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ABSTRACT

This study investigated two questions concerning the empowerment of teachers: (1) What meanings do teachers associate with the social practices and social knowledge that inform the social actions of teacher empowerment? and (2) What kinds of events seem to account for, or explicate, the accomplishment of teacher empowerment? Participants in the 1-year demographic study were 40 teachers in a middle school. Evidence from teacher narratives and participant observations revealed the following teacher definition of teacher empowerment: "Teacher empowerment is the opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and to influence the way one performs in one's profession. True empowerment leads to increased professionalism as teachers assume responsibility for and involvement in the decision-making process." Three principal findings emerged: (1) the organizational culture as reflected in the cultural norms promoted and sustained teacher empowerment; (2) the social practices and social knowledge of empowered teachers promoted and sustained teacher empowerment; and (3) empowering leadership, as transformative leadership, promoted and sustained teacher empowerment. Teacher's meanings and social actions were found to be most consistent with those situated in the discourses of teachers' associations, the conservative and liberal education theorists, and authors of organizational transformative leadership. (JD)

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"Teacher Empowerment: The Discourse, Meanings and
Social Actions of Teachers"

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ABSTRACT

The meanings and social actions associated with the empowerment of teachers have received much attention within the teaching, teacher education, and leadership discourses. Despite its popularity, not one meaning for the term "teacher empowerment" has been agreed upon. More problematic is that the meanings and actions ascribed to this term remain vacuous of the voices of those who are seeing it, living it, and practicing it-- the teachers.

Utilizing ethnographic methods of participant observation and narrative research, this study sought to investigate two questions concerning the empowerment of teachers:

1. What does teacher empowerment mean to teachers? More specifically, what meanings do teachers associate with the social practices and social knowledge that inform the social actions of teacher empowerment?
2. How is teacher empowerment accomplished? More precisely, what kinds of events seem to account for, or explicate, the accomplishment of teacher empowerment?

Findings from this study illustrated both the meanings and actions that teachers associate with their own empowerment. By juxtaposing these findings with those already present in the literature, consistencies and inconsistencies among discourses of theorists and teachers were noted, thus offering a picture of empowerment agreed upon by both theorists and practitioner.

Evidence obtained from teacher narratives and participant

observations revealed the following teacher definition of teacher empowerment:

Teacher empowerment is the opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and to influence the way one performs in one's profession. True empowerment leads to increased professionalism as teachers assume responsibility for and an involvement in the decision making processes.

Three principal findings emerged from observations and theme analyses in which teachers, as narrators, shared the meanings of social actions associated with the accomplishment of empowerment:

1. The organizational culture as reflected in the cultural norms promoted and sustained teacher empowerment. Values shared by the professional personnel in the school, and reinforced by legends, heroes, stories, rituals, and ceremonies were powerful influences in the accomplishment of teacher empowerment.
2. The social practices and social knowledge of empowered teachers promoted and sustained teacher empowerment.
3. Empowering leadership, as transformative leadership, promoted and sustained teacher empowerment.

A comparison of these findings with those already present in the discourses on teacher empowerment found that teachers' meanings and social actions were most consistent with those situated in the discourses of teachers' associations, the conservative and liberal education theorists and authors of organizational transformative leadership.

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INTRODUCTION

Following a decade of debate, there appears to be an agreement among many educational reformists regarding the need to empower the nation's teachers. Despite this growing consensus, there remains much ambiguity as to the meanings and practices associated with what has come to be entitled "teacher empowerment." Ironically, within this profusion of discourses, the voices of those who are living, seeing, and practicing empowerment-- the teachers-- have remained silent.

This study sought to give voice to teachers. The text is a presentation of an ethnographic study which employed techniques of participant observation and narrative research in an urban middle school. Through the sharing of their own narratives, teachers spoke of their history, traditions, and daily routines at school which have translated into their story of teacher empowerment.

Two questions guided the research reported here. What does teacher empowerment mean to teachers? More specifically, what meanings do teachers associate with the social practices and social knowledge that inform the social actions of teacher empowerment? And, how is teacher empowerment accomplished? More precisely, what kinds of events seem to account for, or explicate, the accomplishment of teacher empowerment?

BACKGROUND: THE EMERGENCE OF TEACHER EMPOWERMENT

A Nation At Risk (National Commission, 1983) reflected wide dissatisfaction with schooling and called for increased top down approaches and the implementation of "research based" and "scientifically derived" programs and activities as a means of attaining excellence in schools. Reform efforts that immediately followed all pointed to the pivotal role of the teachers and/or administrators as the "weak links" that required regulation in order to bring about more effective schools. A Nation At Risk ushered in and clearly dominated the first phase of the reform movement. However, in the years following this study, reports by the Carnegie Forum (1986), the Holmes Group (1986), The Educational Commission of the States (1986), and texts by Boyer (1983), Goodlad (1984), andSizer (1984), called for a change in the preparation and conditions of teaching. This second and more recent reform movement supports the notion of teacher empowerment and emphasizes the causes and possible cures for problems confronting schools today (Ambrosie & Haley, '988; Glickman, 1989). Rather than viewing teachers and administrators as the source of educational problems, they are viewed as the solutions. This bottom-up approach to school improvement emphasizes the need to professionalize and empower the nation's teachers. It appears that the only common thread among these educators and the report of the Bell Commission is their criticisms of the nation's schools as currently operated and organized. While A Nation At Risk concentrated on tightening standards and increasing accountability, the "second wave of reform" redefines the

teaching profession and enlarges "teacher empowerment" (Educational Commission of the States, 1986).

Thus, with empowerment on the forefront of educational reform and recognition that schools will not improve without the active support and involvement of teachers, researchers and practitioners are being asked to find ways of promoting teacher empowerment. Although meeting this challenge requires a clear understanding of the meaning of teacher empowerment, even a cursory review of the contemporary discourses reveals a diversity of espoused meanings and activities. Ironically, this variety of discourses remains vacuous of the voices of those who are seeing it, practicing it, and living it-- the teachers.

THE DISCOURSE

Brown & Hawkins (1988) suggest meanings of teacher empowerment have been either explicitly stated or implied throughout the literature. Though highly visible in contemporary educational discourse, no one accepted meaning of this term is shared among educators or policymakers. Although this diversity is present, a review of the current discourse on teacher empowerment does offer some common themes. Empowerment is most often viewed as a process through which people become powerful enough to engage in, share in control of, and influence events and institutions affecting their lives. In part, empowerment requires that people gain the knowledge, skills, and power necessary to influence their lives and the lives of those they care about (Cochran & Woolever, 1984; Vanderslice, 1984)

Although this description depicts a rather clear process, a more comprehensive review of discourses reveals that a variety of meanings

have resulted from the attention of such a diverse audience, one which has often emphasized one aspect of the term's meaning to the exclusion of others. This diversity of meanings is most evident in the purposes for which teachers are to be empowered (refer to figures 1 and 2).

Thus, the discourse on teacher empowerment can be envisioned along a continuum from the emancipatory, educative, and collective conception in which individuals seek an active and conscious level of empowerment, as one struggles to change society, to a reproductionist, instrumentalist, and individualistic approach, which fosters the maintenance of the existing social order.

The first and earliest concern for teacher empowerment emanated from critical education theory. Supported by theorists Apple, 1982 & 1984; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Cherryholmes, 1988; Freire, 1985; Giroux, 1986; Giroux & McLaren 1986 & 1989; McLaren, 1986 & 1988; Simon, 1987 & 1988; and Wexler, 1987, empowerment is viewed as a political vision of the future aimed at enhancing human possibility. Located in paradigms of reproduction and resistance, these proponents envision teacher empowerment as teachers are confronted with social forces which limit what is possible; however, through their own consciousness they are able to reflect and act within social settings.

Much of the work in the field of feminist studies has focused on the empowerment of women, freeing them from oppressions within patriarchal and androcentric institutions (Bunch & Pollack, 1983; Ellsworth, 1988; Hartsock, 1979; Lather, 1984 & 1989; McRobbie, 1978; Maher, 1987; Walkerdine, 1985 & 1986; Weiler, 1988). There is a focus on the "gender stratification system" (Weiler, 1988) which often

reduces women to subordinate positions. These authors maintain that teacher empowerment is having the work of women respected and recognized through collective action, reflection, and democratic relationships with colleagues.

Others have viewed teacher empowerment from a liberal perspective (Cooper, 1988; Glickman, 1989; Lightfoot, 1983 & 1986; Yonemura, 1982 & 1986). In this process, teachers are able to reflect and thus are prepared to alter situations within their own classrooms. Although somewhat emancipatory, these writers maintain a rather individualistic view that fails to address the institutional or societal conditions that affect the teachers' positions.

A more conservative view of empowerment is offered by writers such as Darling-Hammond (1985), Leiberman (1988), Maeroff (1988), Rallis (1988). Their view, often more applicable to the current hierarchical structure in schools, is more individualist and less emancipatory as it assumes an external agent who does things to or for teachers. Here teacher empowerment is often equated with professionalism and concerned with granting new respect to teachers by improving the conditions in which they work.

The National Education Association (NEA), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) have proclaimed teacher empowerment as a goal at the local, state and national levels. Critical of the absence of teacher voice in decision making, these groups call for increased professionalization of teachers and teaching and the restructuring of the nation's schools as avenues toward teacher empowerment (Futrell, 1990; Shanker, 1985; Tuthill, 1987, 1990; Urbanski, 1988; Watts & McClure, 1990).

The separate, yet related discourse on leadership contributes to this proliferation of meanings as it addresses teacher empowerment and the role of administrators and other "key organizers." Meanings range from "leading to empower others" (Griffin, 1989) to "transforming followers into leaders" (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1979) to encouraging a "culture of pride" (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).¹ These authors recognize that in order to gain control over the accomplishments and achievements of the school, leaders must either relinquish or delegate power and control over people and events; therefore, they are most concerned with sharing power with rather than over people. It is to this end that teachers need to be empowered to act-- to be given the necessary responsibility that releases their potential and makes their actions and decisions count (Sergiovanni, 1989).

The rhetoric of these theorists was examined for the meanings and practices associated with teacher empowerment. These findings served as a basis for further interpretation and analysis as the researcher discerned whether meanings ascribed to this term by teachers were mutually exclusive, and therefore inconsistent with those found in the literature, or conversely, if teacher meanings emphasize various aspects of teacher empowerment already present in the professional literature. If teachers' meanings emphasize various aspects of teacher empowerment already present in the literature, a comparison will reveal which aspects are present and which dominate, thus providing a relevant picture of teacher empowerment from those who are seeing it, living it, and practicing it.

METHODOLOGY: CAPTURING MEANING IN CONTEXT

Schutz (1971), through concern for the meaning structure, followed by Denzin (1978), Fay (1987), Jorgensen (1989), Loftland (1971), and Mishler (1979), claims that throughout the course of daily life, individuals seek to make sense of the world around them, giving it meaning and in turn acting upon these meanings. Connelly & Clandinin (1990) concur as they write about narrative as a way of researching how humans experience the world: "People by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives" (p. 2).

Thus, capturing the meanings of teacher empowerment through observation of the daily actions of teachers and their stories about these events became the focus of evidence collection, analysis, and interpretation. Human science research, employing ethnographic techniques of participant observation (Jorgensen, 1989) and narrative research (Polkinghorne, 1988) served as the methodological foundations for this investigation of the meanings and accomplishment of teacher empowerment.

Evidence Source

Fetterman (1989) suggests the research questions shape the selection of a place and a people to study. Sites which appeared to have characteristics of empowerment as identified in the literature and those recommended by a team of expert professional educators (teachers, Department of Education representatives, university faculty, School Study Council representatives, and school administrators) were considered. This initial screening revealed two potential schools. Interviews were conducted with the teachers, principals, assistant superintendents, a chief school administrator, director of research and

evaluation. Each site was carefully screened with respect to the purpose of the study, feasibility, and overall acceptability (the researcher's freedom to move about the school as a participant observer and to conduct narrative interviews). The Pioneer Valley Middle School and its forty teachers was chosen as the site of this intensive, ² one-year ethnographic study.

Evidence Collection

As a participant observer, the researcher went into the school and "lived with" the teachers on a full-time basis from October until school closed in June. Throughout this evidence-collection period, observations and interviews were recorded and non-commissioned documents examined. During the first three months, the researcher maintained extensive fieldnotes, mappings (Schatzman & Strauss, 1971), a daily journal, video-tapings and photographs of teacher interactions and events. The researcher attended all teacher meetings, activities, and extra-curricular events in order to "learn the teachers' routines." Responses to open-ended, unstructured questions provided information regarding the activities of teachers and general information about the school. By the end of the third month, semi-structured, open-ended questions had been posed to each of the forty teachers regarding their role at the school and observed events. All meetings and interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

In early January, narrative interviews commenced with the identified key actors. Six individuals who were in the "mainstream of activities" had been identified through recommendations of teachers and information gathered during the initial mapping and netting. The

researcher had established a rapport with these individuals, and they indicated a willingness to participate in extensive narrative interviews. Besides sharing their own stories of empowerment, the information obtained from the key informants also assisted the researcher in attempts to 1) obtain historical information regarding the school and its teachers; 2) understand personal interactions regarding the school and its players; 3) understand teacher "routines" and how they facilitated empowerment; 4) reaffirm or deny assumptions of the researcher; and 5) provide a vehicle by which the researcher could begin to synthesize evidence.

Eight semi-structured, open-ended questions guided the narrative interviews. These questions focused on the teachers' role in the school and issues of empowerment. For example, teachers were asked, "Tell me a little about your involvement in _____. How does this reflect your sense of empowerment?" These questions were generated from evidence obtained during initial interviews and observations of events in which teachers had either been participants in or observers of decision-making, shared leadership, facilitators of activities, etc.

These interviews were conducted as speech events (Mishler, 1986). As such, the researcher and teacher often sought to reformulate questions and frame answers in terms of their reciprocal understanding as new meanings emerged during the course of the interviews. This format differs from a traditionally structured interview schedule.

Throughout these months, observations and unstructured interviews with other faculty continued as new events and other examples of teachers' routines were observed. In turn, these events often contributed to the plot and themes identified in the narratives of key

informants. The researcher, similar to the lens of a camera, would zoom in on events and their meanings, and pan at a wide angle in order to capture the contributions these events or actions made to the whole. Thus, by the end of the year, an annual cycle reflecting the daily, weekly, and monthly routines of teachers had been captured.

INTRODUCTION TO FINDINGS

Analysis of teacher narratives focused on the significance events had for teachers in relation to a particular plot or theme. Themes were not imposed upon a plot, rather themes were identified through a process in which the researcher moved back and forth between the plot and potential themes to discover the "best fit," how they are significant, thus enabling the plot and theme to be grasped together as parts of one story of teacher empowerment. Evidence obtained through participant observations assisted in understanding, as second order constructs (Schutz, 1971), the meanings these actions had for teachers.

Ten themes of empowerment were identified from the evidence collected from teachers:

1. Teachers sharing leadership
2. Teachers sharing in decision making
3. Teachers accessing the knowledge bases
4. Trusting relationships and confidence in self and others
5. The extension of recognition and appreciation
6. Caring, sharing, a sense of community
7. Honest and open communications between teacher-teacher, and between administrator-teacher
8. The maintenance of high expectations
9. Collegial and administrative support

10. Safeguarding what's important

Three principle findings emerged from the observations and theme analyses. Further analysis of these findings revealed a teachers' definition of teacher empowerment.

1. The school culture as reflected in the cultural norms seeks to promote and sustain teacher empowerment. Values shared by the professional personnel in the school, and reinforced by tales, heroes, stories, rituals, and ceremonies influence the accomplishment of teacher empowerment.
2. The social practices and social knowledge of empowered teachers promotes and sustains teacher empowerment.
3. Empowering leadership, as transformative leadership, promotes and sustains teacher empowerment.

These findings which address the questions central to this research, are displayed in various ways. Using a visual illustration (figure 3), one can envision these themes as dimensions of empowerment, namely, the cultural norms, which were included by teachers in other findings, empowered teachers and empowering leadership, and further reflected in the teacher definition. This suggests that the school's cultural norms are an integral part in producing and sustaining the empowerment of teachers.

Through the analysis of teacher narratives and evidence from participant observation, lists of "What Images Teachers Project and How They Act When They Feel Empowered" and of "Leadership Behaviors That Teachers Associate With Empowerment," were constructed. These lists represent behaviors and characteristics teachers identified as enhancing their empowerment. Thus, teacher empowerment is accomplished through the

interactions of teachers as empowered individuals and an empowering leadership situated within a culture that sustains themes of empowerment.

Presentation of Evidence

The researcher employing narrative collects and displays the evidence. Cinnamond (1990), in reference to narrative research, suggests that the meta-narrative (the scientific discourse about the research project) be bracketed from the micro-narrative (the actual voice of the participants). With reference to Cinnamond's display/presentation of text, the discourse presented thus far is representative of the researcher's meta-narrative (question generation, review of literature, methodology). The micro-narratives, the teachers' talk and the researcher's story about the school, are bracketed from the scientific discourse.

Presentation of the findings are fragments of teacher narratives and other evidence obtained by the researcher as participant observer. However, each fragment reflects back on the whole, the story of empowerment. Cinnamond (1990) writes,

there is not a minimum nor maximum number of instances or length necessary for documentation. The displayed bit must be part of a whole, but the bit or fragment in the text must reflect back onto the whole such that it authentically captures what the whole is about. Either participants' patterns, objects, or themes are appropriate components for display and analysis as accounts or documents.

By presenting the findings revealed through the themes of empowerment, each "fragment" of evidence reflects back onto the whole, the story of empowerment, in a way that illustrates what teacher empowerment, is about.

THE TEACHERS' MEANING OF EMPOWERMENT

Though teachers' voices had remained silent among the discourses and throughout the reform efforts of the 1980s, these teachers could clearly describe what empowerment meant in their professional lives. To these teachers empowerment means

The opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and to influence the way one performs in one's profession. True empowerment leads to increased professionalism as teachers assume responsibility for and an involvement in the decision making processes.

Examples of this meaning were reflected throughout teacher micro-narrative accounts and confirmed through observations and documentations by the researcher.

In addressing her sense of empowerment as she develops and implements her special program, one teacher stated,

I think there is a lot of responsibility that is housed with the teachers. There is shared decision making. I think we have a tremendous amount of responsibility fall back on us because we have been involved in that decision making process. But along with that is the power to affect change, and that's empowerment.

Another teacher spoke about empowerment and her role as community leader and curriculum liaison at her community level:

It is being treated like a professional, someone who's capable of making decisions regarding anything from curriculum to school rules. We do that here.

One respondent, recently nominated teacher-of-the-year in his respective field, noted,

Real empowerment leads to increased professionalism simply because once people have the responsibility for and an involvement in the decision making processes, they become more involved in the outcomes from that decision.

Still another argued that empowerment results from made opportunities and insisted that

If somebody is saying they need more empowerment here I think it would be because they have not jumped in when they were given the opportunity. Plenty of opportunities exists for teachers to take charge in this school.

The evidence obtained from observations and interviews operationalized these meanings at the classroom, community (grade) and building levels. Additional evidence obtained at districtwide meetings and other events external to the middle school further supported teachers' meanings.

Observations and fieldnotes of the bi-monthly Learning Community and Monthly Program Improvement Council meetings support teachers' claims of assuming "responsibility for and involvement in the decision

making processes." Documentation revealed that teachers routinely voted on ideas either proposed by the administration, planned in conjunction with administration, or generated by their peers. Teachers assumed responsibility for these decisions as they monitored and evaluated the implementation of various decisions. In instances where changes and adjustments were necessary, teachers spoke of "our need to revise," or "it isn't working this way, we'll take it back to the learning community and try something else."

In many instances the administrator served as a facilitator, a consultant to these teachers. As one teacher described this relationship, "We use our administrators as facilitators. We see them as support. They help us get the necessary resources to get the job done."

Opportunities were made available for all staff to become involved in various aspects of the school's operation as well as opportunities for personal growth and development. Weekly newsletters, personal invitations, memos, daily flyers as well as personal contacts were vehicles for communicating opportunities for staff to get involved. Another element of teacher empowerment was reflected in the number of extended teacher to teacher opportunities. Although administrators extended many opportunities to teachers, frequently opportunities to become involved in the operation or decisions affecting teachers were extended by other teachers in charge of a particular aspect of the curriculum, program, project, etc. In some instances opportunities were extended by teachers to administrators inviting them to become involved in teacher-generated programs.

The confidence these teachers addressed in their meaning of empowerment was evidenced through their daily practices. One example was the daily operation of the teacher initiated and operated study skills program. This program, which had become an integral part of the student's daily schedule, was copyrighted and incorporated by these teachers. Besides being responsible for its daily implementation, these teachers spoke openly and eloquently to visitors at the local, state, and national level who came to witness the teachers in action.

The teacher-elected coordinator of the study skills program, confirming his own meaning of empowerment, described how he and several teachers recently returned from an international conference where they presented the teachers' program. "Opportunities to present about what we do come frequently, this is my fourth trip out of the country." When asked if there were times when he had to confront the administration or Board of Directors regarding program changes he replied,

Certainly, with this opportunity comes the responsibility of seeing that it is implemented. That means time, and other resources. I've challenged the administration and Board and have gotten what we need. I don't think there's a teacher here who wouldn't challenge the opposition for this program. We believe in it. It works.

Numerous examples support the teachers' meaning of empowerment and can be found embedded within their cultural stories.

THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF TEACHER EMPOWERMENT

Finding 1: The organizational culture as reflected in the cultural norms promoted and sustained teacher empowerment.

Values shared by the professional personnel in the school, and reinforced by legends, heroes, stories, rituals, and ceremonies, influenced the accomplishment of teacher empowerment.

Polkinghorne (1988) suggests narrative themes take into account the historical and social context in which the plot and events occur, "at the cultural level, narratives serve to give cohesion to shared beliefs and to transmit values" (p. 14). The researcher, by listening to the content of the story, learned about the teachers' successes, problems, and social actions, as well as learned how they felt and how they described their own behavior. Through narrative analysis, insight was gained into what was seen by these social actors to be routine, what norms/rules were referenced by the actors in describing their acts.

For a story to become meaningful in a culture, the members must own it, tell it, and share it. In doing so, they illustrate its importance as a cultural story. The story is recognized by those who hear it. It makes sense; it is widely distributed. The majority understand it, and it is reoccurring. People refer to it. These teachers used the Pioneer Valley Middle School story, particularly the actors and events, along with the rules/norms, which were accepted within the story. Thus, to say as a narrator that one agrees with an action is to say that one

acknowledges and accepts the cultural norms on which it was based. Conversely, to say that one disagrees with an action is to say that he or she rejects or disapproves of the norms on which it is based.

The ten norms that teachers associated with their empowerment were evidenced throughout their micro-narrative accounts, displayed within the organizational narrative (exemplary school report written by teachers), observed through participant observation, and confirmed by administrators.

Teacher empowerment was built upon the foundation of these norms. What became known as a "culture of pride" sustained the empowerment of teachers and encouraged an empowering leadership.

The School Culture

The school and its members could be described as a "culture of pride." Just as this culture was important in the education of its students, so too was it important for the cultivation of the teachers. Pioneer Valley Middle School provided a rich culture for its teachers. And the collective quality of the faculty enriched it in return.

Teachers Sharing Leadership

Teachers talked extensively about assuming and sharing leadership within the school. A former teachers' association president spoke about his own history and that of the district.

In our 125 years as a district, we have never been through a strike and that has something to say about the people we have in leadership positions on the board, as administrators, and on the

faculty level. We get together and talk about our concerns— we all have our say about how issues should be resolved, and there is usually a consensus. There is shared leadership.

Another teacher referred to her role as representative on the improvement council:

I think you really become a leader around here. You take on the job, and with the other representatives you move back and forth between communities trying to pull together everyone's ideas. So we are always getting ideas from the teachers and then we meet with administration and share our ideas. This way everyone is encouraged to be a leader.

Within this school teachers demonstrated a broad range of leadership skills, abilities, and experiences. One-fourth of the faculty had been trained in some formal supervisory or administrative program. Other teachers and administrators promoted and provided training in leadership and organizational skills. Teachers are often regarded not only as leaders within their classrooms, but at the community and building levels. Some envisioned the school as a community of leaders where everyone shared leadership:

Everyone must be a leader. We all have been community leaders, improvement council representatives, and now will assume a position on the newly developed curriculum council at some point. When you're not on a council then you are a leader of some other program or project. A year has not gone by when I haven't shared, in some way, in leading this school.

Although teachers and administrators encouraged and worked closely with teachers to assume leadership roles, some choose not to become as involved. As one teacher commented,

Each teacher has a contribution to make and these contributions come at different times throughout their professional career. Many of us have raised our families and are prepared to invest the time and energy to help run this school. Although there are few who don't seek the opportunity to become involved as leaders, we don't begrudge their decision. It's their choice. As for me, I want to be involved in leading this school and the decisions that affect my students and myself.

For those who choose to be involved in leading the school they find that the resulting responsibility and effort are demanding, however "the rewards are great in terms of our sense of ownership and ability to implement change."

Besides opportunities to assume leadership positions on councils and direct special interest projects, teachers were observed, initiating, conducting, and evaluating their own staff development programs, being provided time and resources to implement creative ideas, and sharing their learnings with colleagues through peer-coaching and peer-observations.

SHARING DECISION-MAKING

Events and plots associated with the theme of sharing in decision-making were often intertwined with stories of shared leadership. These teachers had a great deal of control over their work situation— especially in curricular areas. Curriculum concerns ranged from coordination of the end of the year testing schedules to responsibility for budget distribution and selection of textbooks. In each narrative teachers emphasized the importance of their involvement in decisions, particularly those that affect students and their role in the school. As one teachers stressed,

It is important for me to be involved in the decision if I am going to be accountable for the results of that decision.

Although teachers emphasized their involvement in decision making, there seemed to be a standard for which teachers determined whether to devote the time toward a decision. As one teacher noted,

We don't want to be involved in the bus schedules, scheduling for fire drills, or decisions like how many janitors should cover the cafeteria after lunch duty.

We've kind of set a rule, we become involved in professional decisions that affect our lives as teachers and the education of our students. We ask ourselves, is the time necessary to make these decisions worth our time and expertise? If so, we want input into that decision.

Involvement in the process to initiate choices and validate decisions reinforced the teachers' sense of professionalism and empowerment. As one teacher said, "Being aware of how practices beyond my classroom instruction impact the school environment is critical to my sense of empowerment." Input into the design and procedures governing the school informed teachers of the "big picture." Another area in which teachers exercised control was budgeting, and their decisions ranged from allocating funds for curricular improvements to assisting in prioritizing future building and renovation projects.

Teacher input was provided through representation on the Curriculum Council, Program Improvement Council, learning communities, and special committee assignments which enabled teachers to gain first hand experiences of change. As a result of these various decision making bodies, teachers planned for change, and worked through the process of assessing and revising as they implemented new ideas.

Decisions related to curriculum, professional development, and teaching assignments were examined cooperatively with administrators. The expertise among faculty was examined in relation to the demands of the curriculum, and staff development was planned accordingly. In many instances, the expertise necessary for staff development was housed within the school's existing faculty.

TEACHERS ACCESSING THE KNOWLEDGE BASES

Throughout their daily lives, these teachers drew upon their knowledge bases as they expressed their authority. Teachers' voices were full of the confidence that they spoke about when sharing stories of empowerment and their ability to influence the way they taught and how the school operated. Competence was a quality that was expected and respected among this faculty. As one teacher indicated,

If I'm going to take a position that I must defend or propose, I had better have all the facts. The curriculum council is one good example. The administration said we have \$20,000.00. How do you teachers think it ought to be spent? Everyone has an idea, we sit around and debate how can we spend the money and best facilitate the needs of our students. I have to know what's current, what's working, and be able to understand the needs of my students.

Teachers accessed the knowledge bases in many ways. Meetings and special programs held after school provided for creative and intellectual stimulation. The Journal Club met one evening a month. Here teachers and administrators met at a local restaurant and shared ideas and the latest research in their field. Further discussions ensued as teachers began to think of ways to incorporate these ideas and findings into their everyday practices. One teacher noted,

Having the administration there always helps. They get energized right along with us. When we go back to school we share with other colleagues. If we think that it is right, we'll try it.

The Teacher Expectation Student Achievement Program (T.E.S.A.) was another monthly dinner meeting which provided teachers an opportunity to develop teaching strategies and personal interactions that were designed

to enhance student achievement and promote personal integrity. The Journal Club and T.E.S.A. Program provided teachers and administrators with an attractive and non-coercive experience in which they could share ideas among themselves or with teachers and administrators who had been invited from neighboring districts.

Some could not attend the Journal Club because of their involvement with teacher enhancement programs offered at the local university, others were working in faculty exchange programs in which they instructed evening classes at the neighboring community college, while others were out representing their professional organization, some of whom were state and national officers.

Throughout the day, teachers were actively involved with faculty from nearby universities and colleges. As mentors to student teachers, they collaborated with higher education faculty regarding the essential elements of instruction. For the past six years teachers had collaborated with a major university regarding the study skills program. The recent expansion of the study skills program into the elementary and high school provided opportunities for teachers to enhance their understanding of the K-12 program while they shared their own expertise.

Teachers were also observed planning, directing, and evaluating their own inservice programs. Often these teachers would present the latest research or innovations in education that were presented at a state or national conference they had recently attended.

Comparing themselves to teachers in surrounding districts, the teachers at Pioneer Valley Middle School described themselves as having the "confidence," "an easy assertiveness," and "an assured sense of command," which they attributed to a strong

knowledge base filled with "intellectual skills" and "rigorous educational experiences" promoted within this school.

TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS AND CONFIDENCE IN SELF AND OTHERS

In sharing several events in which he proposed new ideas and programs to his colleagues and the administration, one teacher described how their acceptance made him feel.

If you ran into a problem they would try to deal with it with you. But, other than that, you were running the show. To me that made me feel good, that they had the confidence in me to let me do that.

His feelings were echoed by another teacher who came into the school from another district eight years ago. As a member of the curriculum council she described her responsibilities for coordinating the 6th, 7th and 8th community level reading series:

Here I found myself responsible for coordinating textbook selections, so my committee and I have some decisions to make this year. And, in the other school district, I never had that. It was a different situation, you were just told what to do and what to teach and that was it. Since I've obtained my doctorate, I've had other job opportunities; however, I want to stay here, I have a lot of opportunities to make decisions and make changes.

As she continued to talk about her own sense of empowerment, she emphasized the importance of establishing trusting relationships and the level of confidence that existed between teachers and administrators:

It isn't a matter of me coming in a punching in at 7:30 and leaving at 3:30 Or just putting in my hours. We

don't have sign in or sign out sheets, or locked supply closets. Teachers and administrators alike have free access to the copier, the telephone. If I need something I go and get it. I don't have to ask for permission. When we talk with teachers from other districts, that kind of respect and trust doesn't seem to be there.

When asked about the level of trust and confidence he felt present at the school one teacher responded by addressing the responsibility of teachers:

That's called school climate, that's called school culture, that's in the atmosphere around here, and teachers and administrators make it happen. That's why some schools have sign in sheets and sign out sheets. I think the philosophy here is if you act like a professional, people are going to treat you like a professional. I think that's the philosophy of the district.

The words trust and confidence were often paired as teachers spoke about the responsibilities they assumed within the school. One teacher noted that in most instances the principal did not serve as an intermediary for teachers and their concerns with the superintendent and assistant superintendent. Although the principal was aware of the issue, teachers usually dealt directly with the administrator in charge. Issues around developing the district calendar, planning for inservice training, special education programs, were addressed between teachers and the director at the district level. Teachers organized and scheduled these meetings and arranged for a substitute to cover their classes if necessary. The principal was notified of the arrangements.

If programs were to be reported on or successful results to be shared publicly, the teachers made the report. Teachers recognized and appreciated the trust and confidence their peers and administrators had in their ability to perform such tasks.

THE EXTENSION OF RECOGNITION AND APPRECIATION .

Teachers indicated they want to be recognized and appreciated for their efforts and the time they invested in making decisions. Their narratives reflected many events in which the principal and other administrators' responses to their contributions increased their sense of self-efficacy and furthered their sense of empowerment. One teacher described it in terms of her own sense of freedom and leadership:

I think it goes back to the top leadership and you felt free to take action. You were appreciated. I guess everybody needs to be stroked at one time or another, and I think that leads to encouragement and further empowerment. If you are being encouraged, and your efforts are appreciated, then you feel like you can accomplish almost anything.

Evidence of shared appreciation and recognition were found in daily and weekly memos to staff, personal notes of appreciation left in teacher's mailboxes, morning and evening intercom announcements, staff appreciation dinners, the principal's breakfast, and schoolwide picnics. There was even a winter picnic held in the school cafeteria in which teachers and administrators recognized the efforts of the janitorial and secretarial staff. Although many of these forms of recognition are common across most schools, teachers emphasized the importance of the sincerity. It wasn't the nature of the appreciation, but the intent and

purpose that mattered most. One teacher's story seems to best exemplify their feelings.

I've always been interested in writing music, but never felt I was good enough. Shortly after coming to this school the principal and a few colleagues encouraged me to write a song for the Spring play. It wasn't one of my favorite songs, but after the play, everyone kept telling me how good it was and how much they appreciated my efforts. They insisted I send it to a publisher. In fact the principal made the first contact, so I did it and now I have a song published. If they had not encouraged me, I never would have tried for it. Now I'm working on two more songs that will be used this Spring, and the publisher is waiting to see them.

No accomplishment seemed to go unnoticed, and the appreciation and recognition was always distributed between administrators and teachers. Besides verbal and written appreciation and the routine celebrations, teachers and administrators sent flowers, balloons, nominated each other for special awards, and communicated throughout the school and educational community the successes of their colleagues.

As one teacher brought his own story about empowerment to an end, he said,

I think if you don't help teachers feel good, important, productive, and positive about what they are doing, all those leadership styles mean nothing. I think you have to help anyone in any position to feel what they are doing is productive and meaningful and so forth. I think if you achieve that all the other parts of leadership fall in place. I think if you are willing to care about people, that will surface.

CARING, SHARING, A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Teachers and administrators caring for each other and sharing their concerns were equally important to teacher empowerment. "You have people who care about front line people," one teacher commented as he spoke of the concern individuals express for each other.

Front line people have a sincere caring for the teachers and in return let us make a lot of the decisions that go on here. So everything that goes on here was developed by the teachers and it was overseen by the administration and that is the type of environment we have been used to around here, feeling like we are an integral part of everything that goes on in this building. If you asked someone to help, they would help and I think that is how it has grown out here. It's been a lot of growing and caring about each other.

The word caring appeared in every teacher narrative and was expressed in the school's mission statement, "A Tradition of Excellence and Caring." When asked how he would describe caring at the school, one teacher, whose response seemed to reflect the consensus of these teachers, replied,

I would say it is more of a caring and sincere feeling that we have when we talk to each other. If I would say, I would like to get together and meet on something, they would understand that that is a good thing to do.

He was referring to the many after school meetings that teachers conduct regarding the study skills, I.E., Tutorial Program, or

other teacher initiated programs. These teachers met on their own time to discuss problems, proposed changes, or "brainstormed" new ideas. When further asked why teachers devoted so much of their personal time to these projects, he replied,

It's the positive things come out of the meetings and its the best thing for the kids and the school. Our faculty really care about these kids and each other, its like a family, we are part of a community. That's why we chose to be called learning communities rather than 6th grade, 7th grade, and so on.

This sense of community expanded beyond instruction and educational concerns. Wednesday's were "over-the-hump-day" and celebrated routinely with coffee and donuts supplied by various members of the school. "People just sign up and bring them," one teacher remarked. This was just one example of routines in which teachers interact socially. The monthly "Middle School Dances" were planned for, conducted, and chaperoned solely by teachers. "We're supposed to be doing it for the kids, but we enjoy them just as much." Unlike the donut hour, there was no sign up list for chaperoning the dances; teachers just showed up. Sharing responsibility was an important aspect as teachers assumed sharing control in over the operation of school programs. As one teacher described, "There's too much that we want to get done around here fo just a few to do it. So we ll kind of just show up and help out." When asked if administration attended or assisted in the coordination or supervision of these programs, he further replied, "If

we need something that they can get for us, we ask, but generally we do it ourselves."

Teachers also shared responsibility for the annual Awards Banquet, Spring Dinner, and the annual student trips to national sites.

A review of teachers comments written in the recent exemplary school reports supports their sense of community,

The collegiality and sense of community engendered among staff also makes working in this school a pleasure. Working together on lesson plans, curriculum, special events, and activities has developed a sense of camaraderie as well as the many social events-- doughnuts and coffee each Wednesday morning, picnics, and evening socials.

Furthermore, teachers concluded that

These events and programs they have in place along with the open communications among faculty, administration and community foster a positive school culture.

HONEST AND OPEN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TEACHER AND TEACHER
AND BETWEEN ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER

The exemplary school committee, comprised of teachers and building administrators, wrote that

One of the primary efforts the school takes toward providing favorable working conditions is that, our school empowers its teachers to become involved in all levels of decision making and provides open communication fostering professional respect between administration and staff.

Evidence of open communication was collected from daily observations of teacher interaction with colleagues and administrators. Although there were organizational narratives (formal rules and regulations) communicated via school documents, letters, and memos, the majority of information and decisions affecting the school were a result of open discussions at learning community meetings, council meetings, informal gatherings in the lounge, or after school meetings and dinners. Teachers unable to attend a meeting or discussion were notified about the outcomes by their colleagues. "It's not unusual for teachers and administrators to take colleagues to lunch or dinner in order to update them on what's going on," one teacher commented.

Although there was evidence of open communication, many teachers talked about particular events in which they felt an obligation to maintain confidentiality. "If a teacher trusts me enough to tell me his or her private thoughts, then I respect that. And, they know if they ask my opinion, they'll get an honest answer."

Another teacher addressed the issue of honest communication as he reflected on a recent learning community meeting:

You were there (addressing the researcher), you saw how everyone argued about the testing dates. There is confrontation and disagreement, but that comes with people being honest. Now the next day you noticed that no one was angry, everyone spoke. That's expected, and we know that is part of arriving at a decision.

As one listens repeatedly to the taped conversations and reviews the transcribed narrative accounts of teachers there is evidence that teachers were partial to words such as "ours," "we," and "us." Teachers failed to speak of programs or projects as "mine," "theirs," or "my." When asked about this, one key informant replied,

The attitude here is we do this or this is ours. It's more of a partnership here. We work hard to communicate that this is our school, and we are responsible to make it work. No one person can do it alone. I think for a school to be successful it has to be that way. And by the same token, as teachers become empowered there has to be a sharing of ideas and open lines of communication. For instance, Tim (the administrator) shares things with teachers and teachers share back.

He continued to explain how teachers have used these open lines of communications to get things done. "They'll put a bug in an administrator's ear or they'll have dinner together and they'll talk about something. Perhaps it's not through normal channels."

Another teacher, speaking of her sense of empowerment as opportunities to challenge new ideas, addressed issues of honest and open lines of communications.

There is a flow of information and ideas both ways. The administration is constantly putting articles in people's mailboxes about things they read in Phi Delta Kappan or things like that. There are a lot that go back the other

way because teachers are involved in the literature that is specific to their curriculum that administrators may only know in the general sense. So we send an administrator an article that emphasizes or underlines something that we're interested in, or something that he mentioned or they've mentioned. So, it is a two-way flow of information and communications.

Others presented stories about personal experiences in which peers or administrators will "come and ask me what I think about this or that." When referring to important events or way of communicating, teachers spoke of the "informal channel," the "personal note," "the spontaneous meeting." Few spoke of memorable or meaningful "scheduled meetings." One teacher summed up by saying,

They'll (teachers or administrators) come to me and ask me what I think about this or that. Not in a meeting type situation, but just informally. And I know I've gone to some people in the administration and to my colleagues when I had some personal problems and asked their opinions, because I trust them. There is enough respect for the opinions of others and trust to be able to do that.

Honest and open communications is regarded as an important link in conveying the high expectations placed upon teachers and administrators. Teachers reported that the communication of these expectations seemed to motivate them to seek out new opportunities.

THE MAINTENANCE OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS

One teacher began her narrative by stating,
 When I started thinking about everything that is happening,
 things sort of fall into a pattern of people doing the best
 they can do. So where you get the idea you can be the
 state teacher of the year or that you can write a song that
 might be worth someone else's attention, somebody gave us
 that idea. In some district's that doesn't happen.
 Teachers sort of go from one day to the next and ho hum,
 ho hum, and they retire. But, somewhere along the way I
 think the teachers in our school have come to believe
 that what they think and what they do is important. As a
 result, I think these things have just come about as a
 process of having us feel like our ideas are worth
 pursuing.

Teachers at Pioneer Middle School set high expectations for their
 own performance and in turn expect much from their colleagues and
 administration. When asked about the how expectation become realized
 within the school and among the faculty, one teacher replied,

One thing that Tim (the principal) instilled in us
 from the very beginning is the will to be the best we
 can be. And for me I either was totally immersed in a task
 or I would not tackle it.

Another teacher spoke about her history as coordinator of the Teacher Expectation Student Achievement Program (T.E.S.A.)

When we teach the T.E.S.A. interactions to teachers we stress the importance of placing high expectations on students in order that they do their best. I think we do a lot of that to each other. It's expected that you do your best, not just for the kids and the school, but for yourself as well.

Teachers are expected to present at conferences, conduct inservices, prepare their budgets, develop new programs, select appropriate curriculum. With high expectations comes the need for time and resources to meet these goals. Teachers expect their administration and board to support their efforts.

One teacher referred to the exemplary school report as she attempted to explain the expectations present at the school. "We have a statement in our exemplary school report that I think reflects our vision here at Pioneer Middle School." She looked down at her desk pad on which she had written,

Our purpose is to create a positive school culture which will energize the staff, administration, and motivate students.

"That kind of explains it all," she continued. "You don't often hear words like we can't or it won't work. We'd rather say, 'hey, we'll give it a try'."

COLLEGIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

As these teachers described how empowerment is accomplished within their school, they repeatedly referred to the supportive interactions among teachers and between teachers and administrators.

As mentioned, these teachers were accustomed to setting high expectations for themselves and thrived on the expectations placed upon them by others. As one administrator described this faculty, "They are goal setters and accomplisners." Within the theme of collegial and administrative support, teachers' stories reflected two categories: support in the accomplishment of teaching goals, and support in reaching personal and professional goals.

Money and time seemed to be critical to the accomplishment of teaching goals. Clearly the infusion of dollars into the Speakers' Bureau, Teacher Resource Enhancement Program, other teacher initiated programs, and the funding for substitutes necessary for released time helped to provide the financial support necessary to initiate and subsequently realize their goals.

One teacher described the role of administrative support stressed the importance of collegial support:

As new programs and ideas are initiated, the superintendent and the school board initially provide the support and resources, for instance the time, money, and materials, for teachers to acquire any training and to organize our project. However, once the program is at its implementation stage, we become each others' most valued resource.

The newly formed Speakers' Bureau provides an example in which teachers became interested in promoting the school's image throughout the community and among local businesses. The teachers organized a Speakers' Bureau in late October. During the November Board of Directors meeting, members of the Board and the superintendent endorsed the program and offered teachers release time to begin implementing their program. The first presentation to the Lion's Club was made in early January, with the assistance of the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent. Three Board members also attended. By the end of March, the teachers had presented to six different audiences and had hosted three real estate agencies at the school. The Board and administrations would occasionally "drop by" to greet the audience; however, their role had transformed from actually assisting in presentations to being available only when needed.

Although most of the faculty had been with the school for an average of eighteen years, one teacher who was completing her third year spoke about how she is still "amazed at the level at which teachers are involved at this school. In my past experiences you always went to the principal for everything. Now I find myself going to my colleagues more frequently." She described the administrators as "a pair of crutches" and offered an example of her metaphor.

The administrators and teachers work hard to get a program off the ground, like the I.E. or T.R.E. programs. No one says this is my program, or I'll share it with the teachers. It is our program; we do it together. What happens is the administration "backs off" after we're on our way and lets those who are working with it every day take the lead. It's

not like they're not there; they just turn it over to the teachers. They kind of stay in the background, like a pair of crutches. If we need them to move forward, they're there. But, basically it becomes our program and our responsibility to make it work and move forward.

The sense of "we" and the emphasis on mutual support was evident at community and improvement council meetings at the building level, and at the curriculum council and inservice councils where these teachers represented their school at the district level. These meetings were considered gatherings of colleagues where decisions were reached as equals and differences aired freely. There was little sense of "top-down" decisions at any level. One reason teachers shared for this is that the administrators were not perceived as "management."

If there is any sense of management it is at the business office and Board of Director's meetings. The principal is more a facilitator, a liaison between faculty and the business office and Board, than a representative of either one. To me the administrator supports me by encouraging me to do my very best.

Teachers were proud of their colleagues accomplishments. Although individuals were recognized for their individual accomplishments, the administrators and colleagues supported others who had their music, research, programs and ideas published, been nominated teacher-of-the-year, and had presented to other educators across the state and nation. When asked about these accomplishments, individuals would attribute their successes to the support and confidence they received from their colleagues and administrators.

SAFEGUARDING WHAT'S IMPORTANT

There have been times teachers have struggled to maintain their empowerment at Pioneer Valley Middle School. In their stories they recalled incidents about administrators and one former principal who "were not right for Pioneer; they just did not understand what we stand for, or what we are promoting here." Within their stories are plots of "who has the power," "mine vs. ours," and other examples of conflicting organizational and operating narratives, in which the administrator had resisted the school's cultural norms. Teachers spoke of efforts to "safeguard what's important"-- their sense of empowerment. "Although these administrators were not right for Pioneer, they still had good qualities, they are just better suited somewhere else," one teacher remarked. "These individuals do not remain long at Pioneer Valley Middle School," another teacher confirmed.

Each resigned within two years. I think in each instance they came to realize their leadership did not blend with the needs of our school.

A veteran teacher of nineteen years spoke more assertively as he recalled of one principal who, "attempted to remove our ability to make curricular decisions. When these people come along, we try to work with them. If it doesn't work out, we talk to our Board of Directors. These are the individuals we elect to make our schools the best they can be. We rely on them to replace people who aren't right for our school."

For the past five years, teachers have been involved in the screening and hiring of administrators. Most recently, the replacement

of one assistant principal was elected by teachers from within the faculty. As one teacher described, "We know what qualities a leader must possess in order to lead our school. It makes sense that we should have input into who is in that position."

Other teacher narratives contained similar plots and events depicting the theme "safeguarding what's important." As one moves back and forth between teachers' stories about their struggles to maintain empowerment, one can almost envision this theme as a giant umbrella, one which serves to protect the other nine themes of empowerment. Although it is always there, it becomes more important and visible when its being used. This metaphor can best be illustrated through the voices of teachers:

During these times we work hard to protect what we have here. When I talk about protecting what's important, I don't mean that is something we have to do constantly. But, when someone tries to come in and take over the decisions about our curriculum, then that gets to the heart of what we are about.

Another teacher simply stated, "We've worked too hard to make this school what it is today to let someone come in and try to destroy it."

What teachers emphasized about the theme "safeguarding what is important" was characteristic of the other nine themes. That is at any given time, depending upon the current circumstances and events one theme may appear more dominant than another, to either an individual or to the group; however, it is the composite of all these themes that contribute to the whole of teacher empowerment.

EMPOWERED TEACHERS

Finding 2: The social practices and social knowledge of empowered teachers promoted and sustained teacher empowerment.

As evident through the examples presented in the previous section, one can begin to envision a set of behaviors that teachers demonstrated and knowledge that characterized their meanings and understanding of the accomplishment of teacher empowerment. Documentation from the researcher and evidence from teacher narratives propose a portrait of an "empowered teacher," one which teachers suggest reflects their role and in turn interacts with both the school's cultural norms and leadership in the accomplishment of empowerment.

What Images Teachers Project and How They Act When They Feel

Empowered

- 1) Are caring
- 2) Make choices/are involved in decision making
- 3) Commit to and articulate a common goal/vision
- 4) Take responsibility, and, once a decision is made, even if their choice doesn't work out, they own the decision, and learn from their experience
- 5) Enjoy teaching each other and themselves
- 6) Are confident of their own abilities
- 7) Are critically reflective of their own teaching
- 8) Know that continuously developing resources exist within themselves and are accessible upon demand
- 9) Are critically reflective of their own leadership

- 10) Believe their ideas are listened to, their energies make a difference, and it is worthwhile for them to contribute to the school because something happens because of their participation
- 11) Engage administrators in their teaching practices and ideas
- 12) Seize or seek out new opportunities, experiment, are motivated
- 13) Are productively engaged in school improvement efforts inside their own classrooms and in the school
- 14) Inquire as to the causes and possible solutions for instructional problems and seek out resources necessary for improvement
- 15) Assume active leadership roles on advisory, curriculum, and improvement councils
- 16) Know that teachers can teach and lead
- 17) Demonstrate professionalism
- 18) Attend to the social aspect of the school community
- 19) Provide input into policies and procedures, scheduling, staff development, curriculum, goals, objectives, evaluation, and other aspects associated with the daily operation of the school
- 20) Promote networking, provide support for administrators and peers
- 21) Recognize the contributions of others
- 22) Understand and are able to articulate the norms that reflect the culture of the school.

EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP

Finding 3: Empowering leadership, as transformative leadership, promoted and sustained teacher empowerment.

Contemporary organizational theorists write about transformative leaders as individuals who recognize that in order to gain control over the accomplishments and achievements of the school, they must either relinquish or delegate power and control over people and events; therefore, they are more concerned with sharing power with rather than exercising power over people. Sergiovanni (1989) echoes these thoughts as he writes, "It is to this end that teachers need to be empowered to act— to be given the necessary responsibility that releases their potential and makes their actions and decisions count" (p. 220).

Bennis and Nanus (1985) suggests that transformative leadership, as empowering leadership, is reflected in "an organizational culture that helps employees generate a sense of meaning in their work and a desire to challenge themselves to experience success" (p. 218).

Teachers narratives and evidence from participant observations unveiled a set of leadership behaviors, exhibited by administrators and teachers as leaders, which interacted with the school's culture and the empowered teacher to facilitate the accomplishment of teacher empowerment.

Leadership Behaviors That Teachers Associate With Empowerment

- 1) Articulates a vision and goals for the school and its members
- 2) Promotes and models ideals of educational excellence
- 3) Cares about the school, its administration, its teachers and students

- 4) Extends various forms of appreciation and recognition
- 5) Is visible and accessible
- 6) Is knowledgeable
- 7) Is decisive
- 8) Is willing to admit mistakes
- 9) Remains a teacher
- 10) Articulates a set of expectations and encourages risk taking
- 11) Delegates/shares decision making
- 12) Seeks input into the goals for the school
- 13) Is an instructional leader who encourages administrators and teachers to share in instructional leadership
- 14) Promotes a high profile of the school throughout the community
- 15) Provides opportunities for teachers and administrators to access the knowledge bases
- 16) Provides opportunities for teachers and administrators to reach beyond the school and into the community
- 17) Promotes collegiality, builds team spirit, encourages camaraderie
- 18) Provides opportunities for social interactions
- 19) Is positive
- 20) Demonstrates trust, sincerity, and confidentiality
- 21) Listens
- 22) Views relationships as long term commitments
- 23) Understands and is able to articulate the cultural norms that impact the school.

THE META-NARRATIVE REVISITED

Discussion/Conclusions

Through display of the teachers' social practices and evidence of their social knowledge, the meanings that teacher empowerment has for those who are living it, practicing it, and seeing it— the teachers have been explored. Further investigation into these findings revealed how teacher empowerment is accomplished. Theme analyses, in which events and plots were examined, revealed that an interweaving of the school's cultural norms, characteristics of empowered teachers and an empowering leadership interact to promote and sustain the accomplishment of teacher empowerment.

The findings reported in this section are summarized in view of comparisons and contrasts made to existing meanings and practices of teacher empowerment espoused among the authors and theorists of teaching, teacher education, and organizational leadership.

Situated within the narratives of teachers and observed throughout their daily, weekly and monthly routines are the rhetoric and practices of empowerment which further reflect particular aspects found within the discourses of teacher associations, conservative and liberal educational theorists and contemporary writers of transformative leadership.

Found to be consistent among these teachers and theorists is the acceptance of another agent, an administrator or a board of directors, that provides opportunities for or shares in the empowerment of teachers. This notion of empowerment which clearly assumes an external agent, closely reflects the discourse of conservative authors such as Darling-hammond (1985), Lieberman (1988), and Maeroff (1988). Teachers spoke of administrators who "let us make decisions," "provide the

structure for teacher representation on committees," and "support a structure in which teachers are provided opportunities to lead." Within the teachers' meanings of empowerment, phrases such as "opportunities extended to us by the Board or administration," and "the need for teachers to seize opportunities" were emphasized. Teachers talked of sharing decision making and leadership as they "consult with other administrators on decisions." Access to decision making and leadership were always referenced in terms of sharing with those in positions of higher authority, while the resources and time necessary for teachers to realize their goals remained dependent upon those outside the teacher ranks.

Teacher empowerment as envisioned among teachers in this school was also viewed from an educative, liberal perspective as teachers sought "to expand the knowledge base," and to instill within themselves the "confidence to influence the way they perform in their profession." These meanings reflect those similar to authors such as Cooper (1988), Yonemura (1986) and Glickman (1989), who envision teacher empowerment as teachers who are freed to reflect and thus able to alter situations within their own classrooms. Teachers of the Pioneer Valley Middle School spoke of actions and meanings of empowerment which reflected similar efforts to influence relations within their learning communities and at the building level, and to influence decisions affecting their school at the district level. However, these actions and meanings made little reference to addressing the institutional or social arrangements which further limit control over their professional lives.

Traditionally teachers' unions and professional associations have strived for teacher advocacy through collective bargaining, however,

more recently issues of teacher empowerment have spurred a more dialectic view which maintains both union and professional concerns. These thoughts, which are supported by proponents such as, Futrell (1990); Shanker, (1985); Tuthill, (1987, 1990); and Urbanski (1988) and reflected in the comments of Watts & McClellan (1990), who insist that "the empowerment of teachers and the professionalization of teaching remain high on the national agenda for the 1990s" (p. 765).

This more recent focus on increasing teacher professionalism through greater teacher empowerment reflects the meanings of teachers at the Pioneer Valley Middle School. Teachers spoke of "acting and being treated like a professional" and "having the knowledge and confidence to influence the way one acts in one's profession."

Although there are consistencies between the discourses of teachers and those of writers from the professional teachers' associations, inconsistencies were noted. For example, teachers did not speak of securing empowerment through collective bargaining, or of "binding contracts" which were often cited as the "insurance" of teacher empowerment proposed by these writers. Rather, teachers spoke of collegiality and cultural norms that supported their empowerment. Within this school teachers spoke of the Pioneer Valley Professional Teachers' Association, and corrected those who referred to it as "the teachers' union." As witnessed in one narrative, the teacher spoke of the fact that "we have never been through a strike" attributing their success to the shared leadership that is represented between and among the teachers, administration, and Board of Directors.

Contemporary organizational theorists write about transformative leadership and empowerment. Authors such as Bennis & Nanus (1985),

Sergiovarni (1988), and Dufour and Eaker (1987) concur with evidence teachers shared regarding the role of empowering leadership and the accomplishment of teacher empowerment. Teachers and theorists refer to "teachers and administrators" working cooperatively to empower teachers. Teachers at this school articulated the importance of administrative support and said that the "recognition and appreciation" of their administrators furthered their sense of self-efficacy and empowerment.

Bennis & Nanus (1985) and Sergiovarni (1989) write extensively about the role of cultural norms and the empowerment of organizational members. Teachers' narratives as temporal reconstructions of their life stories emphasized the history and traditions that have impacted the values and beliefs reflected in the school's cultural norms supporting their empowerment.

The actions and meanings teachers associate with teacher empowerment are in sharp contrast with those espoused by critical education and feminist theorists. Simon (1987) reflects the basic tenet of these writers as he proposes that teacher empowerment be viewed as a "project of possibility." Simon charges teachers with a political vision of the future, in which teachers are challenged not to adapt to the social order but, as McLaren (1988) writes, "to be able to transform the social order in the interests of social justice, equality and the development of socialist democracy" (p. 3). Throughout the evidence obtained in teacher narratives and participant observations, there was no indication of teachers seeking emancipation from either institutional or societal constraints.

The exclusion of the critical and feminists meanings and practices of empowerment from those of teachers at the Pioneer Middle School

brings to light several questions regarding an emancipatory goal toward teacher empowerment. One must ask, emancipation from what? Critical theorists argue that the emancipation is from teacher oppression. But, what is oppression? In this school teacher empowerment meant freedom from oppressive acts such as freedom from rigid lesson plans, freedom to move within the school and not to worry about sign in or sign out sheets. Oppression was also avoided by the sense of community among teachers that fostered a spirit of collegiality rather than by protests and collective actions.

The question then is, from what should teachers emancipate themselves? According to these teachers there is little evidence supporting teachers seeking emancipation from their current situations, only actions that seek to maintain the current structure and to "safeguard what's important."

Thus, teachers' meanings and social actions of empowerment as described by this group of teachers can be envisioned within the theoretical boundaries of the teachers' associations, conservative, liberal and transformative leadership discourses.

It is recommended, however, that other ethnographic studies, similar to the one conducted with the Pioneer Middle School teachers be initiated in order to determine whether the themes identified by these teachers are similar to other teachers' definitions and social actions of empowerment.

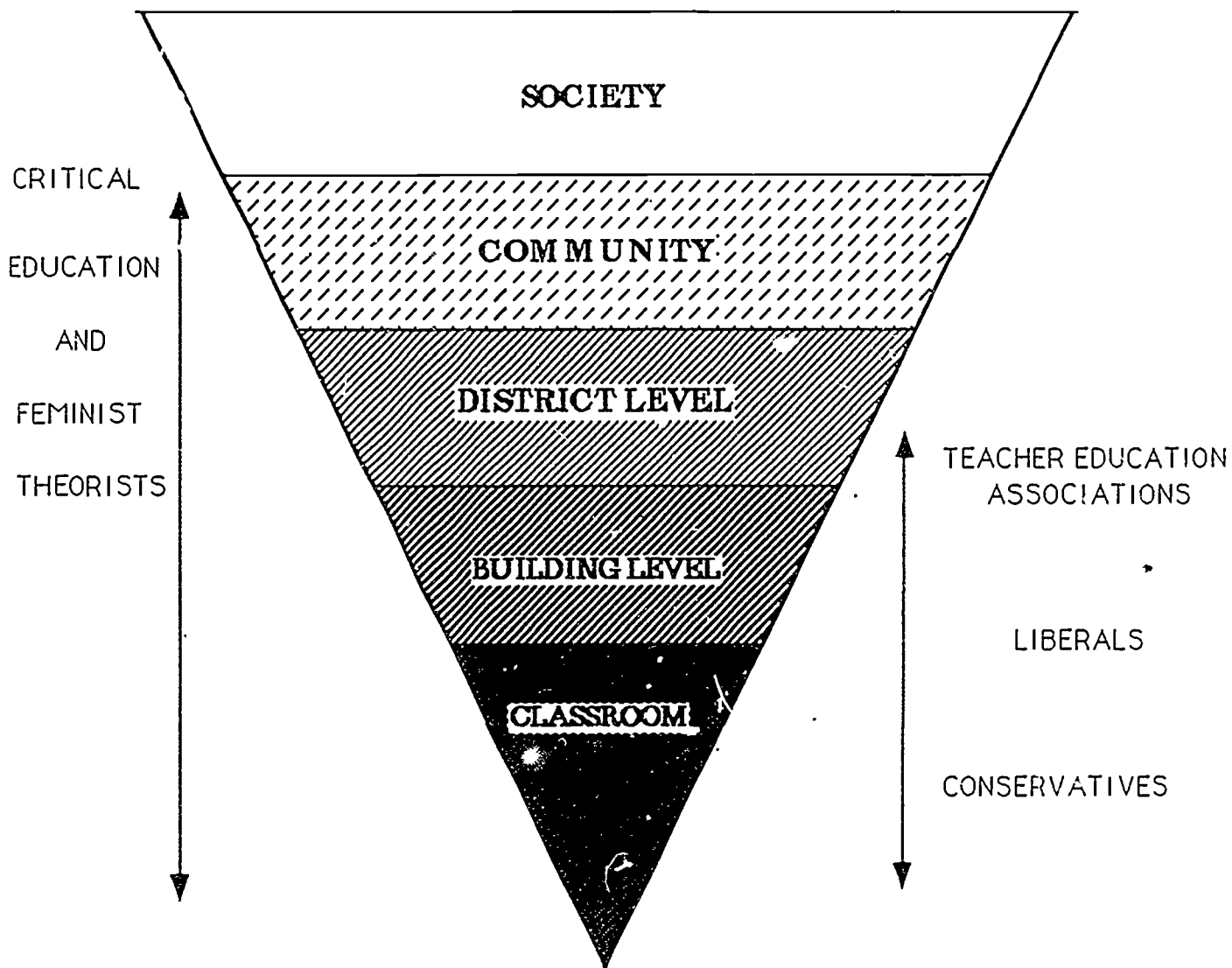
Admittedly, some would claim that conditions at Pioneer Middle School are not reflective of conditions of schools in general and that further studies might yield definitions of teacher empowerment that are more in line with critical educational and feminists theorists.

ENDNOTES

1. The authors write of organizations that promote a culture of pride. Sometimes the teachers of Pioneer Valley Middle School have used this term to describe the composite of the school's norms.
2. The names of people and the school have been changed to insure anonymity and confidentiality.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

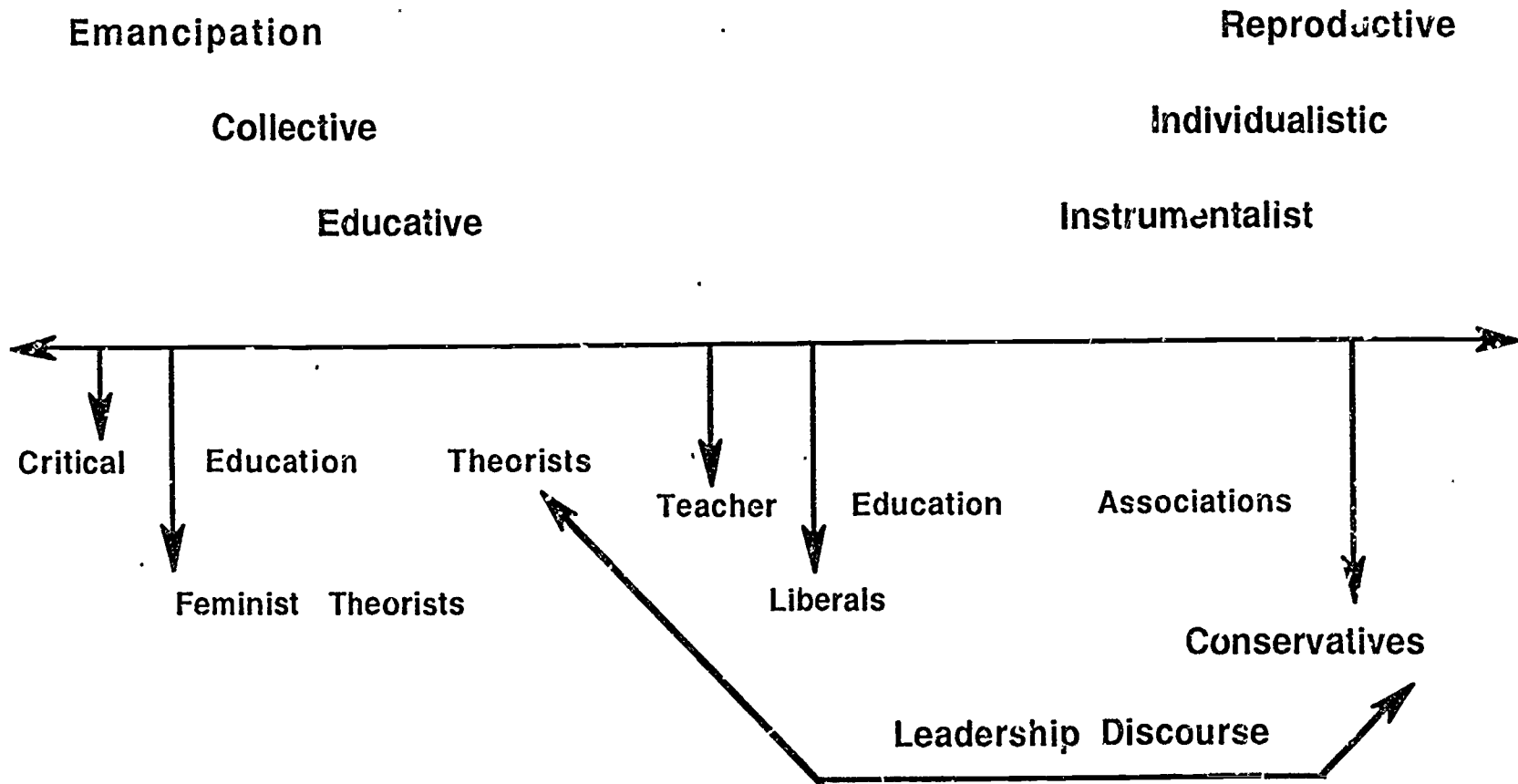


LEADERSHIP DISCOURSE



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LEVEL AT WHICH TEACHERS ASSUME A CRITICAL AND PERSONALLY ACTIVE APPROACH TOWARD THE TEACHING PROFESSION

CONTINUUM OF TEACHER EMPOWERMENT DISCOURSE

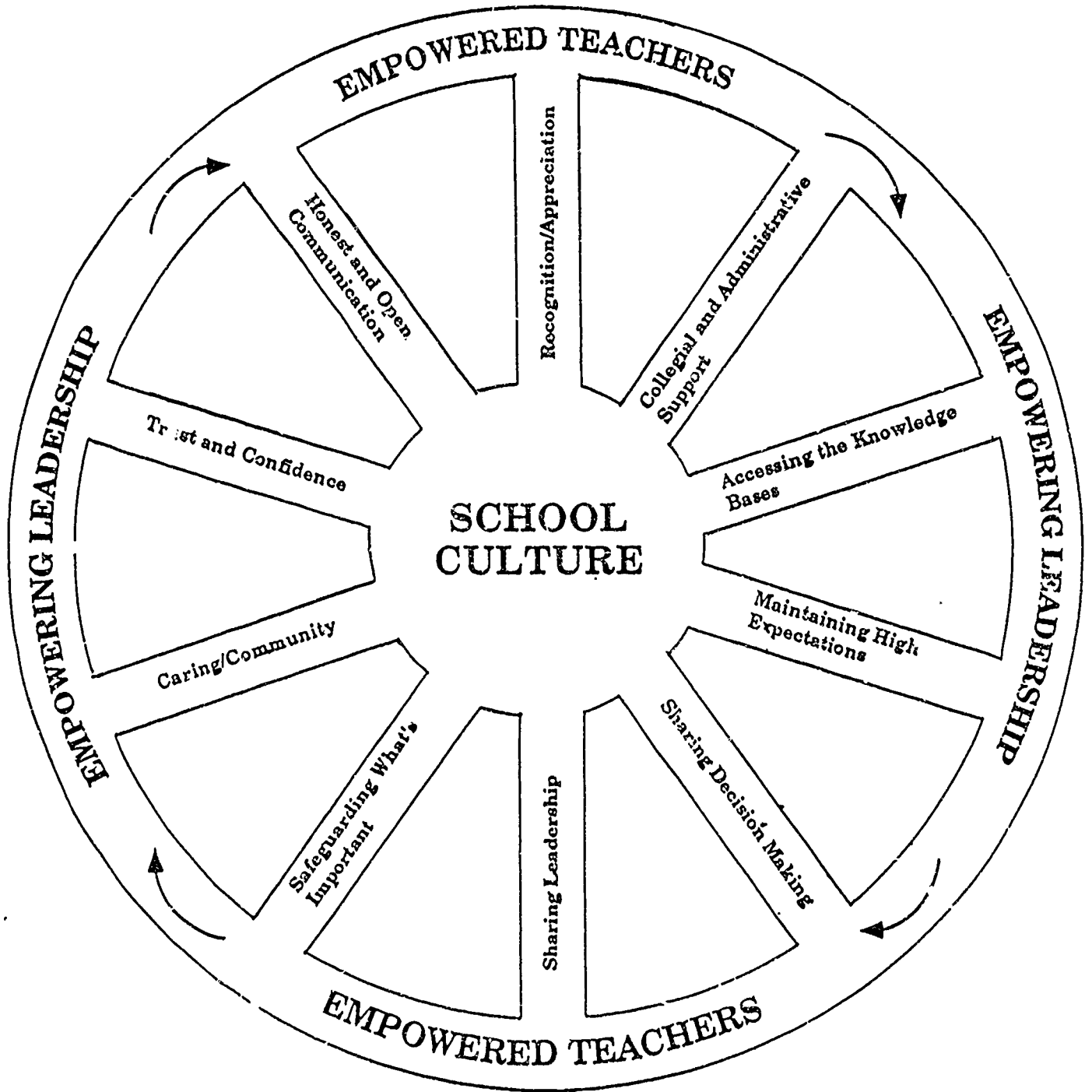


GOAL

Individuals seek an active and conscious level of empowerment

Individuals seek to foster the maintenance of the existing social structure

"A CULTURE OF PRIDE"



A TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE AND CARING

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