a typical evaluation” and had received nothing official stating “what [they] were expected to have” prepared when the committee arrived.

### **The Visit**

The visit took place the first of November 2006 and at a time when the school had recently come to the realization that they had to “drop back a bit because we had gone too radical” and were already in the process of making changes to solve some of the issues that had developed. But the school was not prepared to recognize what the committee would be looking for.

One of the committee members described the visit as beginning “very awkwardly.” He elaborated by saying, “It was quite chaotic and probably hurt the whole first meeting.” It was suggested that perhaps the principal “should have had a stronger plan for presenting the change,” though “the committee itself did not organize the process” well.

The committee visited with the teachers. Some from the school felt that the communication during those visits was hindered by “arguments over terminology.” They argued over the *C.O.D.E. Book* the faculty had produced—whether it contained “learning objectives, or outcomes, or competencies.”

Teachers felt the educators on the committee wanted the teachers “to tell them what” they were doing using the committee’s “lingo.” The committee contended that the

*C.O.D.E. Book* did not have enough “specifics to them” in spite of the fact that “the whole point of Direct Education” is to provide an educational experience “for each student” that seeks to “individualize absolutely everything.” A teacher recalled, “They kept going back to the traditional model.” The faculty wished the committee had taken “what we were saying” and translated “it into what we were doing.” It was apparent that the *C.O.D.E. Book* “did not satisfy” them “at all” and was “pretty much shot down.” Perhaps not feeling heard made one teacher remember, “They didn’t even talk to us.”

The faculty felt the interchange the committee had with them was unprofessional and unfair. One teacher was asked “vague questions” about how he would “measure something.” He gave “an honest answer” that was also “vague.” Because of that answer the committee’s report concluded that the “teachers didn’t know what they were doing.” It seemed the answer had been used as a “club” with which to beat them “over the head.”

After a private interview with the committee, a teacher felt that the information was misquoted. This teacher viewed the committee’s response to that interview as reporting that the staff was “negative about the program and discouraged,” that the teachers believed the “program was completely wrong and not going to work.”

“I never said that,” declared the teacher. There was “this black cloud hanging around that we were trying to figure out how to get through.” The concerns were expressed to the committee, expecting them to give some advice on how to get through the problems. Instead, it felt “that they were on a witch-hunt.” This teacher believed “they heard what they wanted to hear.”

Another teacher remembered all teachers being interviewed “in one shot.” During

the discussion “the majority would respond a certain way” demonstrating their “support of the program” and their desire to see it succeed. Yet, one individual would consistently say something different, complaining about the program and giving “distorted” answers. In the final report, this individual’s negative answers “were the ones that they were giving us” as feedback.

The school administration expected to be brought in early on and given an hour or so “to explain what we’re trying to do.” But the meeting with the committee was remembered as part of “the exit interview.” They asked why the changes were made, which in turn generated some talk “about the financial picture.” Just when the stage was set to describe what they “were actually doing,” the committee had to meet another appointment. They said the conversation would be continued later. However, one administrator said, “That was the last I met with them.” It seemed the committee took it on themselves to interpret “everything,” as no administrator was given opportunity to explain “what we were trying to do.”

A group of students was also interviewed. But, for reasons not described in the data, several groups of students, which included the “best and brightest,” were off campus at the time of the visit. The students the committee interviewed were “wined and dined in a way, and sort of asked questions.” They gave answers that included “every bad thing they could possibly say.” The students saw this as an opportunity to bring the program back to “traditional education.” They believed if they “guttled the program to the committee,” the committee would tell the school they could not continue with the changes. One student told a teacher that she was having a bad day and thought “she was actually in



support of the program,” she “went in there and complained.”

Some believed the student interviews held more weight for the committee than did the teacher interviews. “So, what they got was distorted.” They were basing their feedback “mostly on what the students had said.” Parents were also interviewed by the committee, though details of those interviews were not discussed.

The board chair was not personally invited to be a part of the process, though the entire board had been invited to attend the exit meeting. However, one of the committee members pressed hard to have the committee give the chair time to explain the program. This individual believed that nobody had worked through the entire change process as much as had the board chair and that it was “very, very important” to interview him since he “understood the program” better than anyone else.

A call was made and the chair arrived the afternoon of the second and final day of the visit. Though still not invited to speak to the committee he asked for time and gave a summary report of why and how the changes were made and the commitment of the school’s board and administration of the conference to the change. One committee member stated that the willingness of the board chair to stick “his neck out” and say “we are behind this” change, “we are committed,” this is the direction we expect the school to go, and that the change is “definite, decisive, and intentional” brought encouragement to support the change. Yet, it seemed the information shared was not really heard by the majority of the members.

### **The Committee’s Perspective of the Visit**

(This section is written in the first person as though from the perspective of only one committee member. The thoughts are compiled from the data of all three interviews.)

“We brought in, what I think was, a really high powered committee” including “a number of individuals who [had] been involved in change.” It is true that we were still learning how to give the appropriate support—discovering how we should give “enough encouragement, enough criticism, enough suggestions, and how” to discover if we should “endorse” the changes as this was only our second such visit.

We first interviewed “the administration and got the overview of what was happening.” Then, when we interviewed faculty, parents, and students all in “confidential” settings, we “quickly” discovered “a dichotomy of directions and that people did not understand what they were actually being asked to do.”

“The change had happened so quickly that students were falling through the cracks.” The program lacked “processes and procedures” to ensure “a structure underneath” the students to be sure they were having success in the program. The staff had not “clearly defined” how to give a grade and how to record the class on a transcript. They did not seem to have a handle on progress the students were making “on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.” In fact, they may have just discovered some of their needs a day or so before our visit and had made some drastic changes to the program just the week before.

We asked “some tough questions” because there were concerns about the viability of the program. We could not allow the school to continue on while “headed for chaos, disaster, or” perhaps “its demise.” We began to believe that things were “really out of

hand.” But, our goal was not to demonstrate a lack of support for the program. We were not trying to “be onerous in coming in and saying here is how you have to do it, but” we were wanting to ask, “What are you trying to accomplish?” “It was always a matter of, ‘What can we do to’” help you improve?

We tried to “be very realistic” and not just “walk away from” this school “that had a lot of needs. In order to validate the program as “viable” we knew that changes had to be made. We pointed out needed changes and situations that required review in order for the school to “come up with solutions. I don’t think it was completely prescriptive, but it was definitely pointed.” Our “suggestions . . . were based on the situation that we saw. We were very specific. These things needed to be addressed and changed.” We were trying to help them realize what we believed they “did not see—the precipice just coming up over the rise.”

We also wanted to demonstrate that this school was “not without support of the larger system. This was not a clandestine curriculum that nobody knew about. There were some things that needed to be addressed, but it was being supported in concept.”

The committee should not be diminished “in any way,” but in order to have a trustful, non-skeptical attitude when approaching these visits it is important “to reach a certain level of understanding.” This committee was “not totally” skeptical, there were members who had some level of trust, but we could have demonstrated more understanding and confidence in what had already taken place.

The visit probably came “too soon in the change process” to accomplish all we had

intended. However, “we didn’t know where they were going to be when we set that committee” date.

To some degree I think [the visit] was successful, but I think that some of the motivations, maybe some of the things that I had said or somebody had said in those meetings, were misunderstood, misconstrued, or we said them wrongly. The communication is a complicated process. Within that communication structure something broke down some place so that faculty, and it wasn’t just one person, it was faculty and administration as well, felt like we were trying to do things that were harmful or would not be helpful in the long run. That is a negative. That was not the intention, it was not the goal. I think that some of the things that we said were helpful, but I think the process was not as helpful as it could have been because of the mis-communications that happened during that time.

### **The Message Received by the Faculty**

(This section is written in the first person as though from the perspective of only one faculty member. The thoughts are compiled from the data of all teacher and administration focus groups.)

It seemed as though the committee “came in with their own preconceived ideas.” They were “trying really hard to be the professionals.” They were “locked into their roles too much” and not willing to be “flexible.” Their attitudes appeared “haughty and arrogant.” They evaluated us in the way they had evaluated other traditional educational programs, “but, what we were doing was non-traditional.” Their questions “had validity with traditional education” but did not apply to what we are attempting to do. Many questions were “not even appropriate.” “Sometimes the questions” strayed outside the change of educational delivery and concerned other aspects of our school. I will say it again, the questions were “completely inappropriate.”

Then, when we tried to answer, “they couldn’t understand what we were doing

because we didn't explain it in the language" with which "they were familiar." So, they made "decisions about what needed to change without getting all the information." It was "very tacky."

During one of our meetings, one of the professors said:

"You need to do A, B, and C." Well, I had just told her the night before that I was doing A, B, and C. It was just really strange. It was almost like they weren't listening to you at all, and that was extremely discouraging.

"We had done many things to correct what they were attacking us about and they didn't acknowledge" any of those changes "at all." In fact, "they didn't ask us" about what we had done.

"One thing that didn't happen that I was very appalled by was not once did one of the teachers come into my classroom and observe anything that I actually did with the students." How was it possible to evaluate our changes without seeing any classroom experiences?

"Basically we felt we may as well just throw in the towel—it was a horrible experience." We felt as though we "had just been sucker-punched" or "brow beaten." They seemed to be "just another enemy in the camp." Honestly, it "was very hurtful." We were "devastated by it." "From an administration standpoint, we wondered how we were going to get through this."

"The message they gave us" was that we had "no idea what" we were doing. We felt like "dummies." During the last meeting it seemed that their message to us was, "What are you, idiots? Why did you do this when you didn't know what you were

doing?” “We were probably too open with some of our information.” It felt as though they took all of the negative comments and used them as a club to beat us “over the head with” rather than saying, “Oh, let us help you with that.” They were a committee “we had to survive . . . rather than” a committee “to support us.” “Why don’t some of those PhD people have some ideas about how it’s supposed to work?” Why did they not give us “ideas and support to help the process”? Instead they seemed to point out all we did badly and in essence said that if we cannot fix things up “we’ll throw you away,” but if you do get it figured out, “maybe we’ll look at what you did.” Well, “if you’re so smart and I’m the dummy, why aren’t you helping me?” “Give me a tool or something.”

It would have been great if they had taken our *C.O.D.E. Book* and other materials we were developing home with them and read them over and come back with something like, “I see where you are coming from, but here are the specifics that could be done to it to make it work for our system and the system that you are looking to get into.”

“Basically they told us our program wasn’t traditional” and it seemed as though their agenda was “to keep us from” making the changes. We were convinced that “they were not really comfortable with a school stepping outside of the box.”

“The committee challenged” us, but they did not help us. “We came out of that session with” 18 recommendations that we were expected “to fulfill. It was extremely discouraging because it felt impossible.” “We all went home just shaking our heads saying, ‘What is wrong with our system?’”

## My Reflections on the First Visit

### **Lacking Knowledge**

The individual representing the Division stated that he “learned about the change process in May or June” of 2006. However, in a memo I received from the Education Director of the Union sent November 11, 2003, the director stated that the Vice President for Education of the Division had reviewed the “proposed plan for an innovative program” with the individual who would chair the substantial change committee (Memorandum, 2003, p. 1). In my reply to concerns addressed within this memo I stated that “we would welcome a visiting committee to help us assure the quality of the program” (Memorandum, 2003, p. 4). The Division knew in 2003 that the school was on a track to make significant changes and no official contact from the Division was made until the conversations in the spring of 2006.

In the accreditation process within which this school was being reviewed, a visiting committee usually comes on campus *after* the school has gone through an extensive self-study of their program. It is the visiting committee’s primary responsibility to confirm and acknowledge what the school finds in its self-study. In the substantial change visit no such self-study had been done. Yet, the committee of six apparently expected to understand, analyze, and be able to give valid recommendations for improving this innovative program primarily through interviews with students, parents, and faculty. No wonder the conclusions obtained seemed to the faculty—and to me—to be off the mark.

For instance, one of the committee members stated that “the administrator” of the

school “made the decision in late spring” to make the educational changes that they were trying to implement in the fall. This individual stated that the changes were “initially driven by economic factors,” which was true, and that those making the change (apparently the principal as indicated above) “were surprised to find solutions” that not only helped the economic issues but had the potential of being “a better system” to help students be successful in school than was the “traditional system.”

As has been described earlier, this was not a surprise solution discovered just before its implementation. I tried to explain the process of the changes to the committee when I asked to address them, but it was evident that at least one individual did not hear what I said. This individual concluded the description of how they viewed the change by saying, “I’m not sure that I could say that the school went into [the change] altruistically because they thought that program was the best.”

In October 2003 the “Educational Proposal for Union Springs Academy” assumed that “the teaching/learning environment would be changed.” The proposed changes included “classes structured using a competency/portfolio based approach to education.” Additional descriptions within the proposal included, “Students would follow a daily schedule that would include class time with teachers, but students would also be allowed to progress at their own pace” (Proposal, p. 5). On October 14, 2003, the school’s board voted to give its official support to the proposal (K-12 Board Minutes). About 2 months later the Executive Committee endorsed the board’s action (Executive Committee Minutes, December 7, 2003).

When the subcommittee was re-established in September 2005, the purpose of the



committee was stipulated as “to evaluate, brainstorm, support, and continue to help facilitate the vision and training of staff at [the school]” (K-12 Board Minutes, September 8, 2005). In March 2006 after months of meetings and research, this subcommittee of the board described their charge as, “Create a vision for how [the school] may deliver an exceptional educational atmosphere and the best personal growth opportunities for our youth” (Visions Committee, March 31, 2006, p. 1).

It is obvious this educational plan was developed deliberately by many more individuals and educators than just the principal of the school. And, its arrival was not a surprise. The Substantial Change Committee members could have known the extent of this process. It was stated that the committee wanted to discover what the school was “trying to accomplish,” but such discovery can only be done by extensive conversations with those who led out in the change process as well as with those implementing the change.

There also seemed to be concern that the change “was a traumatic process for the administrator and the faculty.” Perhaps these leaders who stated that their purpose was to help schools going through change “develop policies and procedures to make that change in a systematic and successful way” did not themselves understand what others have discovered: “That the process of educational reform is much more complex than had been anticipated” (Fullan, 2001, p. 17).

Fullan (2001), using information from another individual, states, “Marris (1975) makes the case that *all* change involves loss, anxiety, and struggle” (p. 30). Fullan goes

on to state that “the meaning of change will rarely be clear at the outset, and ambivalence will pervade the transition” (pp. 30, 31). Then he adds, “Things get worse before they get better and clearer as people grapple with the meaning and skills of change” (p. 92).

Would it not be fair to conclude that what the committee discovered a little more than 2 months into the change process should not have been a surprise? The committee concluded, “As the school has continued to develop the program, and changes have been made, the credibility of the program and goodwill of the stakeholders is at risk” (Substantial Change Visit, November 7-8, 2006, p. 1). Perhaps that conclusion would have been altered by a better understanding of the chaos often apparent in the early stages of significant change.

I agree with the member who said that this visit was “too soon in the change process to do exactly what [they] did.” It is clear that change takes time, from 5 to 10 years (Chinowsky et al., 2007; Fullan, 2001; Tomlinson, 1999). Fullan (2001) specifies that the initial “implementation for most changes takes 2 or more years; only then can we consider that the change has really had a chance to become implemented” (p. 52). Perhaps the type of visit this committee conducted should have taken place after at least 2 years into its implementation.

Delaying such a visit does not negate the possibility of the Division helping to ensure that the quality of the education being offered was of high quality. Much benefit and understanding could have been gained by all if the Division had established a supportive relationship with this school in 2003, when the substantial change process

began.

### **Systemic Problems Not Unique**

It is evident that this educational system has the same problems discovered in other systems. Fullan (2001) writes, “The most straightforward way of stating the problem is to say that local school systems and external authority agencies have not learned how to establish a *processual* relationship with each other” (p. 87). He goes on:

Governments can push *accountability*, *provide incentives* (pressure and supports), and/or foster *capacity-building*. We will see that if they do only the first and second they can get results that, I will argue, are real but not particularly deep or lasting. If they do all three they have a chance of going the distance. (p. 220)

I believe it is fair to compare the Division to these “governments” as they serve much the same purpose in the system within which this school operates. Fullan concludes that discovering how to provide all three essentials “is exceedingly difficult” as evidenced “by the fact that no government has ever done it effectively” (p. 232). I believe this statement is also true for this Division.

Interventions by higher governmental agencies that will effectively facilitate change will not happen, according to Hargreaves and Fullan (1998), “unless governments end their obsessions with criticizing and controlling their teachers, and invest more in capacity building instead” (p. 85).

This Substantial Change Committee did criticize more than it attempted to build capacity. For instance, the recommendation “that the administration and staff

immediately develop and implement an effective and systematic process for reporting student progress” (Substantial Change Visit, November 7-8, 2006, p. 2) seemed to assume that nothing had been done to provide such reporting. In reality, the staff had begun to develop the “15 Steps to a Completed Project” that, when finalized in the days and weeks that followed, provided a tool that helped them be “much more able to analyze a student’s progress and evaluate them.” The faculty “had done many things to correct what they were attacking [the school] about and they didn’t acknowledge” the faculty’s work “at all.” And they did not give any help that would have built teacher capacity to remedy the defects addressed.

This was supposed to be a visit to validate the academic substantial change. Yet, recommendations included “extend and expand the integration of faith and learning throughout the curriculum,” that a “student/parent handbook” be “reviewed and revised,” that “sufficient resources” such as computers be available for the program, and that a “stronger sense of social and spiritual community” be built (Substantial Change Visit, November 7-8, 2006, p. 2). Most of these issues were not directly related to the academic changes. The committee seemed to be evaluating and criticizing the whole school program. Addressing all of those issues at this critical time of change was overwhelming.

The committee’s recommendations seemed only to point out perceived weaknesses in the program with little if any practical advice given to assist in building the program and solving the problems. The committee’s final document does appear to list only perceived problems and then expects the school to come up with all solutions.

One of the committee members seemed to confirm the apparent obsession with

criticism with the complaint, “We need to strengthen our schools rather than speak about them as if we are so much better than they.” This individual stated that when the committee’s report was presented to the Division’s accreditation commission, the school’s change was “spun as a weak program.” In an unofficial survey of others in attendance at the commission, this member discovered that others came away feeling that the school’s program was one to which they would not want to send their child. This member stated, “I knew the pain that I felt” and that “I had a right to feel it.” And then concluded, “It always irks me, makes me very, very uncomfortable the way they talk about schools.”

### **The Need to Build and Support**

To me, this visit and its results were clearly examples of “the tendency of the system to crush promising innovation” (Nehring, 2007, p. 427).

Teachers take great personal and professional risks when they become involved in change (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). In order to encourage them to move forward, “building trust and encouraging risk-taking” are important (Thompson, 2006, p. 34). The experience described above did more to *discourage* risk-taking. This was an opportunity for the “‘top’ and the school-level ‘bottom’” to work “as close allies, with the demands and particular needs of the bottom—the individual schools—profoundly shaping the top’s specific policies” (Sizer, 1996, pp. 101, 102). Instead, what took place seemed to be a classical case of “the tendency to impose plans that look great from above” and in this case, did not take into serious consideration what was actually taking place and needed “at ground level” (Nehring, 2007, p. 427). “The point remains that serious school reform

requires *steady and consistent support* [italics added] and a great deal of patience” (Sizer, 1996, p. 101).

A committee member stated, “I think that when we came in and made the recommendations some of them were misunderstood. Some of our motivations were misunderstood.” This individual believed that the committee’s recommendations were “misconstrued, or we said them wrongly,” and the faculty and administration “felt like we were trying to do things that were harmful.” This individual concluded, “That was not the intention, it was not the goal.” Sizer (1996) gives an appropriate response, “Irrespective of their good intentions, leaders at the top can stymie serious and sensible efforts at the bottom” (p. 66).

This committee brought “external pressure” where a “sense of urgency” was “endorsed and aroused.” However, what was missing was their “collaboration,” collaboration that would “focus on learning” how to solve perceived problems in a manner that both “provoke and contain anxiety,” while encouraging mutual cooperation in “ongoing inquiry and reflection,” seeking “cumulative coherence” (Fullan, 1999, p. 34).

### **Seeking to Bring Encouragement**

At the final meeting the committee held with the faculty, I sensed the frustration and devastation the faculty felt. I asked to meet with them right after the meeting. I reminded them that they had already begun to work on much of what the committee had pointed out as weaknesses. I asked them not to retreat more than they should from the direction they had begun to take the program. I told them that they had done a good job

of building the program and they still had my support and the support of the board to keep moving forward. I tried hard to shore up their shattered confidences.

It is interesting and somewhat discouraging that none of the educators remembered this meeting as they talked about the Division's visit. I do think it points out the influence the Division committee had compared to mine even though I was the direct authority. I think it reveals even more that negative interventions often have more influence over human nature than do those that are positive.

In an interview with one of the teachers, I reminded that teacher of this meeting and asked if it was beneficial at all. With this prodding, this teacher remembered the meeting and said, "Yes, that did have a huge impact." I pushed to see if the explanation would reveal whether this individual was just stating what I wanted to hear or would further explain the statement of appreciation. This explanation was given: "I think because you were showing support, and you were showing that you really wanted this program to go forward. You know, it's always the basic idea that somebody believes in you."

I wish my intervention had done more to relieve the negative emotions that obviously emanated from memories of what took place over those 2 days. However, there was a second visit.

### **The Parents Intervene (Late November 2006)**

## Parent Weekend

The parents were involved in the process of the academic change by a representative on the subcommittees that recommended the change to the vote on the constituency floor. However, their impact became very evident on parent weekend.

### **Informing Parents**

At the close of the 2005-2006 school year, before the summer when the faculty developed the changes, the administration met with the parents and tried to help them understand the concepts of what was coming. They did their best to bring understanding to the new program that would be based on individualized instruction, an advisory system to aid learning rather than only traditional classrooms settings, a focus on projects developed with each student's interests and passions in mind, exhibitions as a major assessment tool, and individualized progress reports (K-12 Board Action, March 30, 2006). Since the concepts were still "very nebulous" and "specifics" had not yet been developed, they "couldn't describe them really well."

At the 2006 fall registration, when parents brought their students to campus, another effort was made to help them understand the individualized, project-based academic program that was being launched. The faculty explained how the "Competencies of Direct Education" would drive each student's academic program (found in the *C.O.D.E. Book*). As the concepts of Direct Education developed over the summer were presented, the faculty could tell they continued to be "very challenging for the



parents to understand,” though it seemed many of them “liked the concept.”

### **Growing Concerns**

Within weeks of the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year the power struggle with the students began. Of course, it affected what parents believed was taking place on campus. The number of questions about the program increased as parents listened to their students.

Students complained that “there was a lot more stuff” they did not understand. Specifically they said that they did not “understand what the teachers were trying to teach [them].” School “was a lot harder” because they “didn’t understand what the teachers were expecting.” They did not “know what to do.” Some said they “hated” the changes.

At first parents may have said, “Well, it’s a new program, the kids will adjust.” But, as time went on “their kids were still complaining.” Those who had begun the year “a little hesitant” and “nervous,” now were more concerned as they became convinced that “the teachers really did not have a handle on what was going on.”

Some were “more supportive than others.” One parent knew “there was a change in curriculum” but “chose not to get too much involved” because of not feeling “qualified” to determine the quality of what was being “presented” to the students. This parent “did not attend the meetings” where the changes were described because of the belief that “these people knew what they were doing.” However, many parents were not so trustful.

Their confidence in the school weakened as they questioned the “adequacy of the

program” and whether the teachers knew what they were doing.

Parents asked questions such as, Are the students learning all they need to know? “Is this going to challenge” the students, “or are they just going to sit back, put up some Power Point project, call that their project, and turn it in?” Wondering if the program was “challenging” was asked a lot. “Where is this taking my child? What is this doing for my child?” Are students being prepared “for test taking? Are they covering the skills? Are they getting the skills that they need?” One mother “was just sobbing because she felt she was throwing her money away.”

Some students reached the point of giving up and declared, “I can’t do this, I do not want to do this.” And in a few of those cases the parents responded by saying, “I’m not wasting my time any more with this” and pulled “their students out” of the school. Other parents “did not see” their students “doing anything.” “They [did not] like the program because the kids [were] slacking off. And if they’re slacking off then they [were] not learning.” Parent “perceptions of what” was happening developed as they listened to the students, while not receiving “enough information from” the faculty.

There were valid concerns. The school “did have some implementation problems.” The students were not engaged in learning as they should have been because the teachers “did not really know what to get them to do.” In addition, the school “went through two grading periods without getting any grades out to parents.” Teachers had not discovered how to grade this individualized process. “Of course parents were upset about that.” They

had invested a lot in this education and they could not see how the students were doing. Parents “did not feel like they knew what was going on.”

Without appropriate information and answers to questions, parents still “just didn’t understand what it was all about.” There was not a lot of talking between “students and teachers, and teachers and parents” in order to bring understanding and progress to the program. So, the change continued to be “a shock” to some. Parents were concerned when even those students who “loved the academy” were dissatisfied because academically they were doing poorly.

During this “testy time” many parents called the Union, questioning the integrity of the program.” The Union administrators assured them that the faculty was “working on” making improvements and encouraged parents to “check with” the principal.

Administrators from outside the school described this time as “the dark days of that event because parents weren’t getting information, students were saying we don’t understand it, and teachers were trying to understand it.” “The faculty had almost bought into the process, . . . [but] the parents and students had not been brought along.” It was a “difficult situation.”

To accuse the parents of being overly “nervous” would not have been fair. The school realized the quality of the implementation had been weak. Administration knew they “had to listen” to the parents. Adjustments had to “happen right now.” So, they “did some bold things at that point to actually communicate” with the parents and students. A survey was distributed asking students and parents, “What is working, what isn’t

working?” From the surveys some significant changes were developed in October to help provide more structure and accountability for the students.

### **The Meetings**

One parent had a lot of “political power and financial power” and pushed hard for solutions. “He wasn’t against the philosophy of the program, but he wanted to actually help to implement it.” He took a stand on parent weekend. It was obvious “there were a lot who were unhappy,” so with his leadership the parents called an unscheduled meeting and told the principal that he “should be there.” “It was kind of all of a sudden.”

The faculty had just gone through the process of discovering concerns from the students and parents. They were in the process of doing what they could to solve the problems that had been expressed. Now, they did not see this meeting as “necessarily trying to help the school.” They saw it more as, “We’re fed-up and we want to talk to you guys.” It seemed as if the parents were ready “to rip” them “apart.”

This confrontation took place just days after the Division’s committee had been on campus and as one teacher stated, “I was pretty much done.” The response when the message was delivered that the parents wanted to meet with the teachers was just, “Whatever.” But, it was evident to the principal that they “had to have the meeting” since there were so many unhappy parents.

The parents and faculty gathered in the designated room. It was moderated by the parent who had called for the meeting.

It turned into, for lack of a better phrase, a complaint session. It put us as faculty on the spot. It put individuals against very good friends of theirs. I remember seeing family members sitting on opposite sides of the room. It was a very tight situation. While the parents questioned and complained, the staff kept their “ears open.” It would have been unwise and unproductive to have been “arrogant enough to try to fight with it.”

It became obvious that what the parents were complaining about was what the students had been “feeding” them. Though there had been adjustments, the parents were bringing up “stuff that had gone on in the first few weeks of school.” The complaints were voiced as if no changes had been made and “it was still going on.”

The parents asked the principal “some very specific questions.” His responses were straightforward, endeavoring “to make things as clear as possible.” Issues were honestly addressed and questions were answered with integrity.

Since the meeting lasted so long it began to hold up a scheduled music performance, it was ended with the understanding that more “open conversation” would take place the next morning. Things were still “a bit tense.”

The rest of that evening parents huddled in little groups discussing their concerns. Those who needed to go home expressed their concerns to the principal or shared them with other parents to be addressed the next morning. The teachers and administrators spent the evening and for some most of the night thinking about the issues. They sought to glean from the complaints the specific issues being addressed, and wrestled with how they would deal with them. It was important to find a way to say, “Yes, we agree that we

have the issues and this is what we plan to do about them—this is what we’re doing about it.”

The principal sat in the front as the meeting began the next morning. By now the administration and teachers “knew most of the issues” and were prepared to address them honestly. It was the only way to deal with what they were facing. It seemed to be understood that the parents could “be honest about” their questions and the administration and teachers would “be honest about the answers.”

They “talked specifically about some things that were mentioned the day before. They tried to answer some of those questions very specifically.” They openly acknowledged that they still did not really know how the program would develop. Already there was “no continuity between” what they had explained before the school year began and “what was going on at that point.” They clarified their goals and where they were in the development process. They presented what had been developed of the 15-step program. They described other “tangible and solid” progress that had been made toward finding solutions to some of the issues. The parents heard the principal say, “I do not know exactly how this is going to work. We are trying and this is all I can tell you.”

As the conversation continued, most of the parents “seemed very willing to give” the new program more time to “see if it would work with the” students. “There were a few that said” it would not work and “were not happy,” but the majority “seemed to say, “Let’s try this and see how it goes.” A lot of speeches were made saying, “Let’s get behind [the principal] and be supportive.”

Confidence had been built to the point where parents could say, “We trust [the principal] and know he will do the right thing for the kids. We believe that this will eventually be better for our students.” Those opposed to the program “had done all their complaining,” but now they “had to just be quiet.” The complaints did not carry the day. “Everyone was siding with the school.” At that point, “the whole atmosphere changed.”

### **The Results and Faculty Response**

The school faculty said that Sunday morning’s “open forum was really the turning point for us,” “the turn-around meeting.” Those open discussions “kind of turned a corner and opened a door.” “Those two meetings were incredible,” “kind of a culmination.” The parents walked out of there saying, “Good.” There was a breakthrough that weekend for gaining the parents’ support. Most, though not all, “bought into the program and it changed that dramatically, that fast.” Honest answers to some of their questions had been given and they knew they had been heard.

As parents “came together and tried to understand they discovered that it was a totally different story” than what they had perceived. Some “were ready to string up their children.” They said, “Oh, now we understand.” They realized that many of the students were unhappy not because what was being done “was bad, but because it made their kids work more.” They discovered that the students had been “trying to manipulate the system” to “get out of work.” The parents “had their eyes opened.” They “realized that this could be a really helpful stimulus” for getting their children into college.

They saw how hard the school was “trying to help” their students. “It was touching” to see “how hard [the principal] was working through the process.” They discovered how much “dedication and effort” had been put into building the program and “their hearts were softened.” It appeared they “started to understand that if they teamed up with” the teachers some “very powerful things” were possible. It was especially significant when the parent who led that first meeting “got on board and started actually being proactive” and “giving a more positive base to the program.”

During the parent/teacher conferences later that morning, the parents discovered specifically why each student was facing difficulty. They asked “intelligent questions because of” the earlier meetings. It was easier for teachers “to explain what” each student “was or wasn’t doing, and the parents could understand.” The students were now unable to play “teachers against the parents.”

It was clear now to everyone, parents and students, that the school was not “going to abandon” this new program. They knew the school believed this program was going to produce greater learning for the students and pressure was not going to cause them to “go back to the traditional way” of education. “Modifications to the program” had been made because of “some valid input from the parents and students.” The faculty had not rigidly declared what was started was right and “everybody else’s ideas stink.” They had been “flexible” and the parents started to see “that there was potential.” One teacher said, “Once they understood what we were trying to accomplish, a lot of them, especially the educated parents, were very invested.” After that weekend the school “lost only one student,” and not because of “academic issues.”



A teacher summarized, “You have to be patient” when making changes. It is “a process you have to go through.” If the faculty had not listened and made changes they would not “have survived.” The changes prepared them “to meet the parents and be prepared to stand.” However, the faculty were still doing this all by themselves without any expert, outside help. It was still “primarily an internal effort.”

### My Reflections on the Parent Interventions

Within the context of the struggles with the parents an administrator stated that if doing it again he would “definitely,” towards the end of “the year before, . . . have a discussion session with parents” in order to tell them what the specific changes were “going to look like.” Then he admitted that they had tried, but were unable to be very specific. The insinuation seems to be that they were not ready for the change since they had not been able to share all the details. Perhaps giving more details would have helped the parents understand better. However, Sizer (1996) describes another situation in which, “even after a Herculean effort by the staff to reach out to families, parents still did not seem really to understand or appreciate what was going on” (p. 59). Others have discovered that, “for the most part, parents were not pushing for change. In fact, many were staunchly opposed to it” (Evans, 2003, p. 432).

This school also discovered firsthand how “school structures and cultures are ill designed . . . to have worthwhile discussions with parents” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 24). This school’s problems were not unique.

How the culture changed once the parents understood and came on board

demonstrates how important it is that teachers “not be left alone” in the quest for more effective education. Parents “are essential school clients and partners of educators” (Danielson, 2002, p. 35).

According to Bolman and Deal (1999) a time of conflict, “from a political perspective,” is normal. Managed well, conflict brings “an essential source of energy, creativity, and clarity” (p. 9). The parent weekend provided the needed “arenas and forums for airing people’s concerns and grievances” (p. 9). All of the arenas and forums were not planned events by the school, but when the parents confronted the staff, they did not seek to cover up and run from the conflict. When the issues were aired, understanding and clarity were produced. As a result, according to one faculty member, the parent weekend became one of the “very important parts of the whole process.”

### **The First Year Continues (Spring 2007)**

#### **Second Semester**

As second semester began, the faculty continued to try to improve the effectiveness of the program. The information obtained from the parent and student surveys, the descriptions and recommendations from the Division, and the information gleaned from the discussions with the parents were all used to make further adjustments to the academic delivery program.

#### **The School Responds**

All of the interventions—the planned or unplanned actions and events that influenced the change process (Hall & Hord, 2001)—that the faculty experienced during

first semester helped them conclude that what they had begun putting in place at the beginning of the year had been too “idealistic,” “too radical for people to accept.” “The culture change was too drastic for the students to handle.” The faculty concluded that they “had to adjust.” The process needed to be made less “open ended.” They needed to “back up until everyone [was] comfortable before moving forward again.”

“Modifications to the program” based on “valid input from the parents and students” had to be made.

They “changed quite a few things to accommodate the culture shock.” These changes included “more structure” or “stepping stones and guidance” for the students. Fifteen specific steps for developing a project were “laid out,” including “due dates for each step, . . . guidelines on what was acceptable and not acceptable, and criteria to meet.”

The faculty felt the Division required them “to do something more specific,” so they “ended up not using those *C.O.D.E. Books* any more” in order to “appease the committee.” They “actually changed [their] whole scheduling” back to a lecture-based style of education. Now students were being “tested,” having quizzes, and “doing homework,” while still being asked to “do a project.”

An administrator from one of the higher organizations viewed this process as the staff looking “at the problems as they [came] to them” with a “realistic viewpoint.” They discovered what was working and what was not working and tried to make appropriate adjustments. There were times when they “had no idea how” to solve the problems, but they kept trying new solutions and continued to modify as needed. This individual felt that throughout this process the staff “used some good coping skills to make the change.”

On the other hand, a teacher summarized the process as flip-flopping “a little bit back and forth trying to figure out how to implement” the change while seeking to stay true to “the direction [they] were headed.”

We were afraid of getting too specific. If we got too specific then we were not individualizing the education and were just jumping back in the box. As it was, none of us were really comfortable where we were because we had one foot in the box and one foot out.

“It did not make any sense” to another teacher. “We were torn as a faculty and staff. This was the direction we thought we wanted to go,” however, “we had been told to go” a different direction “or else.” Maybe this was the way it had to be done, but there were some faculty who were “not convinced at the time.”

### **Complaints Continue**

Then, “the kids started to complain” because of all the “changes.” They had begun to understand the new direction but now felt the adjustments compromised the school’s goals and caused them to do more work—traditional homework, tests, and quizzes in addition to producing projects.

There were still parents so concerned even after explanations by the school or, perhaps, because they were not in attendance during the parent weekend that they called the Union with tales of how terrible things were going. “Between Thanksgiving and Christmas” and into “January” the Union got many phone calls questioning “the integrity of the program.” The Union administrators assured the parents that the Division

committee had investigated the school's program against "the criteria, the standards, and so forth" and had discovered "a different approach to responding to the standards, but in no way did it compromise" quality.

However, critics continued to complain and predict the worst. A Division administrator called the Union because he had received information that "40 students were leaving" the school at the semester. As second semester began, the number of enrolled students remained the same as the end of first semester.

### **Collaboration Results in Progress**

With the steady enrollment and stronger parent understanding and support, "second semester" brought a "completely different kind of experience." When the parents "were actually behind" the school the program began to "take off."

We had parents who wanted us to e-mail them, and as soon as I would e-mail them they would e-mail me back and they would say that we will call them tonight. I'm going to get on their case. Sure enough, within one week everything was resolved. No longer could the students manipulate the parents. It frustrated the students "for a while, but then suddenly [they] started to adjust." By the end of the year there was "an amazing adjustment."

Students still struggled, but parents now encouraged them to stick with it. Though some parents had been "very nervous" at first, they were coming to see that "there was something very positive" for the students and the program was really working for them.

"Light bulbs" began going "on in the students' heads. Wow, this is better than

[we] thought it was and [it] makes sense now.” A major breakthrough came when “there was a student that actually completed a project. All the projects before this time” had been less than stellar. This project presentation had technology components, “models,” and “artifacts” all of high quality. With this presentation as an example, other students said, “I can do that in my area, wow! I can do this. Then the ideas started flowing from a lot more students. We just needed that one, and everybody started kicking in.”

During this time faculty continued learning “the hard way what wasn’t working.” They met together “a lot” that year—“basically on a weekly basis”—“sharing ideas.” These regular meetings helped bring them through the struggles as they pulled together. They shared ideas, came up with new ideas, and then worked with the principal to find practical steps to pull them off. All the while they still had no “personal guiding or mentoring” from outside the school.

### **The Second Visit**

As the scheduled follow-up visit by the Change of Delivery Committee arrived in May 2007, the principal, aided by the advice of one of the Union educators, put together a presentation demonstrating the results of the learning that had taken place over the months since the first visit. As soon as the principal had the opportunity to speak, he told the committee that he had a Power Point presentation. The principal recalled, “I took the floor and I didn’t stop until I had gone through everything that I thought needed to be said.” He provided details that explained the goals of Direct Education. He enumerated the solutions that had been developed for the recommendations given at the first visit—90%

of which had actually been accomplished before the first visit.

Students were brought in and described their projects. It was obvious these students “had studied all of these things in depth” and had not just skimmed over them. The 15 steps that guided students through project construction, how student projects were graded, and what each student provided as evidence of learning were all explained to the committee.

Committee members were impressed with how the principal “took charge and really communicated the program.” They recognized that what “needed to have been done . . . had been done.” They saw that most of the recommendations, some of which “were no longer valid,” had “been addressed very specifically and some were still in the process of being implemented.” Signs were evident “that the ship was righting itself.” “Learning was going on” and students were being prepared for “the next grade and going on to college.” It seemed to one committee member that the staff had “learned an awful lot” about project-based learning since the first visit.

The second committee was comprised of “just a portion” of the original members. Perhaps it “strategically” contained “different people.” It appeared to some that “key people” for whom “change was difficult to accept were not there.” This time the members seemed “willing to listen.” It seemed as though “the light bulb went on in the committee’s head.” Discussions were open. Questions were asked and answers given. The members felt that the school “did a nice job” of accomplishing more than the letter of the recommendations, but had thoughtfully addressed each one within the context of their institution.

The chair recognized and acknowledged some of the negativity generated during the first visit. “It became very clear at the second visit that the tension was there with the committee and with [the Division] office.” As this tension was addressed by the chair, the faculty appreciated what they described as an apology.

The faculty saw the second visit as “more professional and supportive.” There was a “totally different atmosphere,” “a different kind of attitude,” “much more supportive at that point.” The committee “identified specific things [the school] needed to do to show that student learning was taking place” and gave concrete “advice and tools to help [them] do better.” They seemed to understand that the first visit had taken place “at probably the worst time” possible for such a visit. Now the committee responded with relief, “This is not a school that is in crisis. This is a school that is making a transition. This is a school that is in passage and not floundering.” Feeling supported, many of the faculty now believed they “could keep moving” forward.

However, there was one who described the committee’s response as only buying “into it a little more”—not convinced they were giving whole-hearted support.

They still think the implementation of the program was troubling, but to be honest with you, I think they were grasping at straws because I think they were a little more impressed than they wanted to admit. They wanted to tell us that we had to do something, but they did not really know what to tell us because we were on the right track.

The questions had been answered with “tangible evidence and presentations by students.”



But still they “did not want to admit that maybe this could work”—that perhaps it was not “such a bad idea.” They reluctantly admitted it, but “very under their breath.” It was frustrating because it still did not seem all were “on the same team.” Isn’t “trying something new what education is all about, innovations?” If a teacher becomes “stagnant” and teaches “the same thing year after year after year,” where is that teacher going? It would seem that all valid change should be given a chance to have a future.

Another teacher was concerned because it seemed the committee still had questions “based on traditional curriculum” and traditional expectations. However, “at that point, they were much more open to what we were trying to do and much more supportive.”

### **A School Visit**

Before the end of the first school year, a dozen students and some faculty spent a day at one of the “Coalition of Essential Schools” engaged in project-based education. That visit was one of “the biggest” supports for the change process.

After the visit they all sat in a room and were asked, “What do you think?” The “almost universal opinion” was that their school was doing better than the school they visited, in spite of the struggles. This response “was really exciting and validating” to the school’s administration. These students saw firsthand “what others were doing and they liked” what their school was doing better. The experience “was really encouraging” after what had been a tumultuous year.

## My Reflections on Second Semester

Reflecting on these months makes me frustrated. I had emphasized how important it was to have experts who were involved in successful project-based educational programs in-service the faculty and yet none of us brought such an in-service. If one had guided and validated what the school developed, I believe the confidence level of the faculty to stay the course would have been higher—perhaps high enough to have resisted more of the pressure placed upon them by the Division, parents, and students. Perhaps they would have understood from the personal, firsthand experience of others how the change to a project-based program with assessment by exhibition is usually difficult and turbulent (Cossentino, 2004; Evans, 2003; Sizer, 1985, 1996). Perhaps they would have been convinced before the fact what one administrator pondered after the fact—that if they “would have stayed with it, maybe [they] could have been able to keep going without making so many changes.”

Should I have given more help to obtain such expert help? If I were to do it again, I would try harder. No help in meeting this need was provided by either the Union or the Division, and the school’s administration, for whatever reason, did not make it happen. This was an intervention that was glaringly missing.

Professional support was given to the faculty during the second committee visit. If the atmosphere of the second visit had been apparent in the first visit, I believe much of the trauma caused by that first visit would have been avoided. Comments like, “I think they have learned an awful lot as a staff and a faculty about project-based programs since

we were there the first time,” would have been tempered by the recognition of the solutions the faculty had worked out with parents and students before the recommendations were made.

While sitting in the meeting during the second visit I went on line and found members of the Coalition of Essential Schools within driving distance. I e-mailed the principals of two of them. One replied within a few minutes. It is to that school that the administration took faculty and students. I should have given such assistance sooner.

I fear what began to happen during that year—especially during second semester—confirmed what Oakes et al. (2000) assert, “In the face of resistance from within and outside the schools, educators in most schools compromised and scaled back their reform practices” (p. 575).

However, the school did make it through that first year. It was traumatic, but perhaps different circumstances and interventions would not have significantly eased the trauma. At the end of all first years comes year number 2.

### **Continuing to Build the Program (2007-2008)**

#### **The Second Year and Beyond**

Over the summer of 2007, before the second year of the academic changes, the conference continued to fund time for the teachers to build the effectiveness of Direct Education. Once again a full-time teacher left the school and a new one was hired and was brought up to speed with the developing changes. Once again, no in-service by

outside experts was provided.

When the school year began, 73 students enrolled (K-12 Board Minutes, September 6, 2007), an increase of 7 over the previous year. Optimism flourished as the year began even though the school faced an accreditation self-study and a visiting committee visit in the spring.

### **Adjustments and Response**

Adjustments to Direct Education continued to be made during the year. However, these adjustments were made under much less challenging circumstances than those that had been made the first year. A Union administrator observed that now the students understood better the expectations of the program. During the first semester of the second year, no parents or students called the Union to complain.

Some of the adjustments made were described as going “back to more traditional” methods where some classes met “every day” and where each class was “in charge of [their] own projects.” They believed that a completely individualized, integrated, project-based academic program did not work the first year. So, the second year they separated “classroom instruction from projects.” They were now “doing classroom teaching and then instead of doing homework” the teachers would require projects. Administration believed this change was “really important.” However, these changes did cause additional teacher stress. One teacher was prepared to teach how they had ended the last school year. But he found himself “behind the eight ball” as he discovered

“something else was being expected and [he] wasn’t prepared for it.”

The students continued to experience various levels of academic success. There was a group who had not done “well with traditional education” who flourished under “project-based learning.” These students gave encouragement to the teachers. Some of them immediately became “A’ students.” However, others who had done well with traditional education “went the other way.” They continued to dislike actually figuring out for themselves what they were to learn. They had been “smart enough to be able to get their assignments done without thinking too much.” These students were “still sort of sabotaging” the program. And, there were “the others”– the “slackers” – who had “always . . . been slackers” and were still “slackers.” Teachers were concerned that they had not yet discovered “how to light a fire under them.”

One teacher said, “I’ve been able to accomplish far less this year than I wanted because the kids have been slacking off because they don’t get what we’re trying to do here.” This teacher believed the solution was “to structure it more and give point values for all the little iddy biddy steps.” However, such structure would go “against the whole philosophy” of Direct Education.

When that teacher introduced more structure, a colleague heard a student complain, “I like to do it in my own time and in my own way and get it done.” The colleague gave support by explaining to the student that the additional structure was an effort to help students who struggled. The colleague then added, “So, that’s kind of hard. You’re constantly trying to reach out in different ways to different students.”

The parents’ feelings about Direct Education that second year were also impacted

as the school continued to deal with student issues. One teacher said, “I have yet to meet a parent who likes what we’re doing.” Others disagreed, “I’ve had very few parents that disagree with the concept of what we’re doing, but they don’t believe the implementation is adequate.” One of the administrators stated that he felt parents loved the concept of “teaching students instead of subjects.” He believed “almost all of them” were “very much in favor of what we’re doing.” However, “the nuts and bolts” of making it happen continued to concern them. Parents still wondered if the school was “covering everything” the students needed for college. They knew their young people would be joining “with students from other schools” and wondered if they would be able to “compete” with them.

One parent who supported the program said that what was required “helped out my daughter a lot.” She was “learning a wide spectrum” from her projects and by listening to the presentations of the other students’ projects. Another appreciated the variety rather “than just cookie-cutter projects” where “everybody has to do the same thing.” The changes of this second year were viewed by one parent as revamping and overhauling “all the mistakes” of “the first year.” Another knew his student felt “very positive about” the program and believed it was providing the “steps” needed for college.

There were strong parent concerns with the lack of communication from the faculty. Since parents could not look at the “workbook” to see if “page 10” was done, it required more reliance “on the teachers to know” the quality of the student’s work. A parent stated, “That makes it a little bit more difficult to know what is happening.” Communication with the school was characterized as “a struggle.” Parents wanted to

help when their students were having problems but, as one put it, “I can’t help out if I don’t know what’s going on.” It was stated that perhaps the teachers were too busy to communicate. But, “teachers are teachers” and parents “gotta know what’s going on.”

The faculty validated the weak communication with parents: “Most of the parents’ perceptions of what happens come from the students.” The magnitude of the problem became “very clear” when a story “going around the rumor mill [was] totally out of touch with reality.” When thinking about “some of the stuff” that went back to parents the reaction was, “Oh boy!”

### **Missing Support**

During the second year the faculty found it “hard to have time for meetings.” They had “met basically on a weekly basis” the year before, but did not continue this regular collaboration. These meetings were really missed. However, some teachers did still work together. “Maybe we haven’t had a lot of formal discussions like we did last year, but there have been many, many informal discussions that have been wonderful.”

They still believed collaboration was essential. However, instead of staff meetings that year, it seemed they were “caring for the students.” They concluded, “When have we had a chance to sit down and talk about the curriculum? Well, not much.”

The following statements and questions demonstrate how the teachers continued to crave more leadership—expert leadership—outside leadership: “If this is a significant

change” philosophy, “why are all the changes coming from the bottom?” Why are there not “some of those PhD people sharing ideas about how it’s supposed to work?” Why are they not supporting us. Why do we “feel like we’re all alone in this?” “We need strong leadership.” The teachers wanted leadership to show “the way,” providing for “growth and change.” They believed it was hard for the principal to provide this leadership because he was “teaching so much.”

There was the feeling that the principal had an “idea of where this needs to go,” the superintendent had his idea, and the teachers had theirs. But, they were “not the same.” So, “Where is it going?” They believed if the ultimate goal was known, the changes could be made “in that direction.” At that point it seemed that no one really knew “what the end result” was going to be.

Teachers wanted leadership to hold them accountable, ensuring that the process was kept at a “consistent level.” Someone needed to tell them that they were expected “to collaborate” and then “give” them the “time to do it.” It was believed that they were at “a more serious situation” than during the first year “because the people who were willing to hold their breath for us last year are less willing this year.” Yet, “no one” was helping.

It was not that they wanted “someone to come” and “tell [them] how to do” project-based education. They wanted “some support” so they could “work as a team” to make it happen. They did not want “a paint by number.” They did not want to be “micro-managed.” They did not want someone to come in and say, “We’re the PhDs and this is how you do it.”

They craved someone to facilitate the process of discussing where they were going,



getting them together so they could share—letting each describe what they had done and discussing the benefits and challenges. They wanted access to resources, experiences, and knowledge that would keep them headed toward their vision.

They were “being pushed by the big questions of education.” They were seeking to discover how to “give the kids the best education”—practical education that prepared for life. Though one felt that it was “appropriately clear where” they were going, it was still not understood how to get there. They had the “principles” and “philosophy” and now it was important that leadership hold them accountable.

### **Building on the Vision**

Teachers made statements such as, “I’m philosophically on board with what we’re doing.” “I think we are all coming together.” Administration was encouraged because “most of the teachers [were] still supportive of the idea,” though they probably had “different ideas about some of the details of how” to make the program work.

Another school using project-based education was visited. Reaction included, “What they were doing wasn’t helpful for us at all.” The school they visited seemed to be in “a rut” and stuck there. They were still dealing with issues to which this faculty already had discovered answers.

That fall, the superintendent met with each of the teachers and they appreciated the “chance to talk to him a bit” and “think about what” was being done in the classes and what changes might be appropriate. The faculty felt support such as this needed “to be a little more consistent.” At that point it had been “very sporadic.” It was more a “token”

support then something that could be counted on.

Compared to the teachers, the school's administration seemed to feel more support. They recognized support from the Vision Committee "and of course" from the superintendent, "who has been there" reminding us that "we really want to do this—it is really important." They knew the superintendent, board, and subcommittee expected to see student enrollment hold up, a balanced budget maintained, test scores at least remaining steady, and students and parents relatively happy. If some of that were to change, one administrator said, "we'd have to come in and answer why."

School administration also felt support from the Union. The Union director was viewed as "very open to letting" them "experiment." They felt both Union administrators could be talked to and would give good ideas. They asked "educator type questions" and, if "bad answers" were given, would give suggestions. They had been on campus and saw firsthand what was taking place, which increased their ability to be of assistance.

Both teachers and administrators realized that improvements were needed such as:

1. How to help the students develop quality projects. Ensuring that they truly substituted depth for breadth—"where the student really is learning on a deeper level."
2. How to guide students to make meaningful, productive choices in their learning process.
3. How to "develop competencies" so that subjects may be integrated "into the projects."
4. How to discover the ideal goal to which they were going and ensure that they

continued moving forward. They did not “want to lose what [they had] gained.”

The teachers and administrators did address two major issues—one teacher called them “the big events of this school year”: (a) They established ways to help students who were “lagging too long, slacking too long” face the consequences of extra study hall, etc., and (b) they provided “more structure and more teeth into” the program before it totally fell apart. The results seemed to help bring problems “back into line.”

### **The Self-Study and Accreditation Visit**

During the first few months of 2008, school administration with the assistance of teachers, parents, and board members prepared a self-study report. In May 2008, a 10-member visiting committee of the Division’s accrediting organization made up of educators from schools and organizations from various levels of the nation-wide system spent parts of 4 days on-campus. They came to validate the quality of the school’s program for continuing accreditation.

The “Justification Statement” from this committee’s final report began, “[The school] is providing a strong program for their 69 students.” It continued,

The stakeholder initiated “Direct Education” program is morphing its way toward a clearer picture of what they want the program to be. There is a growing number of supporters in parents and students as they go through this transition period. (Visiting Committee Report, May 2008, p. 4)

The visiting committee’s first major commendation praised “the board, administration, staff, parents and students for working collaboratively to create and adopt

the Direct Education program in accordance with the Journey to Excellence guidelines to expand the academic program” (Visiting Committee Report, May 2008, p. 6). Of the nine major recommendations, only one specifically addressed Direct Education. That one recommendation stated, “That the board, administration and faculty clearly articulate the Direct Education program and develop a timeline for its implementation” (Visiting Committee Report, May 2008, p. 7).

The committee recommended a “partial” 6-year term of accreditation (6 years is the maximum length) requiring “an on-site revisit” in 3 years to verify significant progress.

They felt it “was important” that 3 years be given “before another committee visited the campus,” providing time for the growth and development of the program (Visiting Committee Report, May 2008, p. 4). It would then be possible, if acceptable progress had been made in meeting the school’s action plans and the committee’s recommendation, to extend the term for the remaining 3 years (p. 5).

The committee indicated its confidence in the continued success of the school by stating, “It is the belief of the visiting committee that the constituency, board, administration, and faculty have the significant capacity to continue their pursuit of these goals” (Visiting Committee Report, May 2008, p. 4).

### **And Beyond**

During the third summer—the summer of 2008—the conference continued the provision of funds for teachers to spend extra weeks building Direct Education. An additional teacher was hired since enrollment had remained steady during the last year and

more time to free the principal for stronger academic leadership was needed. Again, this new teacher needed to be brought up to speed, but the one hired seemed to have an educational philosophy that fit well with Direct Education. More adjustments were made to provide an ever-improving experience for the students. The school year began with 74 students (K-12 Board Minutes, September 2008).

During the previous spring the sub-committee of the board in consultation with the faculty began building an Innovation Configuration for Direct Education. Apparently, it is common for there to be uncertainty about an innovation because “change facilitators and teachers do not have clear images and descriptions about what the use of the innovation can look like” (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 41). Hall and Hord (2001) have developed the Innovation Configuration Map to help those involved in a change “visualize and assess the different configurations that are likely to be found for any particular innovation” (p. 41). Entering into this exercise was the beginning of what Champion (2003) calls a “tedious” process, but one she believes “can be a powerful, job-embedded professional development experience for a leadership team or faculty” (p. 69). Though only partial and in draft form, the principal used the instrument to help direct the faculty as adjustments to the program were developed over the summer to keep the program on track toward the ideal goals.

During the first half of the school year, the superintendent met often with the school’s administration. He also had two meetings with the teaching staff and principal in the process of continuing to build the Innovation Configuration. It was an effort to provide outside professional assistance for which the faculty had been calling.

The Division provided another intervention with the official vote of the accrediting agency approving the recommended partial 6-year term with a re-visit during the 3<sup>rd</sup> year. This vote confirmed the positive feedback received from the accreditation visiting committee.

### My Reflections on the Second Year and Beyond

The lack of an expert, experienced professional giving practical in-service to the faculty continues to haunt my reflections. I believe that much of the anxiety during the struggles to engage the students in the new learning process could have been reduced in intensity if someone from a successful school had been brought in to describe the process in place at their school—especially if such an in-service had been done multiple times over the years by more than one successful practitioner.

I do not believe the Division leadership could have provided the in-service; there was no one there who had successfully implemented such a program. There was no one in the Union who had this expertise and no other school that I am aware of within the national system had implemented such a program. The conference leadership, primarily me, had not implemented a project-based, individualized academic program.

Discovering how to implement a dramatic change is a major challenge when facilitated and demonstrated. Fullan (1999) explains, “It is one thing to see an innovation ‘up and running’, it is entirely another matter to figure out the pathways of how to get there in your own organization” (p. 14). However, meeting the challenges of such a

transition without such expert leadership exponentially increases the difficulty.

This school's change remains in jeopardy because, according to Fullan (2001), "change will always fail until we find some way of developing infrastructures and processes that engage teachers in developing new understandings" (p. 37). He continues, "Changes in beliefs and understanding . . . are the foundation of achieving lasting reform" (p. 45). The fact that this school has advanced in developing new understanding and beliefs to their present level is a testament to the dedication and collaboration of the faculty, their confidence in the support of the conference and other local significant stakeholders, and the collaboration between conference leadership and school staff—though less than ideal it seems to have been.

I still cringe that my efforts to provide positive interventions did not make this vital component a reality. The school continued to face resistance from within and without, and the faculty was never provided expert support, understanding, and validation that would have provided the courage to stay the course in spite of opposition.

Seeking to appease the resistance, I believe, contributed to erosion of the faculty's ability to make time for their regular collaboration. Every adjustment seemed to combine more traditional educational experiences with the innovations, and the time investment demanded of the faculty continued to grow. Faculty failing to collaborate is a major liability to successful change (Bolman & Deal, 1999; Collinson et al., 2006; Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Palmer, 1998; Schmoker, 2006; Senge et al., 2000; Sizer, 1985).

Realizing that administration felt more support from me than did the teachers,

seeing the pressure to compromise by the continued resistance, and sensing the faculty's frustration of not knowing for sure what the program ideal looked like drove me to begin facilitating the development of an Innovation Configuration. Some may contend this process began too late. Perhaps that is true, but I do not believe we were ready to begin earlier. Fullan (2001) explains why, "The meaning of change will rarely be clear at the outset, and ambivalence will pervade the transition" (pp. 30, 31). Actual involvement in the change helped us discover by experience the goals needed to define the ideal of Direct Education and the development of steps to reach the ultimate goal. Remember, we did not have outside advice to help us philosophically or practically define the ideal before we began the discovery for ourselves.

Since no outside expert help was found, I increased my leadership involvement. I told the faculty, "I don't know where the next water hole is, we're going to have to somehow learn our way there together" (Bolman & Deal, 1994, pp. 81, 82).

The final intervention by the Division up to this point was the official letter from the accrediting agency announcing the voted term of accreditation. I was told that there was extensive discussion as to how soon the next on-site visit should be held. In the end the committee accepted the recommendation of the practitioner experts who for 4 days observed the program firsthand. The school is now allowed to grow the change for 3 years before facing the work required for the next on-site visit. The Division avoided extra supervision that Schmoker (2006) describes as tending to "divert teachers from implementing and continuously improving their mastery of effective instructional and assessment practices" (p. 23). The Division did begin "an annual accountability process



for our ‘journey to excellence’” which, they admitted, would take more “precious time” to develop (Letter, August 29, 2008).

There continues to be no corresponding assistance from the Division in the discovery of how best to build the program in the “journey to excellence.” Fullan (2001) warns, “Pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation” (p. 92). I believe the system still provides more “criticizing and controlling” of teachers than it invests in building their “capacity” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 85) to expertly make the “journey to excellence.”

### **Summary**

This chapter told the story of this school’s journey beginning in 2001 when the conference intervened, requiring it to make changes for survival. The retelling described how decisions were made to go beyond survival to building an educational program that provided better learning for the students and what the school encountered as they tried to construct an individualized, project-based academic program.

The details of the story were not intended to provide in-depth analysis of the success, failure, or description of the change process on campus. The story does give opportunity for the analysis of interventions from those outside the school. It provides opportunity to discover the change culture of the educational system within which this school operates and how it impacted the school. It describes the interventions by the Union, the Division, the parents, and the conference, in response to the circumstances that

developed on campus. It also describes needed interventions that were missing.

## CHAPTER 5

### WHAT WAS DISCOVERED

#### **Introduction**

In earlier chapters I have established from the literature that change in education—in any institution—is difficult. The research indicates that for changes in local schools to be successful in the long run, the system in which the school operates must support and encourage change. Fullan (2001) states, “We have come to the conclusion that the larger infrastructure matters” (p. 219). This study was done to provide educators additional understanding of the influence educational system issues have on the change process.

This study was the story of what one small, boarding high school in a parochial school system experienced while making change. I discovered how key stakeholders described their experience of change within their education system.

#### **Research Design**

The research design was a narrative case study as I sought for insight and discovery into how the system responded to the change process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Merriam, 2001).

In seeking to retell the experience from as many sides as possible, the school’s teachers and administrators, parents, and administrators from organizations responsible for

overseeing the school—14 individuals in all—were either personally interviewed or participated in focus groups. The data obtained from these individuals were combined with information from committee minutes, school publications, and documents created for the school by other entities. I, as an educational administrator and chairman of this school's board, added my reflections on what I observed and encountered.

### **The Case**

The case for this study is a small Seventh-day Adventist boarding high school in the Eastern United States. It was chosen primarily because it is a school that undertook dynamic change. The school had been in financial difficulty for many years. When faced with changing or closing it went through a process of restructuring. In determining the survival changes needed, the leadership decided to do more than survive, but use the opportunity to significantly improve the educational product the school offered. Two years after the school stabilized financially it began a dramatic change of its academic delivery system.

This school is a part of the largest Protestant education system in the world. The system in North America has three layers:

1. The Division, that is responsible for all Adventist schools in North America (400 day care centers, 1,100 K-12 schools, and 14 colleges and universities).
2. The Union, which gives direction and oversight to schools within a territory of several states.

3. The Conference, the administrative level directly responsible for overseeing the operations of the school.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In order to support change successfully, Collinson et al. (2006) propose that schools and education systems need to engage in “organizational learning.” They define this learning as ongoing “in a deliberate manner with a view to improvements supporting the organization’s goals.” They believe learning organizations have a better potential to “renew themselves from the inside out and to improve learning” (p. 107). Fullan (2002) calls this learning, “knowledge sharing.” He says it is essential that the sharing of knowledge throughout the system “be seen in relation to the overall development of the intellectual and moral aspects of the teaching profession, and indeed to the fundamental transformation of the profession itself, and correspondingly of the cultures of school systems” (pp. 418, 419). If an education system wants to support change within its organization, Hall and Hord (2001) propose that interventions—“the various actions and events . . . [taken] to influence the process”—“are key to the success of the change process” (p. 9).

It is from this theoretical framework that I looked for indications that the system demonstrated characteristics of a learning organization and described systemic interventions that impacted the school’s change process.

## Results

The participants in this study described a system conflicted in its quest to maintain and improve on the quality of Adventist education. The desire to bring change was voiced and documented, but the system demonstrated weaknesses in its support. This study revealed a system with the following characteristics in relation to the process of change:

1. The system operated primarily from a well-established paradigm of holding schools accountable. We were quite good at sending warnings, analyzing proposals, criticizing processes, and seeking to ensure that policies and procedures were followed. However, we were not so good at helping the school find solutions to its shortcomings.

2. The system did not demonstrate a thorough understanding of what is known about change. An excessive amount of concern was expressed when the change was messy, when the vision was not crystal clear, when those implementing the change were not positive of how to develop it, and when it was discovered that there were those involved in the change who were resisting. Instead of recognizing and helping the school proactively deal with symptoms that accompany change, the system revealed the tendency to quickly label the messy change as weak and left the impression that since the change was chaotic it was in major trouble.

3. The system revealed that it lacked effective communication mechanisms and processes. This lack was not because educators at various levels did not want to communicate with others, but such communication did not fit well within job descriptions and what was viewed as more urgent. Administrators related to each other and the school

from the responsibility paradigm of holding schools accountable without as yet accepting as just as important the building of relationships through communication that results in collaboration.

4. The system demonstrated some understanding of its role in school change, but events revealed it still had much to learn. There were indications, especially at the conference level, of a developing understanding that change must be driven by the local school and its teachers. The conference provided leadership that facilitated change without bringing a pre-packaged mandated change from on high. However, the system at all levels did not collaborate with the school as it developed an operational structure for the change. There was not collaboration for the purpose of the personal and professional development of all involved, from the teachers to the Division's Vice President, in the building of new frames of references.

5. The system revealed a growing desire to facilitate positive educational change. In some cases it took a change of leadership personnel in key positions, but by the end of the time frame of the study most, if not all, levels of the organization had leadership committed to making changes that would improve education for the students.

## **Discussion**

### **The Dominance of Holding Schools Accountable**

Education leadership within the system seemed to realize a need for change in order to bring improvement, yet frustrations remained from many who observed continued pressure for the school to operate within traditional approaches to education, only do it

better and more diligently. For instance, when the school faced its early survival crisis, the conference held it accountable for not operating in a fiscally responsible manner. But the solutions imposed were a tightening of the school's financial regulations. In the first year of the major academic delivery change, the Division became involved and again emphasized accountability. It found the developing program did not meet established regulations and guidelines. The committee responded with numerous recommendations that reiterated the importance of fulfilling established policies in order to receive continued Division support. In both of these situations there was evidence of "conspirators"—"culturally embedded tendencies" (Nehring, 2007, p. 425) to view schools from traditional philosophies and expect changes to come by doing what had been done only more intensely and efficiently.

The system made great effort to "check on progress" (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 111) and hold the school accountable for deficiencies. Then, it imposed plans that probably made sense from where those in authority sat, but made "little sense at ground level" (Nehring, 2007, p. 427).

The conference asked the school to raise more money, expect less financial aide from the conference, keep education looking the same, and balance the budget. Later, the Division expressed grave concern that the school had not convinced parents and students that the change was sound. It was convinced traditional measurements would reveal significant weakness in the quality of the new program. The unstated order in both situations was, You find and do what it takes to remedy the weaknesses. In neither case did any part of the system outside the school play an active part in "planning and providing



resources” (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 110). There was no systemic collaboration to find creative financial solutions or to discover and share knowledge that would help remedy perceived defects in the innovation. Both examples demonstrated how the system tended to stifle change, not because there was a lack of commitment to change, but because how the system held the school accountable did not promote change. The system did not provide interventions that, according to Hall and Hord (2001), are essential to change, “providing continuous assistance” and “creating a context supportive of change” (p. 112).

### Coming to Grips With the Change Process

The school met a serious crisis, change or close, and from within the crisis came the vision to not just survive but improve. However, the school did not have extended planning time when in crisis mode. When the teachers named and planned the implementation of Direct Education, they were not sure how to make the vision operational. When the students arrived on campus they knew they would not like this new way of doing school. When the parents listened to their students’ complaints they became convinced the product must be inferior. When the Division came to discover what was taking place on campus they were quite sure the school was near implosion. The results of reactions from those imposing the accountability caused teachers at the school to believe the innovation must be scaled back in order to keep the system happy—even though the vision was compromised.

The system need not panic when schools that change have stages of chaos. Sizer (1985) says the current structure of education “remains in place” because “reformers are

impatient” (p. 210). I would add that not only are reformers impatient, but so are those looking on as they call for immediate verifiable results. However, asking for measurable results quickly brings disappointment (Sizer, 1996). Fullan (2001) states, “Things get worse before they get better and clearer as people grapple with the meaning and skills of change” (p. 92). There is a need for the development of processes to facilitate change where there is demonstrated understanding and support of change experiences that are usually chaotic.

I contend that the “knowledge base” of change is becoming more profound, and that it is absolutely indispensable to dealing with the relentless ubiquity of innovation and reform. It isn’t that people resist change as much as they don’t know how to cope with it. The answer is for individuals, especially in interaction with others, to arm themselves with knowledge of the change process and to refine it continually through reflective action, and to test what they know against the increasingly available knowledge in the literature on change. (Fullan, 2001, p. xii)

It is important that the system at all levels provide resources to combat ambivalence and chaos, not shut the change process down when they appear. “Few schools make much progress if the demonstrable sensible plans they put forward are continually second-guessed or undermined by higher authorities” (Sizer, 1996, p. 96).

When we understand and expect the messiness of change, we will then realize the importance of interventions that provide “continuous assistance” (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 112), that facilitate the development, articulation, and communication of “a shared vision of the intended change” (p. 108), that realize a heavy investment “in professional learning”

(p. 110), and create “a context supportive of change” (p. 112).

### Facing Communication Issues

The Union and Division leadership did not talk to the educators at the conference when the change was first brought to their attention. Even after they gave their approval to move forward, there was no follow-up contact about the change from these two organizations for over 2 years, even though they were invited to participate in its development. The faculty did not feel the conference administration communicated enough while they were constructing the new program. The parents felt the faculty did not communicate enough with them as the new program began. These are all illustrations of inadequate communication. However, this system was not the first to experience the difficulty with communication in education settings.

Palmer (1998) speaks of the distance between participants in education and says we could blame the system.

We are distanced by a grading system that separates teachers from students, by departments that fragment fields of knowledge, by competition that makes students and teachers alike wary of their peers, and by a bureaucracy that puts faculty and administration at odds. (p. 36)

And in the case of this system and this school I would add geography that puts miles of separation between entities within the system. However, Palmer goes on to say that

blaming the structure of the current system “for our brokenness perpetuates the myth that the outer world is more powerful than the inner” (p. 36).

A system serious about promoting change will find remedies to these problems. When the parents decided they were going to require the faculty to communicate with them, the results were greater understanding, empathy, and collaboration. This was an example of organizational learning, where “individuals’ learning” was “shared at the group or organizational level” (Collinson et al., 2006, p. 110). Fullan (2002) states that successful businesses value “both the ‘giving’ and the ‘receiving’ of knowledge as critical to improvement” (p. 411). Collinson et al. (2006) summarize, “Because individuals are social beings, individual or organizational change depends on the social system in which human beings interact and learn” (p. 111). Communication is essential to an organization seeking to renew itself.

#### Increasing the Understanding of Systemic Roles in Change

There was demonstrated a growing understanding within the system that change means change. There was a recognition that different support mechanisms were needed to develop better practices in education—beyond just verbal directives that proclaim support of change. Fullan (2002) states, “Leading in a culture of change does not mean placing changed individuals into unchanged environments. Rather, change leaders work on changing the context, helping create new settings conducive to learning and sharing that learning” (p. 411).

The conference began a new collaborative process when it chose not to close the

school but intervened to develop, articulate, and communicate “a shared vision” of intended change (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 108). It was an inclusive process that “questioned shared assumptions and norms to reach new theories-in-use” (Collinson et al., 2006, p. 109).

The conference empowered the teachers to enter into a collaborative learning process that continued adjusting and building the new program by “the selective retention of good ideas and best practices,” and the “explicit monitoring of performance” (Fullan, 2002, p. 417). “Their gains were the result of internal expertise, shared and refined by groups of teachers” (Schmoker, 2006, p. 109). They were provided significant “space and scope . . . to invest their own purposes and exercise their own professional judgement in the change process” (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 306). The school was becoming “learning enriched” where “the whole school faculty” was “engaged in inquiry together.” They “felt supported in experiments with innovations” (p. 111). The conference created a new “context supportive of change” (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 112).

Understanding the significant roles that teachers must have was important, but the system missed what may be its most important role in facilitating change. We did not invest in outside help to provide “professional learning” (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 110). The system did not “foster capacity-building” (Fullan, 2001, p. 220). Fullan states, “Change will always fail until we find some way of developing infrastructures and processes that engage teachers in developing new understandings” (p. 37).

Union and division administrators did not include as part of their jobs the

facilitation in gaining understanding of the most appropriate ways to change. It seemed all three were committed to supporting innovation and change in education. “Exciting,” “a great adventure,” and “what education is all about” were phrases they used to describe the school’s change. Yet, the system did not provide collaborative “ongoing learning in a deliberate manner with a view to improvements supporting the organization’s goals” (Collinson et al., 2006, p. 107). There was not a high level of “prioritizing learning for all members” (p. 110). The result was an organization that had not taken significant steps in “creating a context supportive of change” (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 112).

#### Leadership Determined to Change

When the parents had concerns they demanded a meeting with the faculty, and school leadership responded appropriately. Parent weekend began a process of collaboration between faculty and parents that enhanced student learning. The faculty were energized to move forward. After the Division committee was on campus the first time it left the faculty devastated. However, Division leadership changed the dynamics of the second visit and the faculty felt somewhat encouraged by the changed accountability process. The faculty appreciated the ongoing support from conference leadership and knew that without it, they would not have progressed as far as they had. Yet, they complained that they did not receive help from anyone to understand how best to develop the program. Conference leadership responded by a more frequent collaborative process with the school and leadership committees to increase change momentum.

Leadership at all levels expressed commitment to change for the betterment of

Adventist education, yet this study revealed that the high level of collaboration needed for lasting change was missing. There was acknowledgment of the weaknesses in the process and system involvement throughout the experience, yet no dramatic changes were visible as the study ended. The process provided information demonstrating that the system could

know how to better facilitate change and, it was clear, leadership desired to learn the lessons provided.

We were into the third year of the school's academic change process when this study ended. The vision was still there, but the changes realized had been limited. How will the system foster what is still a fledgling change? Only time will tell.

### **Summary Thoughts**

This study discovered a school and educators who wanted to change and tried to change, but faced significant challenges from their own system. These findings corroborate the literature that describe pervasive calls for reform and a desire among educators for change, but how those who do attempt change experience persistent difficulty in creating lasting change. The findings of this study support the fact that leadership within education systems can work against the reforms they say they are trying to encourage.

Fullan (2001) argued:

The *pressure* for reform has increased, but not yet the reality. The good news is that

there is a growing sense of urgency about the need for large-scale reform, more appreciation of the complexity of achieving it, and even some examples of partial success. (p. 6)

There was evidence that we in the system at least allowed this school to have partial success toward dramatic change. However, the evidence did not reveal an understanding within the system that facilitated an effective change process.

Fullan (2001) described three ways that those within a system may facilitate change. He said that leadership “can push *accountability*, *provide incentives* (pressure and supports), and/or foster *capacity-building*.” He continued, “If they do only the first and second they can get results . . . but not particularly deep or lasting. If they do all three they have a chance of going the distance” (p. 220). In this summary I will look at these three aspects of change facilitation and how they appeared in this study.

There was evidence of an effort to provide accountability. Yet, the accountability process did not seem to encourage change. Fullan (2001) states, “The fact is that there is a great deal of inertia in social systems, requiring high energy to overcome” (p. 66). In this school’s experience it was revealed that there were processes within the system that created inertia to pull back the change toward traditional methods rather than providing the professional energy required to break out of traditional education practices.

We provided the school with very few positive incentives for change. There were some negative incentives such as discussions of possible closure. The pressure from the possibility of closure encouraged the conference to collaborate with school personnel to find creative ways to survive. From that collaboration came the vision for the dramatic



academic delivery change. However, from the beginning and emphasized throughout was the constant fear of possibly losing accreditation. That incentive tended to slow down the change rather than empower it. Beyond recognizing some of the local school's success and the level of support provided by local leadership and conference committees, there were very few tangible, positive incentives to bring about the change.

Although there was a collaborative process of developing the broad vision for the change, this collaboration did not provide the all-important capacity-building. In fact, capacity-building was virtually non-existent within all levels of the system. Without capacity-building, educators at all levels did not learn how to recognize and facilitate successful change. Without a new capacity of understanding and practice there was a bias from educators within the system that tended to only observe what was perceived as weaknesses in the change without providing help for teachers to build the capacity to remedy the weaknesses. We in the system seemed unable to become a learning, collaborative system, working together to discover a shared vision and forge creative implementation of strategies and skills needed for change.

This study confirms one of Fullan's (2001) conclusions: "It is exceedingly difficult to combine accountability, incentives, and capacity-building, as evidenced by the fact that no government has ever done it effectively" (p. 232). The status quo continued to dictate how those within the system tried to analyze and guide change. It seemed they had not discovered the flexibility that Fullan (2001) contended is needed. He said:

High capacity schools and districts are less likely to toe the line with rigid impositions, more likely to take a risk when flexible options are available, and more likely to be

resource-hungry when it comes to exploiting the larger infrastructure. (p. 225)

There was evidence that old paradigms did not allow for healthy change dialogue, flexibility, risk taking, and collaboration.

Finally, the study showed that educators within this system did not seem to have a complete understanding of what was required in dramatic change. I believe leadership still did not fully grasp the depth of the change process required and the chaotic struggles that usually accompany such change. There was a need for all of us to gain a better understanding of how a system must facilitate the complexity of change if the improvement was to be realized.

I will let Fullan (2001) conclude:

Two ships have been passing in the night, stopping occasionally to do battle, in the dark. One is named Accountability, the other Professional Learning Community. Both have evil twins. One is called Name and Shame and the other Navel Gazing. The future of educational change is very much a matter of whether these two ships will learn to work through the discomfort of each other's presence until they come to respect and draw on each other's essential resources. (p. 267)

We still need to discover how to have these two ships work together to facilitate change. There was evidence that we in this system began to work through the discomfort in the presence of both ships. However, we still must realize and eliminate the “evil twins” from our process. This study provided evidence that may be used to make advancements within this system—a system that promotes and describes the importance of education change.

## **Suggestions and Final Thoughts**

### **For Superintendents and Conference Leadership**

If we are determined to bring educational change to improve education, conference administration should intentionally act as a change facilitator, meeting regularly with the principal and less regularly with the staff—primarily to listen and brainstorm solutions to problems being faced. We should also facilitate bringing in outside professionals to in-service the teachers (regularly over time) on understanding how to implement the change. It could be that the conference administrator should formally follow up the in-services provided with regular meetings to work through problems discovered in implementation and keeping the direction of the process in place.

It is important that conference administration not diminish or undermine the principal's leadership so essential to success within a school. The conference administration should facilitate the principal's leadership, not replace it. The principal is still the most important leader in the change, but conference facilitation as described above should strengthen the principal's hand and give validity and outside professional support to the change effort and strengthen the culture of change, collaboration, and learning to reduce the power of the inertia to draw the change back into old paradigms.

It is vital that throughout the collaborative process all involved are constantly reminded of the difficulty involved when making changes. When obstacles are encountered, if there is collaboration, it will be easier to have the courage to maintain the

course even when it seems that chaos reigns.

#### For Union and Division Administrators

An administrator interviewed stated how some say it is difficult–no, impossible–for large educational organizations to change without killing the system and starting over. But this individual expressed a commitment to prove this assumption wrong. The belief was that the larger organization can bring change as it seeks to be helpful and supportive to schools that want to change while ensuring that the change is “beneficial to the organization, a specific organization institution, as well as the organization as a whole.”

Here are my suggestions to help leadership within each organization build a system that more effectively facilitates change:

It is important that we understand the reality that change does not come from the top down. I am convinced that there is little an organization of any size can tell a local school in determining what is best for them. However, a large organization can provide resources to help those at the local school discover how best to change. I believe we would provide greater assistance if we spent less time developing codes that are expected to micro-manage the local educational process and more time facilitating building the vision at local schools. Those of us who lead larger organizations should create directives that contain “a small number of integrative structures–key priorities, mechanisms for planning and problem-solving and a focus on core outcomes” (Fullan, 1999, p. 37). “People do not learn or accomplish complex changes by being told or shown what to do.

Deeper meaning and solid change must be born over time” (Fullan, 2001, p. 80).

It is important that systemic leaders, in their collaborative efforts to facilitate change, include an obvious investment in the teachers—providing resources and experiences that enable them to effectively “exercise their own professional judgement in the change process” (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 306). I do not believe this can be done primarily by national conventions or union-wide teacher in-services. Large organizations cannot mass produce professional judgments in teachers.

It is important that we promote an academic philosophy that encourages change. However, ultimately all change takes place at the local level. Therefore, for best results, those of us who lead supportive organizations should provide specific professional support, collaboration, and resources appropriate to the needs within each school that desires to change. We should do what it takes to build the capacity of teachers within the framework of the change they have come to believe in. Without an intentional, personalized approach to building teacher capacity, our assistance will lack effectiveness.

I suggest the compilation of a list of professionals willing to invest significant time to build the capacity of local school faculty. Facilitating change may be enhanced if financial assistance was provided since many effective professionals’ fees can be costly. The experts provided should listen intensely to local personnel in order to facilitate change as only local personnel can implement. This specific assistance may facilitate a school’s growth into becoming a model school demonstrating concrete evidence of the benefits of effective change. Providing resources to allow other significant administrators and change agents to visit these schools for extended periods of time may help disperse a better

understanding of what is needed to bring about change and effectively build a dominant philosophy that promotes change and growth.

We should take those schools that are committed to change and actively facilitate their efforts, however rough may be the road, and trust the local leadership. Change will not be effective if leaders believe they have all the answers and local individuals are less capable.

We need not stop school evaluations, but the evaluations should include a process of collaboration to discover solutions rather than only pointing out problems. These evaluations, even the significant-change-of-program visits, should be done only after requiring a self-study to lead the school into an in-depth discovery and description of their purpose of the changes undertaken. However, we should not require this self-study in the midst of beginning a change. Time should be given for the change to begin to take shape and perhaps a professional ally could be provided to help facilitate the process from the beginning.

As leaders in each organization search to discover how best to make changes at the local level to better facilitate improved education, school by school, they should find ways to be involved in the intense interaction required for the system to truly become collaborative. I challenge Unions and the Division to provide resources, leadership, and a structure of collaboration that will “immediately and relentlessly begin to share, examine, and engage in dialogue about these realities on every occasion—until our actions and commitments begin to erase the awful inertia of past decades” (Schmoker, 2006, p. 164). The Adventist education system is promoting a *Journey to Excellence*, which, we say, is

about change. By building improved collaboration where leadership within the whole system gives stronger support to the process of developing sound innovations, the prospects for permanent change can be dramatically improved.

### Some Final Thoughts

Thornburg (2002) quotes Machiavelli (1998) in *The Prince*:

It ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new. (p. 105)

We must develop a system that provides much more than “lukewarm defenders” because the “enemies” can be fired up and they have inertia on their side.

What if the conference administration had been critical of the changes this school was making when the Division committee expressed so much doubt in the possibility of success? What if the parents had pulled 20 students out of school after that first semester? What if the teachers had truly said, “This is not worth it, I give up”? There was and is in every situation so many opportunities for a change to be derailed. Is it a coincidence that in this case so many individuals have come together to keep this innovation moving forward in spite of obstacles faced?

As a researcher looking at this school through the prism of a Christian, I do not

believe it can be overemphasized that “it is not for man to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23 NIV). The Lord “sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning” (Dan 2:21 NIV). God says His plans will succeed. “Even if you were to defeat the entire Babylonian army that is attacking you and only wounded men were left in their tents, they would come out and burn this city down” (Jer 37:10 NIV).

If we are pursuing a course that God is blessing, even if everything is not done exactly as it should be, even if the vision is not entirely clear, even if other organizations question the validity of what is being attempted, even if there seems to be a lack of resources to make the change a reality, He brings a group of people together that He can use to keep things moving forward. He does not let the liabilities overcome the potential. He gives wisdom to travel through what appears to be chaos.

In the end, “No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. . . . But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine” (Ps 33:16, 18 NIV). One of the school’s administrators stated that he believed it was providential that school faculty, school administration, and conference leadership all with the same vision were here at the time the school needed to make substantial changes to survive. There seems to be more at work here than what can be discovered only by academic research.

### **Suggestions for Further Study**



1. Allow one close to an institution such as I was to truly do an insider research study. There is valuable information yet undiscovered without such studies.

2. Study this school to measure the effectiveness of the change taking place in relationship to what this study has revealed.

3. Study how the Division relates to schools that seek to change on into the future in order to discover if there has been any change in their processes.

4. Study the codes of these organizations, determining what flexibility is built into them to facilitate change.

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS

ANDREWS UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT

EDUCATION OFFICERS IN HIGHER ORGANIZATIONS INFORMED CONSENT  
FORM

DISCOVERING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM'S CULTURE

Researcher: Stan Rouse, doctoral student in Leadership and Educational Administration  
Department at Andrews University

This form requests my consent for participation in research to discover the culture of the educational system within which this school operates. I will be involved in an interview in which I will be given opportunity to respond to questions posed by the researcher. This interview will be held at a mutually agreed upon site and will last no more than one (1) hour.

The purpose of the interview will be to discover the stories describing the culture of the educational system encountered by the school as it has sought to make their academic delivery changes. The benefits of this study will be the retelling of our experience so others who may want to undertake such dynamic change may have the opportunity to better understand the educational system within which they operate and may allow the system to have opportunity to maximize their support of positive educational change.

I have been told that the interview will be recorded and transcribed and the transcription will become part of the data base for the dissertation. I have been assured that an effort will be made to keep my personal identity in this study from being obviously disclosed in any published document beyond the context of the organization for which I work. I understand that within the context of this interview I need not share information beyond that with which I am comfortable.

Because the researcher is chairman of the school's board and president of the conference, the relationship between the researcher and the school provide the benefits of a more complete understanding of the context of the information I share and the ability to collectively tell a more complete story describing the culture of the educational system.

I have been told that there will be no cost to me for participating in this study and that I will not receive any monetary compensation for my participation.

I have been told that if I wish to contact the researcher's advisor, Dr. Duane Covrig, a professor in the School of Education at Andrews University or an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any complaint I may have about the study I may contact Dr. Covrig at

Andrews University Bell Hall Suite #173, Berrien Springs, MI 49104, (269) 471-3475, or [covrig@andrews.edu](mailto:covrig@andrews.edu) for information and assistance.

I acknowledge that my participation in the study is fully voluntary. I have been told that refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalties or loss of benefits to which I am entitled. I also understand that if I choose to participate I may end my participation at any time.

I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by Stan Rouse. My questions concerning this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study. If I have additional questions or concerns, I may contact Stan Rouse at the New York Conference, 4930 West Seneca Turnpike, Syracuse, NY 13215, (315) 469-6921, or [stan@nyconf.com](mailto:stan@nyconf.com).

I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____	_____
Signature	Date

_____	_____
Witness	Date

I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

_____	_____
Signature of Investigator	Date

ANDREWS UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT

EMPLOYEE INFORMED CONSENT FORM  
DISCOVERING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM'S CULTURE

Researcher: Stan Rouse, doctoral student in Leadership and Educational Administration  
Department at Andrews University

This form requests my consent for participation in research to discover the culture of the educational system within which this school operates. I will be involved in a focus group made up of educators of the school in which all participants will be given opportunity to respond to questions posed by the interviewer, Shirley Freed, Ph.D. from Andrews University. This focus group will be held at a mutually agreed upon site at the school and will last one (1) to one and one-half (1 ½) hours.

The purpose of the focus group will be to discover the stories describing the culture of the educational system I have encountered as we have sought to make our academic delivery changes. The benefits of this study will be the retelling of our experience so others who may want to undertake such dynamic change may have the opportunity to better understand the culture of the educational system within which they operate and may allow the system to have opportunity to maximize their support of positive educational change.

I have been told that the focus group discussion will be recorded and transcribed by a third party obtained by Shirley Freed, Ph.D. and the transcription will become part of the data base for the dissertation. However, in the transcription educators will be identified by number only with no record of individual identity being given to the researcher within the transcribed information. I have been assured that my identity in this study will not be disclosed in any published document.

Because the researcher is chairman of the school's board and president of the conference there is a potential that information I share could be used to affect my employment status with the school. That is why the individuals participating in this focus group will be identified only by a number when the transcribed information is given to the researcher. I have been assured that the information shared during this focus group interview will have no bearing on future employment. I also understand that within the context of this focus group I need not share information beyond that with which I am comfortable. The interviewer has assured me that she has no family connection to the researcher and is not an employee of the New York Conference. She stated that she will keep confidential the specific identity of individual participants.

The benefits of the researcher's relationship with the school include a greater understanding of the context of the information I share and the ability to collectively tell a more complete story of our experiences.

I have been told that there will be no cost to me for participating in this study and that I will not receive any monetary compensation for my participation.

I have been told that if I wish to contact the researcher's advisor, Dr. Duane Covrig, a professor in the School of Education at Andrews University or an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any complaint I may have about the study I may contact Dr. Covrig at

Andrews University Bell Hall Suite #173, Berrien Springs, MI 49104, (269) 471-3475, or [covrig@andrews.edu](mailto:covrig@andrews.edu) for information and assistance.

I acknowledge that my participation in the study is fully voluntary. I have been told that refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalties or loss of benefits to which I am entitled. I also understand that if I choose to participate I may end my participation at any time.

I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by interviewer. My questions concerning this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study. If I have additional questions or concerns, I may contact Stan Rouse at the New York Conference, 4930 West Seneca Turnpike, Syracuse, NY 13215, (315) 469-6921, or [stan@nyconf.com](mailto:stan@nyconf.com).

I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Witness	_____ Date

I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

_____ Signature of Interviewer	_____ Date
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ANDREWS UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT

FORMER EMPLOYEE INFORMED CONSENT FORM  
DISCOVERING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM'S CULTURE

Researcher: Stan Rouse, doctoral student in Leadership and Educational Administration  
Department at Andrews University

This form requests my consent for participation in research to discover the culture of the educational system within which this school operates. I will be involved in an interview in which I will be given opportunity to respond to questions posed by the researcher. This interview will be held at a mutually agreed upon site and will last no more than one (1) hour.

The purpose of the interview will be to discover the stories describing the culture of the educational system I encountered as we sought to make our academic delivery changes. The benefits of this study will be the retelling of our experience so others who may want to undertake such dynamic change may have the opportunity to better understand the culture of the educational system within which they operate and may allow the system to have opportunity to maximize their support of positive educational change.

I have been told that the interview will be recorded and transcribed and the transcription will become part of the data base for the dissertation. However, in the transcription I will be identified by number only with no record of individual identity. I have been assured that my identity in this study will not be disclosed in any published document.

Since I am no longer employed by the school, the fact that the researcher is chairman of the school's board and president of the conference has no bearing on my present employment. I have been assured that the information shared during this interview will not be shared in any manner that would have any bearing on future employment. I also understand that within the context of this interview I need not share information beyond that with which I am comfortable. The benefits of this relationship between the researcher and the school include a more complete understanding of the context of the information I share and the ability to collectively tell a more complete story of our experiences.

I have been told that there will be no cost to me for participating in this study and that I will not receive any monetary compensation for my participation.

I have been told that if I wish to contact the researcher's advisor, Dr. Duane Covrig, a professor in the School of Education at Andrews University or an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any complaint I may have about the study I may



contact Dr. Covrig at  
Andrews University Bell Hall Suite #173, Berrien Springs, MI 49104, (269) 471-3475, or  
[covrig@andrews.edu](mailto:covrig@andrews.edu) for information and assistance.

I acknowledge that my participation in the study is fully voluntary. I have been told that refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalties or loss of benefits to which I am entitled. I also understand that if I choose to participate I may end my participation at any time.

I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by Stan Rouse. My questions concerning this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study. If I have additional questions or concerns, I may contact Stan Rouse at the New York Conference, 4930 West Seneca Turnpike, Syracuse, NY 13215, (315) 469-6921, or [stan@nyconf.com](mailto:stan@nyconf.com).

I have received a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

ANDREWS UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT

PARENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM  
DISCOVERING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM'S CULTURE

Researcher: Stan Rouse, doctoral student in Leadership and Educational Administration  
Department at Andrews University

This form requests my consent for participation in research to discover the culture of the educational system within which this school operates. I will be involved in a focus group made up of three parents who have had a student enrolled in this school since the beginning of the 2006 school year to the present. All participants will be given opportunity to respond to questions posed by the researcher. This focus group will be held at a site mutually agreed upon by the researcher and each participant and will last no more than one (1) hour.

The purpose of the focus group will be to discover the experiences I have had or have observed first hand that have affected my support for the school's academic delivery changes. The benefits of this study will be the retelling of our experience so others who may want to undertake such dynamic change may have the opportunity to better understand how to maximize their potential support for positive educational change.

I have been told that the focus group discussion will be recorded and transcribed and the transcription will become part of the data base for the dissertation. However, in the transcription participants will be identified by number only with no record of individual identity. I have been assured that my identity in this study will not be disclosed in any published document.

Because the researcher is chairman of the school's board and president of the conference there is a potential that information I share could be used to affect the experience of me and my student in relationship to the school and its employees. However, I have been assured that the information shared during this focus group interview will not be shared with the school for the purpose of identifying any participant or their student. I also understand that within the context of this focus group I need not share information beyond that with which I am comfortable. The benefits of this relationship between the researcher and the school include a more complete understanding of the context of the information I share and the ability to collectively tell a more complete story of our experiences.

I have been told that there will be no cost to me for participating in this study and that I will not receive any monetary compensation for my participation unless a special trip will be required where I will be reimbursed for the cost of the gas I used to travel to the focus

group sight and up to \$10 for meal expenses if needed.

I have been told that if I wish to contact the researcher's advisor, Dr. Duane Covrig, a professor in the School of Education at Andrews University or an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any complaint I may have about the study I may contact Dr. Covrig at Andrews University Bell Hall Suite #173, Berrien Springs, MI 49104, (269) 471-3475, or [covrig@andrews.edu](mailto:covrig@andrews.edu) for information and assistance.

I acknowledge that my participation in the study is fully voluntary. I have been told that refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalties or loss of benefits to which I am entitled. I also understand that if I choose to participate I may end my participation at any time.

I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by Stan Rouse. My questions concerning this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study. If I have additional questions or concerns, I may contact Stan Rouse at the New York Conference, 4930 West Seneca Turnpike, Syracuse, NY 13215, (315) 469-6921, or [stan@nyconf.com](mailto:stan@nyconf.com).

I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Witness	_____ Date

I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

_____ Signature of Investigator	_____ Date
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APPENDIX B  
PROCEDURES

ANDREWS UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
LEADERSHIP DEPARTMENT

EMPLOYEE FOCUS GROUP PROCEDURES  
DISCOVERING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM'S CULTURE

**Verbal Instructions:** The purpose of this focus group is for you to share experiences you have had **with individuals and organizations outside the school** that have encouraged and/or discouraged you in your effort to bring about the academic changes in this school.

The purpose of this focus group is not to discover how effective you and the school are in the change process. None of the information you share during our time in this focus group will be used to affect your employment status in the school. You need not answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. Your identity will not be disclosed in any published documents. The information shared during this focus group will be transcribed by a third party obtained by the interviewer, Shirley Freed, Ph.D. from Andrews University, with all identity of the participants removed and each individual identified only with a number.

This research is being done as part of a Ph.D. from Andrews University, but the researcher is also committed to giving an accurate description of the system we have been working within in an effort to help all of us understand better the culture of this system toward change. The final publication will combine your experiences with those of the researcher.

1. Why have you chosen to be a teacher at this boarding academy?
2. What encourages you the most to keep trying to be a better teacher?
3. Since July, 2006, [the school] has been changing its academic delivery system. Please, from your perspective, describe the changes?
4. What do these changes mean to you personally – how have they affected your professional life?
5. What has helped you in the change process?
  1. Follow-up focus may be: **How have parents or students encouraged you?**
  2. Follow-up focus may be: **How have other individuals or organizations encouraged you?**

6. What has hindered you in the change process?
  1. Follow-up focus may be: **How have parents or students discouraged you?**
  2. Follow-up focus may be: **How have other individuals or organizations discouraged you?**
7. If you were called to be a consultant what advice would you give to bring this school the support it needs?
  1. Follow-up focus may be: **Have you experienced anything like this? (Describe)**
  2. Follow-up focus may be: **Have you experienced the opposite? (Describe)**
8. What do you believe would be the best next step the academy should take to improve the education they offer the students?
9. If you were the moderator, what question would you ask? (What is your answer?)

Remember, before the final version is published you will have an opportunity to review what has been written and give in put that in your view may help make the information more accurate. Your suggestions will be carefully considered when the final version is written.

ANDREWS UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
LEADERSHIP DEPARTMENT

EDUCATION OFFICERS IN HIGHER ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEW  
PROCEDURES  
DISCOVERING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM'S CULTURE

**Verbal Instructions:** The purpose of this interview is for you to share your view of how your organization has related to the academic changes taking place in the academy and experiences you have had while relating to those changes. Your identity will not be disclosed in any published documents.

I am doing this research as part of my Ph.D. from Andrews University, but I am also committed to giving an accurate description of the system we have been working within in an effort to help all of us understand better the culture of this system toward change. The final publication will combine your experiences with mine.

1. How many years have you been a teacher in the classroom and what is your specialty?
2. How many years did you teach at the academy level? How many years have you taught in a boarding academy?
3. How many years have you served in your present position? What are your responsibilities?
4. What is the role of your organization as it relates to changes in specific schools?
5. Since July, 2005, [the school] has been changing its academic delivery system. From your perspective, describe the changes?
6. What do these changes mean to you personally?
7. What has helped you and/or your organization support this school's change process?
8. What has made it difficult for you and/or your organization to support the change process?
9. What should schools that want to bring changes do to make it easier for you and/or your organization to support the changes?
10. What do you see as the greatest need in our boarding academies?

Remember, before the final version is published you will have an opportunity to review what has been written and give in put that in your view may help make the information more accurate. Your suggestions will be carefully considered when the final version is written.



ANDREWS UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
LEADERSHIP DEPARTMENT

FORMER EMPLOYEE INTERVIEW PROCEDURES  
DISCOVERING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM'S CULTURE

**Verbal Instructions:** The purpose of this interview is for you to share experiences you had **with individuals and organizations outside the school** that encouraged and/or discouraged you in your effort to bring about the academic changes in the school.

The purpose of this interview is not to discover how effective you or the school were in the change process. You need not answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. Your identity will not be disclosed in any published documents.

I am doing this research as part of my Ph.D. from Andrews University, but I am also committed to giving an accurate description of the system we have been working within in an effort to help all of us understand better the culture of this system toward change. The final publication will combine your experiences with mine.

1. How many years have you been a teacher and what is your specialty?
2. How long did you teach at the academy? How many total years have you taught in a boarding academy?
3. During your last year at [the school] changes were made in the academic delivery system. Please, from your perspective, describe those changes?
4. What did those changes mean to you personally – how did they affected your professional life?
5. What helped you in the change process?
  - a. Follow-up focus may be: **How did parents or students encourage you?**
  - b. Follow-up focus may be: **How did other individuals or organizations encourage you?**
6. What hindered you in the change process?
  - a. Follow-up focus may be: **How did parents or students discourage you?**
  - b. Follow-up focus may be: **How did other individuals or organizations discourage you?**
7. Did the changes have any impact on your leaving the school? (**Explain**)

8. If you were called to be a consultant what advice would you give to bring the school the support it needs?
  - a. Follow-up focus may be: **Did you experienced anything like this? (Describe)**
  - b. Follow-up focus may be: **Did you experienced the opposite? (Describe)**
9. What do you believe would be the best next step the academy should take to improve the education they offer the students?
10. If you were the moderator, what question would you ask? (What is your answer?)

Remember, before the final version is published you will have an opportunity to review what has been written and give in put that in your view may help make the information more accurate. Your suggestions will be carefully considered when the final version is written.

ANDREWS UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
LEADERSHIP DEPARTMENT

PARENT FOCUS GROUP PROCEDURES  
DISCOVERING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM'S CULTURE

**Verbal Instructions:** The purpose of this focus group is for you to share experiences you have had related to the academic changes that are taking place at the academy – those that encouraged you to support the changes and/or those that have hindered your support.

None of the information you share during our time in this focus group will be used to affect any change in the status of your child at the academy. You need not answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. Your identity will not be disclosed in any published documents.

I am doing this research as part of my Ph.D. from Andrews University, but I am also committed to giving an accurate description of the system we have been working within in an effort to help all of us understand better the culture of this system toward change. The final publication will combine your experiences with mine.

1. What is your profession?
2. How many of your children are presently in the school? Have you had others attend?
3. For how many years have you had children in this school?
4. Since July, 2005, [the school] has been changing its academic delivery system. Please, from your perspective, describe the changes?
5. What was your first reaction to the academic changes the school is making?
- 6. What has happened that encourages you to support the changes?**
7. What has happened that makes it more difficult to support the changes?
8. (If not covered in the above answers) How have these changes affected how your child relates to school? How has it affected his/her learning?
- 9. What do you see are the roles of parents as the school brings innovations they believe will help students?**
10. What do you believe the school should do to better utilize and involve parents in such

a change process?

11. What advice would you give the school to improve the quality of the education they offer students?

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VITA

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