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ABSTRACT

This collection of four case studies discusses the work of teachers and their efforts to change their classrooms, schools, and districts. The case studies show that teachers can learn to use their own strengths and talents, knowledge, shared vision, and commitment to student growth and development to effect change. The first case study, "Santa Ynez Valley Union High School" (Jon Snyder), documents how a rural California high school brought together internal and external resources and expertise to create a model for school change, and reports the difficulty and complexity of mobilizing "whole school" change and of sustaining optimism and momentum in face of early setbacks. "Pod 200 Clubs: A Multicultural Curriculum in Action--the Walt Disney Magnet School" (Lynette Hill with the assistance of Alice Weaver) describes creation of a multicultural and integrated curriculum within an open-classroom team-teaching environment in Chicago (Illinois) through student participation in interest groups. "Lompoc Valley Middle School Challenger Program" (Marianne D'Emidio-Caston and Jon Snyder) discusses creation of a California school-within-a-school which focuses on active learning, accountability, community of learners, integrated curriculum, and changing relationships among teachers and between teachers and parents. "The Foundations School: The School of Choice" (Lynette Hill with the assistance of Alice Weaver) was brought about by Chicago (Illinois) teachers who saw their role as facilitators in the learning process and who believed in whole language, child-centered classrooms and an interdisciplinary approach to learning. Some generalizations are woven throughout the fabric of the case studies that offer insights about networks as supports for intellectual and social change, about the subtleties and nuances of individual and collective learning when they are part of the change process in schools, and about the tensions that arise as teachers bring knowledge from the outside to change the inside of their schools. (JDD)

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Teachers' Voices

Reinventing Themselves, Their Profession, and Their Communities

Marianne D'Emidio-Caston
Lynette Hill
Jon Snyder

Introduction by Ann Lieberman

NCREST

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NCREST
Box 110, Teachers College
Columbia University
New York, NY 10027
Fax: (212) 678-4170

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November 1994

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Marianne D'Emidio-Caston
Lynette Hill
Jon Snyder

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Introduction

Ann Lieberman

For fifteen years, Impact II, a nationwide non-profit educational network, has been working to support the innovative work of teachers in their own classrooms. In providing support for the "Teachers Voice Initiative," it has brought the work of teachers and their efforts to change their classrooms, schools, and districts to the forefront of the reform movement.[1] The four case studies that make up this book have much to tell us about the meaning and scope of this work.[2]

We see schools seeking to become places where students and teachers are actively engaged in continuous inquiry, and where teachers are struggling to find time for their own learning as well as to participate fully in making decisions about the best ways to provide quality education for their students. We experience the pleasure and the pain of teachers who are in the process of changing roles, relationships, and ways of working; who, in the face of incredible challenges, are willing to work through the impersonal and professional angst, to do what it takes to change the educational experience for their students and themselves. While each of these stories is unique, there are some generalizations woven throughout their fabric that help us to gain valuable insights: about networks as supports for intellectual and social change, about the subtleties and nuances of individual and collective learning when they are part of the change process in schools, and about the tensions that arise as teachers bring knowledge from the outside to change the inside of their schools.

Networks for Educational Change

Showing the significance of belonging to a network, all of the teachers in these case studies attended a meeting sponsored by Impact II where teachers were encouraged to involve themselves as leaders in school change efforts. Each of them, as individuals and in groups, gleaned something important from their network participation. For one school, the network served as the catalyst for changing a group of teachers, introducing them to a process for reorganizing their school to accommodate new possibilities for student learning. Another group gained support for working through ideas for a student-centered "school within a school." One teacher was able to further develop her approach to creating a multicultural curriculum in her classroom, while another, already recognized as an outstanding teacher,

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[1]In 1991, Impact II published ***The Teachers' Vision of the Future of Education: A Challenge to the Nation***. The following year, 60 teachers from across the country came together to develop school change projects to make their visions a reality.

[2]These cases have also been published in IMPACT II's most recent publication in its "by teachers for teachers" series, ***How Teachers are Changing Schools***.

expanded her support network to help her fight rigid rules and regulations preventing her and other colleagues from bringing a new school to life.

Individual and Collective Learning

Changing schools usually involves an intricate interplay between teachers who themselves get excited about and are willing to invest energy in changing what they do, and their peers, who must somehow become interested and involved. In the best of circumstances, entire school faculties participate, which is what happened at Santa Ynez Union High School. Most often, however, one or two teachers get excited and begin to share experiences and ideas with a few other teachers, who join them in planning and then doing something innovative with their students. Individual teachers may take a course, read something, share with a friend, go to a conference, a class, or a network meeting, and get on fire about new possibilities for their classes.

We see in these cases that the tension between individual learning and collective learning is an inevitable and significant part of the change process. Individual teachers were connected by a variety of experiences to innovative ideas. For one teacher, Lynn Cherkasky-Davis, her sensitivity to children's needs and problems merged with her growing knowledge of the benefits of the whole-language process, mixed-age grouping, and other possibilities for improved teaching and led to working with others to create a teacher-led school. For Rosemary Cabe and Wynn Clevinger and their colleagues, it was becoming members of the South Coast Writing Project, thereby gaining new insights into how to teach students to write while being encouraged to make other changes in their classroom teaching. For Marcia Regan, her understanding of the importance of an integrated, student-centered curriculum, coupled with observing a student body increasingly poor and alienated from the existing educational process, fueled her desire for transforming her classroom in a Chicago school. For three team members of a rural high school in California (Carol Bantz, Leslie Tarbet, and Joyce Kent), learning how to create a vision for their school was a valuable organizing device.

But individual learning and seminal experiences do not neatly transfer to larger collectivities of people. Individuals on fire often get doused with resistance from colleagues and others who are unmotivated, disengaged, protective, or feeling manipulated by people they do not know promoting ideas that they have not shared. (Of course there is no guarantee that even if they are a part of a larger group, they will be supportive). The cases show us graphically that there are no short cuts to changing schools and that the inspiration of one person must be caught and experienced by others if any authentic reform is to take place. It took an eight-member team at Walt Disney Magnet School to make a multidisciplinary, multicultural program work that had been originated by one teacher. The Challenger Program, at another school, with a team approach that works for the participating teachers, faces a continuing struggle to engage parents and students. The more they do things differently, the more their peers who are not involved in their team resent the perceived differences, the attention they receive, and the resources they obtain. The study of the Foundations School, in part a story of an obviously talented teacher, is also about fashioning new leadership for team members that is more facilitative and less bureaucratic

and hierarchical. Working through more egalitarian relationships on the team, while figuring out how to relate to the rest of the school, is representative of the complexity of the change process in many schools.

Outside Knowledge and the Inside of Schools

One of the dilemmas of school reform is that knowledge about the processes of change, pedagogy, content, and school organization comes from outside of the contexts of the specific schools that try to use this knowledge to effect change; yet it must somehow inform the culture in the school and influence the everyday activities of the people inside the school. How this happens and what conditions support or constrain the use of new knowledge within a school remain difficult questions to answer.

At an Impact II meeting of teacher leaders, some teachers from Santa Ynez learned about the importance to the school community of building a shared vision of their school. Inspired by their participation in the process at the Impact II meeting, they attempted to introduce it to their high school. (If it worked so well in one place, why not in another? Why couldn't the same powerful ideas be moved from one place to another?) They organized a two-day meeting. The first day, all the teachers gathered to create a vision for the school. The second day, a Saturday, was optional, and only a third of the faculty came. The groups had different experiences; not sharing the same process, they did not share the same vision.

At Walt Disney, a team of teachers believed that student clubs could provide a multidisciplinary, multicultural program in a variety of settings. To organize this program, however, they found that it was necessary for the team to learn to work together and to talk to each other about learning, students, activities, themes, and other specifics. Each teacher, no longer working alone, had to learn to communicate with an eight-member team.

Teachers at both Lompoc Valley and the Foundations School had been learning about "child-centered" schools: contrasting passive classrooms with the creation of active learning opportunities for students, changing from the emphasis on "coverage" -- teaching the curriculum -- to being accountable for what students actually learned and creating a caring, supportive school community. The leadership of the innovative teams in both these schools knew and practiced the "writing process" approach. Teachers in these schools had to learn more than pedagogical theory to achieve their goals, however. The core at the Foundations School had to learn how to gain financial support for their programs (despite the presence of Cherkasky-Davis, recognized nationally for her outstanding work), how to work politically with the bureaucracy of Chicago's local school council, and how to gain access to a school where they would have the freedom to work programatically with students. Educational ideas, by themselves, were plainly not enough.

Two teachers who were part of the Lompoc team participated in the South Coast Writing Project, increasing not only their writing knowledge but also their self-confidence. This led them to lead the way in expanding a small team to a larger team, which in turn created the concept for the Challenger Program, involving new ways of working with

colleagues, students, and families. The inevitable dilemmas had to be confronted: working as an innovative group without becoming isolated from the rest of the school, creating new pegagogical strategies that undermined teachers' desires for regularity and certainty, and attracting students who found these innovations appealing and yet were representative of the student body of the school.

Listening to these teachers' voices helps us to understand that changing schools is a process that involves teachers on many levels. They, like their students, are not passive receivers of knowledge, but can learn to use their own strengths and talents, their teacher knowledge, their shared vision, and their commitment to student growth and development. This is a process that enables teachers to reinvent themselves, their profession, and their communities.

Santa Ynez Valley Union High School

Jon Snyder

This is the story of change efforts at Santa Ynez Valley Union High School, one rural California high school intent on transforming rhetoric into reality. It tells how these efforts began, and how internal and external resources and expertise were brought together in one educational community to create a new model for school change. It is also about the problems encountered at one particular school and the lessons learned along the way. It is the story of how this school set about inventing authentic processes to support school reform, of the difficulty and complexity of mobilizing "whole-school" change, and of sustaining optimism and momentum in the face of early setbacks and extraordinarily long odds.

Introduction

High schools are tough nuts to crack. The rhetoric of change flows fast and furious from the towers of academe, concerned citizens, self-styled experts, legislative/policy edicts and experiments, and newspaper editorials. Foundations support changes in governance, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and counseling practices. Thousands of high school communities have accepted the challenge and put forth Herculean efforts, working fingers to the bone to humanize teacher/student relationships, to create learning experiences built around the students and their strengths rather than traditionally defined disciplines, and to restructure the huge and bureaucratic schools to combat the fragmentation endemic to large comprehensive high schools. Yet, in the larger scheme of things, what they often have to show for their efforts may be nothing more than bony fingers. The students have changed, so have the clothes they wear, the language they share, and the songs they dance to; and so has the world from which they have come and to which they will return. Yet, with limited exceptions, the institution of the high school remains imperturbable. Many students still take a year of biology and a year of chemistry, and finish with a year of physics, just as their parents and their grandparents did. Although this sequence of subjects was defined by their alphabetical order at the end of the last century rather than by the developmental needs of the learner, many schools still follow it. In addition, students frequently study the same subjects in the same old ways as previous generations of students -- from outdated textbooks, teacher lectures, standardized tests, and drills.

The reasons high schools change in nearly geologic time frames are many and beyond the scope of this case study to explicate. Briefly, powerful forces in the lives of communities, students, parents, and high school teachers all play a role. For instance, in many communities, high school athletics serve as the social glue that binds school and community together; winning or losing on Friday night becomes the primary criterion that shapes community attitudes, resource allocation, and decision making. In other communities, high school students, more visible and not as "cute" as younger children, become the lightning rods for various groups who are unhappy that the world today is not the way they remember it, or certainly not the way it "should" be.

Many high school students, waffling between the twin needs of independence and dependence, find more sustenance in the five-minute seams of socializing between classes than from the academic fabric of the day. Old enough to be consciously impacted by the larger social issues of racism, AIDS, unemployment, drugs, and crime, these young people are often neglected as essential participants in shaping solutions to the problems that affect them. They are caught in the nebulous zone of adolescence -- neither adults nor children.

Outside of athletics and social events, families find it more difficult to be active participants in school programs and activities than they did when their children were younger. Their children are, in some ways, more complicated, wanting their families to be involved, but not too visibly. These days, there seems to be a much finer line between acceptable and unacceptable or embarrassing parental behavior, and this line is constantly shifting. In addition, the schools themselves can be a confusing maze of offices and departments to the uninitiated or the frightened. High schools offer a plethora of teachers and administrators, and a cast that can change several times over the course of nine months. It is difficult to become involved in a school where no one knows your child well or has the time to speak with you. Finally, for parents, high school is where the rubber hits the road. Their children are older and the stakes are higher. As one parent said, "If my son messes up, the police phone . . . and you know what happens if my daughter does." New concerns and questions are raised as families begin to wonder what happens after high school. What about college and careers? While noble social skills and self-esteem keep many an elementary school family pleased and proud, the complexity, competitiveness, and cost of career options raise the fears and the blood pressure of parents of high school students. The choices and academic performance of a fifteen-year-old can open or close doors many years down the road. Thus despite the initial high hopes of parents and students for a successful high school experience, it is the school track that students follow that all too often determines the level and quality of their achievements as well as their future career paths.

High school teachers, educated in a particular discipline, often enter teaching driven by a desire to share their enthusiasm for that discipline. Once they begin teaching, however, they encounter numerous traps that make it difficult either to share that enthusiasm or to connect with their students. The subject matter they love is defined by 50-minute periods, predetermined sequences of presentation, and the content of externally developed assessments. Standardized tests often become the sole yardsticks for determining their students' futures. The students they hope to reach become a blur of hundreds of faces briefly passing through their classrooms each day. As these teachers navigate the nested layers of bureaucracy within and outside the school in their attempts to steer their students to knowledge, their working lives narrow. Their options for forming genuine connections with students become more limited by the mandated minutiae of a system sent out of control by its intent to control.

Santa Ynez Valley Union High School

Santa Ynez, a rural Southern California town located between two coastal ranges, takes its name from the river that flows through it, seeking a pathway through the coastal

range and to the sea. Founded in the 1880s when several cowboys decided not to get back on the stage coach going north to San Francisco, the town retains a distinctively western air. While still decidedly "whiter" than much of urban California, in recent years the population of the valley has grown to include increasing numbers of Latino families in addition to the original German, Dutch, and other Western European settlers. These demographic changes have brought some tensions with them, which are also reflected in the school. As Santa Ynez Valley Union High School students become increasingly diverse, the faculty is becoming more aware of the potential for new problems and conflicts that can occur between the entrenched groups and the newcomers.

The Santa Ynez Valley Union High School District consists of one high school fed by five small K-8 school districts from the valley. The school, originally built during the Depression, has been almost completely refurbished in the past several years, yet retains its sense of history, time, and place -- complete with a WPA mural gracing the walls of the board room. Santa Ynez Valley Union High School's 50 professional staff members serve approximately 850 students throughout the valley. The superintendent, Dean Anders, doubles as high school principal. His leadership style is described by a local journalist and parent of two school children as "casual and unhurried." The quality of the school's leadership coupled with the small size of the community makes school events likely to be "attended by familiar faces" and foster a school environment where parents "definitely feel listened to," and a widespread perception that the school is "open to hearing the parents' points of view and not at all defensive." In general, the staff appreciate their working conditions and enjoy each other's company. Staff retreats support collegiality and there is no outward evidence of infighting or school cliques.

Change Effort One: The Vision

Beneath this comfortable and placid surface, however, is a staff and community driven to improve the caliber of educational opportunities for its youth. In the summer of 1990, three Santa Barbara County teachers, Carol Bantz, Leslie Tarbet, and Joyce Kent, attended a week-long national teachers' conference sponsored by Impact II, a nationwide educational nonprofit networking organization that recognizes and rewards innovative teachers who exemplify professionalism, independence, and creativity within public school systems. Initiated in 1979 in New York City as a "quiet experiment" to design new educational models and strategies for improving schools, Impact II fosters teacher empowerment by awarding public school teachers a variety of grants to create, disseminate, and adopt their own programs. Thus teachers who have developed successful curriculum projects in their classrooms as well as those who want to try out new ideas and programs, such as working together across subject areas, grade levels, and schools, are given the freedom to experiment with new teaching strategies to improve the quality of education in their schools. In the years since its inception, Impact II has continued to work to connect teachers with each other in order to support innovative teaching practices and has become a fervent advocate for the ongoing professional development of teachers and the restructuring of schools with teachers, staff, and parents as the new decision makers.

The 1990 Impact Summer Institute for the Future of Education was a major Impact II initiative to promote and advance school change. This first Impact II Summer Teachers Conference represented a major national effort to build in nonclassroom professional time for teachers to think about curriculum design and structural reform, to reduce teacher isolation, and to empower teachers to take control of the curriculum. The summer conference was attended by 50 educators from 17 states around the country. Facilitated by Impact II consultants Joan Goldsmith and Kenneth Cloke, known for their work in helping to bring about organizational change, the conference utilized the visioning process developed by Goldsmith and Cloke -- having teachers collaboratively develop a new vision or educational mission for their schools, identify barriers to change, and plan specific change strategies.

* * * *

In December 1990, inspired by the collaboration and camaraderie of Impact II's national summer conference -- and feeling some obligation to do something -- the three Santa Barbara teachers, Carol Bantz, Leslie Tarbet, and Joyce Kent, decided to lead their own local visioning workshop for interested teachers in the county. This workshop was supported by the Santa Barbara County Education Office and followed the same kind of visioning process that Goldsmith and Cloke had used so successfully during the summer at Impact II's national conference. But this time, the teachers focused on creating a common mission for all Santa Barbara County schools, again identifying the major barriers to school change and planning specific steps to initiate the change process. This second county workshop was also attended by several members of the Santa Ynez Valley Union High School faculty.

The Santa Barbara workshop had a profound impact on the teachers from Santa Ynez Valley and they decided to "try out" a similar activity at their own school. On a Friday afternoon in the spring of 1991, the entire Santa Ynez faculty, by administrative edict, participated in an envisioning workshop to determine how they, too, might create a new role for teacher voices in school reform efforts. Although the workshop was planned for two days, only the first day, occurring on school time, was mandatory. The Santa Ynez staff decided to follow the same small-group visioning process used at the 1990 Impact II National Conference for the Future of Education and the December 1990 Santa Barbara County workshop, condensing the work of both meetings into two days. Thus, the teachers spent Friday developing their individual visions of what their school could be. In small groups, individuals worked together to create a shared vision. Finally, the large group identified commonalities in the small-group visions. By Friday evening, there was a general sense that consensus had been reached.

On Saturday, about one-third of the staff voluntarily returned to complete the process. The second day followed the same format of having individuals, small groups, and larger groups identify the barriers to attaining their vision, invent the strategies necessary to overcome these barriers, and then create action plans to implement those strategies. Jerry Swanitz -- social studies/English teacher, basketball coach, chairperson of the school's staff development committee, participant in the Santa Barbara County vision workshop, and later, attendee at the second Impact II Institute for the Future of Education in 1992 -- described the Saturday meeting as "positive, upbeat, and productive." A group of six to eight "hard-core conspirators," who included teachers and administrators, were so upbeat after the spring

workshop that they met throughout the summer of 1991, plotting an entirely restructured school with changed student-student, student-teacher, and teacher-teacher interactions.

The first step of their action plan was the creation of "in-groups" or student family groups. In-groups were to consist of family groups of 12 students with equal numbers of ninth- through twelfth-graders in each group. These groups would meet once a week for an hour with a teacher/advisor. The notion, culled from the visioning workshop, was that personalizing teacher-student relations and increasing opportunities for constructive peer interaction would improve the school climate, increase student achievement, and enhance teacher collaboration.

One day prior to the arrival of students for the 1991-1992 school year, the day teachers reported for duty, the "hard-core" faculty members, with full administrative and school board support, presented the action plan they had worked out that summer. That afternoon, for the first time, they outlined the responsibilities of the in-groups to their colleagues, who had not attended the summer workshop and who would be responsible for implementing the new plan the following day. Five weeks later, the in-groups were out. The majority of the faculty, unaware of the decision-making process that had taken place during the summer workshop sessions and uninvolved in the development of the action plan, was unprepared for the new facilitative role the in-groups required of teachers and incapable of bringing the plan to life. The school returned to its previous schedule.

In retrospect, Swanitz stated, "I can't believe how naive and foolish we were. We thought everyone would think our plan was wonderful." Instead, they succeeded in replicating what Swanitz describes as the traditional change model: "Change goes to chaos goes to retreat." Somewhere between the initial energizing consensus and the implementation of an action plan, the change process was short-circuited and the strategy blew up.

Yet what Swanitz describes as "retreat" also served to advance two essential elements of change. First, the visioning process changed attitudes, even for those who were not particularly keen on the in-group idea. Prior to the summer 1992 workshop, many teachers felt either that "nothing could be done" or that "nothing should be done," following the old saw that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." After the workshop, the dominant attitude was "things can be better." While there was still wide variation on what could be better or how to make things better, the impetus of possibility was now in place. Second, the process established important internal connections. For instance, Swanitz and fellow hard-core conspirator Harvey Green had, over several years, moved from talking together to team teaching, leveraging schedules and room assignments so that their team teaching periods were back-to-back and their rooms were side-by-side with a sliding wall between them. When other teachers found out that Green and Swanitz were using some of the innovative teaching methods that they too were trying, such as working together across subject areas, new channels of communication were opened; school faculty began talking with Green and Swanitz, and with each other, for the first time. Isolated dyads became larger, more coherent forces for change.

Change Effort Two: Re-Vision

Although disappointed with the failure of their initial efforts to implement the change process, Swanitz and the rest of the "hard-cores" did not give in. Many years ago, Swanitz "watched teachers crawling toward retirement" and thought, "I don't ever want to be like that." The hard cores, their numbers increased by the new attitude that "things can be better" and the internal networking of teachers moving in a common direction, decided to do all they could to renew the energy of change. They decided to "back up to where the mistakes were made," find out where the short-circuit had occurred, and rebuild the process from there. Because the process had broken down between the *vision* and the *action*, the group retained these three key assumptions from their first attempt:

- Creating a common vision is a necessity.

- The *whole school* (not the department or the school-within-a-school) is the locus of change.

- The culture of the school will improve when relationships within the school community are improved.

Based on what they had learned from their initial attempt, the teacher-leaders added two components that they now believed were necessary to make the change process work:

- Actively involve more people in the process (not just more staff, but students and their families as well).

- Take one carefully planned step at a time.

In early December 1992, another full-day visioning workshop was held at the school. The teacher-led staff development committee planned the workshop. The committee decided to use Goldsmith and Cloke, developers of the visioning process, as facilitators, not only because of their expertise, but also because the committee was looking for the credibility outside experts would bring to their undertaking. Supported by state staff development funds, the Santa Ynez staff once again went through the steps of envisioning the kind of school they wanted to have. This time, however, the entire faculty remained until the end of the visioning process. As they had done before, they first identified the key directions in which they wanted their school to go, then they came together to identify the barriers to change and the strategies to overcome these barriers. Finally, they developed the action plans they wanted to put in place to implement these strategies. Together, the staff set out to answer these questions:

- What are our visions for our school? How do we articulate these visions?

- What stands in the way of our achieving our visions? What barriers are most powerful? What barriers, if addressed, promote the greatest leverage for restructuring?

- What strategies can we create to overcome the key barriers?

- How do these strategies build on one another to form a new synergy that will further advance school change?

- What actions can we take to implement our strategies?

- What can we do to move our school toward achieving our visions?

Since the goal was whole-school change, the December 1992 Santa Ynez workshop attempted to teach and model essential components of shared decision making. With the faculty, Goldsmith and Cloke worked through these twelve steps: (1) become inclusive; (2) act jointly; (3) clarify expectations; (4) establish common goals; (5) state key problems; (6) identify critical success factors; (7) develop an action plan; (8) create cross-grade and cross-curricular cooperative work teams; (9) distribute work-team reports; (10) obtain feedback; (11) evaluate results; and (12) schedule a retreat for further reflection on the workings of the process.

After the staff visioning process, school time was set aside for a comparable process with a group of 50 heterogeneous students. Students reported being enthusiastic and energized by the process. A feeling that they were being sincerely listened to increased their own sense of responsibility for the school and enhanced their experiences within it. In addition, the feedback, coming from the perspective of students, confirmed key barriers and strategies the staff had identified.

The student meeting was followed by a seven-hour process with parents and community members held on a Saturday in February 1993. For two weeks before this meeting, the school placed notices in the local newspaper, explaining that this workshop followed the staff and student workshops and guaranteeing that common themes from the three workshops would be presented to the board of education. Nineteen parents, two teachers, superintendent/principal Anders, and one board member attended the session. Swanitz, a highly visible member of the community, was chosen to facilitate the visioning process. A school basketball coach and real estate salesman who had lived in Santa Ynez with his family for 27 years, Jerry was well known and appreciated by the parent participants for his energy and expertise in many areas. Participants reported the day was a "worthwhile endeavor as a forum for substantive discussions on the core of education. . . . It gave everyone a chance in a casual, unhurried way, to have their say -- to take their time and really think." By the end of the day the group had reached a consensus on indicators that the school was approaching its vision. One parent thought the best indicator would be

> when kids are happy going to school. When they more often combine "good and tough" as descriptors. When parents no longer hear their children say "All we needed was five minutes, the rest was killing time." When this happens, it will be a sign of respect for all of us. It's the expectations piece. Kids want more -- not the easy way out. If the school is just killing their time, not challenging them, then the school is failing and the kids won't like it because nobody likes to have time wasted.

Still, there was some concern. While the small size of the group enhanced sharing, some participants felt the group was not representative of the community, and that two or three of the participants came with a particular axe to grind. Second, the district already had a reputation of listening to parents. Would this be different? Would they, in the words of one of the parents, "take the bull by the horn? Be feisty?" Finally, the group identified three "tracks" of students ranging from high academic achievers aiming at elite universities to vocational-oriented students eager for on-the-job experiences and skills. According to one of the participants, "Nobody felt their children's needs were being met but that everyone else's were." The identified strategy was increased differentiation and "more of everything" for all three tracks. In short, the parents' pleasure was tempered with a pragmatic wait and see: "This got it going, but it is going to take more."

Among the staff, the outcome of all this "processing" was a feeling of "so what? Something has to happen as a result of this talking." This feeling was one step beyond the shift in attitude that occurred after the first pass at change. Staff attitudes advanced from "things can be better" to "we have to do something to make things better." While they gave great credence to the visioning process, arguing that "it is the most important part of change," having a dream was not sufficient. The staff wanted concrete steps outlined in a collaboratively developed action plan. Remembering their "keep-everyone-actively-involved" and "one-step-at-a-time" principles, the staff development committee culled the commonalities -- the most important ideas and suggestions from the three workshops -- and then established five restructuring committees to come up with plans for translating workshop visions into realities. Each teacher had to become a member of one of the committees. There would be no waiting until the end while others did the work. This was going to be whole-school change. Though people could choose the area of school reform they wanted to focus on (the category of action they believed would make things "better"), everyone in the school was going to get their hands dirty.

The "agendas" for the committees came from the identification of barriers and strategies developed in the three workshops during the visioning process. As they attempted to put into practice the vision they wanted for their school, the committees organized themselves around the topics listed below, for which each committee then generated and discussed the following ideas:

- *Time/Scheduling*: flexible days, the use of the college model, night classes, prep days for teachers, and the use of administrator substitutes to create collaborative time for teachers.

- *Morale/Pride*: student activities, staff/student activities, school self-esteem, and student accountability.

- *Teaching Strategies*: cross-curricular teaming, cooperative learning, peer coaching, media and technology, and writing across disciplines.

- *Curriculum*: multimedia choices, student-centered learning, and increasing electives.

- *Community Relationships*: parent-school connections, business sponsorships, apprenticeships, and collaborative searches for funds.

Despite an initial impulse to "do it all," the faculty agreed to implement a new schedule as their first strategy. The staff agreed to double the time allotted to each period and use a ten-day, rather than a one-week cycle. This meant having one set of classes meet on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays the first week and on Tuesdays and Thursdays the second week, while another set of classes would follow the reverse schedule for weeks one and two. Thus, an eleventh-grader at Santa Ynez would follow this new schedule (which appears on page 16) for a two-week cycle of classes with extended or doubled periods.

The nonacademic period was designed as an opportunity for teachers and students to match up around a particular activity or common interest such as chess, conversational Spanish, computer applications, photography, art, drafting, or woodworking. The purpose was to allow the joint pursuit of a shared passion and thus to enhance the personal relationships between and among students and teachers. Monday's nonacademic period also created important time for teachers "to work together and brainstorm -- a great move forward for us."

Practical and conceptual reasons undergirded the faculty's decision to begin with the schedule. First, there was the initial energy generated from the December 1992 school workshop to move in that direction. Second, the proposed schedule was convenient for athletes and coaches -- both in providing additional practice time and in limiting the amount of time that school athletes missed for road trips. In theory, beginning with the schedule allowed the school to move naturally into two additional areas: content and pedagogy. The teachers believed that *what* was taught and *how* it was taught would change when students and teachers doubled the length of time they spent together.

Staff members expressed concerns about the schedule. What would happen to those students who "can't even focus for one hour?" "Won't this schedule make it more convenient and attractive to skip classes?" Given the number of athletic road trips and the travel time required, it is conceivable that a student-athlete could go four to five days between some classes. Foreign language teachers argued that "research says students need daily doses of a language." These concerns among the staff were expressed openly and honestly. As one of the prime supporters of the schedule change said, "Like the kids, I'm just trying to figure out what we're going to do for an hour and a half together!" The hard-core teachers did not succumb to the human tendency to think that those who did not agree with them did not care about students. They shared their experiences, their knowledge, and their ignorance. They assumed that all the teachers did care and when care was assumed, care emerged. Formally scheduled times like staff development days as well as informal meetings in the halls or during lunch breaks provided teachers with the opportunities to come together and support each other in figuring out how to implement the new schedules.

The momentum built during the process, the lessons learned from the first change effort, and the potential advantages of the revised schedule eventually led to a *whole*-staff agreement to "give it [whole-school change] a shot." This decision indicated a significant

Monday Wednesday Friday	*Tuesday Thursday*
8:00-9:40	Chemistry
9:40-10:00	Nutrition Break
10:00-11:35	English
11:35-12:20	Lunch
12:20-1:55	Auto Shop
2:00-3:00	"Nonacademic" Period[3]

Tuesday Thursday	*Monday Wednesday Friday*
8:00-9:40	United States History
9:40-10:00	Nutrition Break
10:00-11:35	Pre-Calculus
11:35-12:20	Lunch
12:20-1:55	Spanish
2:00-3:00	"Nonacademic" Period

cultural change in the school from a year and a half earlier. The school was now driven by a commitment to "have something happen, and soon." Swanitz estimated that the original hard-core group had expanded to include approximately 25 percent of the staff; 50 percent of the staff had moved from "no" to "it makes sense, let's try it"; and the remaining 25 percent remained uncertain but indicated a willingness to try the collaboratively developed changes.

In May 1993, once again using state staff development funds, the staff convened another two-day retreat. This time the agenda, as explained to the staff by the chairperson of the Staff Development Committee, went like this: "We agreed to the schedule. Now what are we going to do with it?" The staff worked primarily with cooperative learning and

[3]The "nonacademic" period is scheduled for Tuesdays through Fridays with Mondays set aside for teachers to have a common meeting time.

alternate assessment techniques. More important than the content, however, was the process and what it indicated. The workshop was two full days "off-site, far off-site. We wanted some personal time," the chairperson said. "If our goal is to be personal with kids we have to be personal with each other." The two days were school days so that as the proposed changes were transformed into classroom specifics, everyone was involved. Everything was done to maintain comfort *and* focus. Sweet cinnamon rolls met with near universal acclaim. When complimented, one of the planners commented, "We thought we ought to do it right."

While there were several "external experts," for the most part, the presenters were either Santa Ynez faculty or teachers from schools using a similar schedule. The retreat also provided multiple opportunities for small-group sharing. It is not that the staff had no respect for the benefits of traditionally defined experts but rather that they had come to believe that the "learning must come from each other and from trial and error. When something doesn't work, we have to start talking with each other more, because if we don't change it will be awful for everybody." The entire process reflected a strong and cohesive sense of staff responsibility, culminating in the teacher presentation to the school board, which concluded the retreat. During that presentation, teachers from the Staff Development Committee presented the content, the process, and the directions for schoolwide change. The board, initially favorable towards the school's efforts, left the presentation even more supportive.

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The 1992-1993 work of the Santa Ynez Valley Union High School community represents a re-vision of its original vision for school reform. Although the school's initial vision of change was a noble ideal, in practice it resulted in the "change-to-chaos-to-retreat" model of school improvement. The faculty, however, refused to give up on their students, their community, and themselves. Through their many attempts to make their school work better, through the often painful process of trial and error, Santa Ynez teachers and staff learned that change is no a set of plans to be developed by the few and obediently carried out by the many -- not even if the few are trusted teacher colleagues. As adults, the faculty learned and changed and now the school is changing.

On the Cusp of Change

The result of the past two years of effort is a school community, in the words of a longtime skeptic, "poised and gaining impetus" to translate its vision into education experiences for all members of the Santa Ynez Valley community. Several components have built this momentum. One was a common vision held by a small community of believers who refused to give up. Their vision and commitment were simultaneously supported by the national Impact II visioning conference, which provided the opportunity for teachers from urban, rural, and suburban schools, from diverse generations, backgrounds, and cultures, to redefine the way they wanted their schools to be. Like an ever-widening ripple in a pond, the Impact II national conference and the subsequent visioning workshops provided the impetus for teachers to start thinking about the process of creating genuine school change.

These events, by bringing diverse groups of teachers together to exchange ideas, in the words of Goldsmith, "really empowered teachers to take on staff development and leadership roles in their schools and in the country."

In addition to teacher leadership, Santa Ynez benefitted from administrative leadership and support from more distant sources. Both the Santa Barbara County Office of Education and the State of California provided funding for the school's reform efforts. Finally, the school community had the wisdom to know what they knew and what they did not know. They were strong enough to request technical assistance when and where they needed it, as reflected in their consistent use of outside facilitators (Goldsmith and Cloke). Yet they were ready to draw on their own knowledge and experience when they knew the answers had to come from within.

Unanswered Questions

Will the schedule change make a difference for students? Will teachers and students really change what they do in their classrooms? Are the raised expectations of students and their families unrealistically high, especially in times of severe economic uncertainty? Will these new expectations only serve as forces of disillusionment? What can be done about the larger social problems that directly affect the school, such as racial and ethnic conflict and unemployment? For instance, in the midst of the staff development retreat, a newspaper headline trumpeted "Latino, Anglo Relations Tense at Valley High."

There are several reasons for patient optimism. The possibilities for classroom change were supported by the decision to include a workshop on cooperative-learning strategies at the staff development retreat. The focus of the school's next staff development retreat (and the talk during much of the teacher collaboration time made possible by the revised schedule) is thematic cross-curricular learning and teaching where students, time periods, and disciplines are flexibly combined to support student learning. Teachers who are enjoying the pedagogical vistas opened to them with longer class periods are being approached by those who are discovering that combining two 50-minute periods into an hour and 40 minutes of class time demands a greater variety of learning activities and innovative teaching practices if students are to stay involved. At the same time, families are noting more student enthusiasm about school. The fear that the new schedule would be an incentive for truancy has proved unfounded. Attendance rates are up. Students and teachers comment that the increased time between class periods has "calmed the campus." The words of a recent convert to the hard-core camp may provide the strongest source of optimism.

> Some folks are going to have to change what they do. But most of them are ready to try. Like anything important, this will be tough. But we know that and we will stick it out. We can do something. We have to do something. We are doing something. We will do more.

Pod 200 Clubs: A Multicultural Curriculum in Action The Walt Disney Magnet School

Lynette Hill
With the Assistance of Alice Weaver

It is eight o'clock on a Wednesday morning. Eight fourth- and fifth-grade teachers gather around a large rectangular table at the Walt Disney Magnet School, a cantilevered steel and glass structure located on Chicago's scenic Lake Shore Drive across from Lincoln Park, an affluent area of high-rise buildings overlooking Lake Michigan and most commonly known by Chicago residents as "The Gold Coast." The group is discussing scheduling, program planning, student progress, upcoming field trips, and their innovative new multicultural club curriculum. Marcia Regan, the fourth/fifth-grade team leader, guides the meeting. The teachers are enthusiastic and continue to discuss program issues and new projects they are planning as their students assemble in the large open classroom to start the school day.

The teachers end their meeting and join their combination fourth/fifth-grade class in the 1,500-square-foot open space that both teachers and students affectionately call "Pod 200." Within this space, without walls or partitions, the teaching team works with 200 fourth- and fifth-graders in a relaxed "student-driven" teaching and learning environment, where children are free to explore various learning centers and to develop and enhance their skills in a wide range of subjects. Divided into separate learning areas for reading, language arts, math, science, social studies, and fine arts, Pod 200 provides a friendly community setting where teachers and students can come together in small groups within the large open classroom to explore and investigate specific topics or content areas of interest. Each teacher works with students in an assigned area and throughout the day students move in small groups from one center to another, working on a variety of individual and group projects.

The Walt Disney School was designed according to the open classroom model and has three floors, with three pods, or open classrooms, on each floor. Each pod, like Pod 200, is approximately 1,500 square feet and can accommodate approximately 200 students. Pod 200 is one of three intermediate-level open classrooms on the school's second floor. Each pod is staffed by a team of eight teachers, including a team leader selected by the school principal. Each floor of the school has its own floor director, and floor directors are responsible for the open classrooms on their respective floors. Floor directors report to the school principal. In addition to its nine pods, the school has generously equipped computer labs and music rooms as well as a small cafeteria area on each floor.

Established in 1979, the Walt Disney School was the first magnet school, or school of choice, in Chicago. An alternative to Chicago's traditionally segregated public schools, the Disney School was created "to demonstrate that racially and ethnically integrated student populations will contribute to an ideal educational setting."[4] The school was originally designed to facilitate racial integration when the U.S. Marine Corps sold the property on which it was built to the board of education for $1.00, with the stipulation tha the Communication Art Center, to be located in the basement area, service all children in the city. The board of education agreed and invited students from schools throughout the city to

[4]Excerpted from ***Teaming: A World to Share, Impact II Proposal, 1992.***

utilize the center, which offers classes in such subjects as photography, filmmaking, quilting, arts and crafts, and music. A school of choice since its inception, Disney has attracted children from many ethnic and racial backgrounds. The school is open to all families who wish to apply and students are selected at random from a large list of applicants. The criteria for admission are that students reside on the north side of Chicago and that they form a classroom population that is 30 percent African-American, 30 percent white, 30 percent Hispanic, and 10 percent Southeast Asian and Native-American. This selection process has allowed the school to maintain its ethnically and racially diverse student population.

Because of the heavy demands of team teaching in an open classroom setting, all teachers at the Disney School must have at least three years teaching experience and the demonstrated skills, abilities, and maturity to work with mixed-age groupings and diverse student populations, as well as other team members, in a child-centered, flexible, and collaborative learning environment.

The Pod 200 Team

The eight members of the Pod 200 Team are clearly unified in their commitment to providing a multidisciplinary, multicultural, and integrated program grounded in the specific needs and interests of their fourth- and fifth-grade students, one that reflects and supports diverse learning styles, as well as the diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial groups that are represented in the classroom population. They also share the belief that "learning cannot be a passive activity"; that "the learner is not a receptacle, but an actor who gives meaning to reality and, then, shares the [new-found] vision with contemporaries"[5]; and that, when students' deepest interests are tapped, it is indeed possible to transform passive and apathetic onlookers into active and engaged learners. In addition, all members of the team see Pod 200 as a unique community that reflects the special strengths and needs of both its teachers and its students.

Marcia Regan, a 20-year veteran of the Chicago public school system, has been a team teacher at the Disney School for the past ten years and team leader of Pod 200 for the last two years. She is also the author of numerous innovative curriculum guides based on a multidisciplinary approach to learning. After years of classroom experience, Regan says she has become convinced that learning is most exciting and useful when it is a personal process, involving individual choice and responsibility and connected to children's real-life activities and experiences. She believes that "we have deprived our students of the freedom to learn in their own specific ways and we have been deprived of learning and sharing those ways."

The other members of the team, Sandra Bradley-Strautmanis, Ruth Goodman, Phyllis Hogan, Lisa Kane, Gail Kay, Rose Falco, and Laurie Engberg, represent a wide range of skills and abilities and complement each other in their areas of expertise and special talents. Hogan, a Pod 200 team teacher for six years and a long-time church choir member with a

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[5]Excerpted from ***Teaming: A World to Share, Impact II Proposal, 1992.***

strong performing arts background, has been instrumental in developing the class Performing Arts and Choral Club. Kay, a 20-year veteran of the Disney School, with preschool through high school certification and a background in fine arts, coordinates the newly developed Fine Arts Club and adds experience to the team. Team members have taught both primary and intermediate level classes and range from seasoned teachers -- Kay, Goodman, and Falco -- to younger teachers such as Kane and Engberg, who share a special interest in environmental and community issues.

This study describes how this group of teachers decided to create their own multicultural and integrated classroom curriculum to make the learning process work more effectively within their open classroom. It details how the team set about designing, developing, and putting into action their vision of a project that would cut across all subjects, rather than separate them, and that would reflect and support the ethnic and racial diversity within their school; and how they were supported and encouraged by Impact II in getting this innovative program off the ground.

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After 20 years in the classroom, working to create a more integrated and student-centered curriculum, Regan was becoming increasingly concerned about two trends in Chicago public school education that she believed worked against the kind of personalized teaching and freedom she found essential to the learning process: (1) The student body was increasingly coming from the poorest and most disenfranchised portion of the population; and (2) an increasingly sterile and impersonal bureaucracy, in its struggle to maintain itself and its control, had legislated ever more specific guidelines, rules, and goals for teaching and learning. Regan wanted "to extricate [her] students from the sterility of learning divorced from life and to allow them to experience the elan of learning within the concrete context of their own lives."[6]

To make learning more meaningful for the students in their Pod 200 class and to encourage ethnic and racial pride in a cooperative learning situation, Regan and her Pod 200 colleagues decided to develop a program that would help their students to understand and appreciate their national, regional, and ethnic origins, as well as the cultural and ethnic origins of their friends and other students in the pod.

Impact II: Creating Networks for Change

In 1992, Regan was selected by Impact II as one of 50 outstanding educators to attend its 1992 Summer Institute and National Teachers' Conference held at the Snowbird Center in Utah. This institute, which focused on the theme "Inventing the Future of Education," provided Regan with the opportunity to share her thoughts and ideas for reshaping her classroom curriculum with interested colleagues. Participating in a curriculum planning

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[6]Excerpted from ***Teaming: A World to Share, Impact II Proposal, 1992.***

group, Regan was able to strengthen her initial vision for creating a new and innovative multicultural curriculum within her open classroom.

Returning from the Impact II teachers' conference revitalized, she wanted to share her idea with the rest of the team. Although somewhat anxious that her colleagues might reject the new plan, Regan found to her surprise that the teachers enthusiastically embraced the idea. The new project would facilitate learning across subject areas and allow students to learn about the customs and traditions of the various cultural and ethnic groups represented within Pod 200 through offering students five student-selected interest groups or clubs in which to participate. Together, the team decided on the following clubs: the Fine Arts Club; the Environmental Club; the Stamp Club; the Creative Arts Club; and the Health Club. The team chose these particular clubs because of student interest in learning more about these subjects as well as because they represented areas of their own expertise; for example, Falco organized the Health Club because of student interest in cooking and nutrition as well as her own hands-on knowledge of this area. Working long hours to coordinate the plan and make it work smoothly, the team started to implement their club program. The new project, which integrated all subjects across the curriculum, allowed students to be in several different clubs throughout the school year, and to participate in a variety of hands-on and experiential learning activities that helped them learn more about their own national origins as well as about other cultures and ethnic and racial groups. In addition, the Pod 200 teachers shared their new project with eight teachers from the Communication Art Center, who coordinated the clubs with art center activities to enhance student involvement.

Initially, the Pod 200 clubs met once a week. They soon became so successful and students enjoyed them so much, however, that the team applied for and received an Impact II Team Grant to develop their program further. They called their proposal *Teaming: A World to Share*; it represented the team's first collective effort to design an integrated multicultural learning project and to describe the club curriculum they had created. At one school and within one classroom, the process of curricular reform had been set in motion.

Creating the Clubs: Setting an Idea in Motion

One of the first steps that the teachers took in creating both the clubs and the interdisciplinary curriculum was to help the students discover their own heritage. To do this, the team sent a letter home with the students asking their parents to identify the ethnic group(s) that would best indicate their ancestral roots. The teachers stated that the purpose of this information was "to help the students collect and research information which has personal value for each of them." Providing parents and families with an overview of the new program and the purpose for incorporating it into the curriculum, the letter from the Pod 200 Team explained:

> We are including opportunities for children to interview friends and relatives who may have interesting stories and memories on many of the topics covered.
>
> From this study we expect that children will develop projects that will express

their heritage. Beyond this is the more important objective of nurturing respect for the contribution of each cultural group to America's richness.

The plan is to reach out and share the results of this classroom enterprise with other teachers and students in the school, with parents, and with all interested members in the community. We look forward eagerly to your valuable cooperation and participation.

After parents and families identified their ethnic backgrounds, the students were asked to provide information about cultural heritage and family history, such as family or cultural traditions, festivals, music, dances, folktales, art forms, traditional costumes, special foods, and geographic origins. Once this information was compiled, the team was able to incorporate it into developing more club activities based on specific cultural themes. For example, the Performing Arts Club might learn and practice gospel music, while students integrated their study of these particular songs with African-American folktales and storytelling activities of the Creative Arts Club.

Thus the teaching team worked to coordinate thematic activities across clubs so that one interest group would augment the activities of another. The goal, as the Pod 200 Team stated in their Impact II proposal, was for students to "not only discover the commonalities manifested in different cultural formats, but . . . to appreciate the value of cooperative learning," which is shared by students, teachers, and parents.

The Pod 200 Clubs

Each of the clubs had a specific purpose and agenda, which team members struggled to define and develop through a series of brainstorming sessions. The diverse club activities reflected the team's belief that human beings do indeed possess a varied array of mental competencies, strengths, or "intelligences" that they can combine and call on in different ways to achieve excellence in diverse disciplines.[7] The team's goal was to provide as many ways as possible to tap into children's multifaceted learning styles, skills, and abilities. The teachers describe the five Pod 200 clubs as follows.[8]

The Fine Arts Club aims to promote the appreciation of different artistic styles and techniques. "Utilizing a variety of mediums, students will investigate, share and produce artistic products representative of various skills incorporated within the cultural heritage of the student population." After some basic instruction and practice, the plan is for students to create a life-size "Pageant of Cultures":

After researching cultural designs from [their] ethnic backgrounds, family knowledge, information from the Stamp Club, books and magazines, students

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[7]Gardner, H. (1983). ***Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences***. New York: Basic Books.

[8]All club descriptions are excerpted from ***Teaming: A World to Share, Impact II Proposal, 1992***.

will create traditional and contemporary clothing ideas. These drafts will be incorporated into individually made sketchbooks.

They will create their own patterns using a stamper and stamp pad on tissue paper which will later be formed into life size representations of contemporary and traditional clothing, based on their cultural heritage, to dress their figurines. The culminating activity will be a display and appreciation of our "Pageant of Cultures" throughout the school.

The goal of the Environmental Club is

to promote environmental awareness. By investigating various regions of our world, students will learn to trace the origins of different plants and herbs, discover the many benefits of our world's rain forests, research endangered species, and learn what each individual can do to benefit our planet. Students will also explore the relationship human beings have with the earth. They will create an acceptable ecosystem within the classroom.

The projects designed by the Environmental Club included growing various plants using a variety of methods (for example, clipping and rooting plants; germinating seeds and herbs; growing flowers and foods from bulbs; sprouting beans and seeds; and planting cacti), researching the origins of each plant, constructing growth charts for each plant, creating an herb and sprout garden for the use of the Health Club, making decorative plant containers for display and use in the classroom ecosystem, using paints and recycled materials, experimenting with different growing conditions (i.e., light, water, and nutrients), relating the results to different climatic zones of the world, and creating individual environmental books for the classroom resource library.

The Stamp Club provides a medium for students to investigate, discover, research, and learn about foreign stamps from nations represented in the student population.

The Stamp Club will serve as a resource of information for other clubs within the classroom. The compilation of comparative celebrations depicted on stamps serves as an incentive to the commonalities and differences shared in our multicultural classroom environment.

The students in this club will learn to mount, categorize, and label stamps; to research stamps that represent the multicultural population of the classroom; to publish a personal stamp album; and to produce a passport. The students in the other clubs will benefit from many of the projects completed by students in the Stamp Club. For example, every student in the open classroom will "apply for a passport issued by The Stamp Club. While the students 'travel through' various club activities, they can earn a stamp from [each] country or region [they explore], which will be added to their passport."

The Creative Arts Club helps the students enjoy the richness of each other's heritage through song, dance, folktales, and dramatic presentations.

> The Creative Arts Club convenes to joyously celebrate the Walt Disney Magnet School racial-ethnic rainbow. We sing songs of many cultures. We dance steps of many cultures. We speak tales of many cultures in choral unison. We discover that different races and different nations all share the need for comfort, for pride, for instilling values in their young, for recognizing milestones in life, and for explaining a wondrous universe. Each race, each nation does this uniquely in song, dance and retold tale. By sharing these songs, dances and tales, the children in the Creative Arts Club know both the unity and diversity of the human experience. Our shared pleasure in creation allows us to appreciate our similarities rather than our apparent differences and to understand the irrationality of prejudice.

The students in the Creative Arts Club participate in such activities as: learning to recognize the mood of a song by listening and discussing traditional music; choosing songs from other lands; and assembling personal songbooks. The Creative Arts Club is also responsible for organizing the year-end classroom festival, which is shared with the entire school. The festival is a culminating experience to celebrate the Disney School's rich heritage and the unity and diversity of its student population.

The Health Club is designed to educate students regarding proper nutrition, to help students learn about many different kinds of foods, and to nurture good nutritional habits.

> The students will become aware of the many different foods that are prepared and eaten in different cultures, and explore the idea that good nutrition is achieved by eating foods from each food group daily. Each culture achieves this through combining foods native to [its] country for each meal. The student will learn to appreciate . . . that many different foods can provide something that is needed universally -- and that is good nutrition.

The students in the Health Club will review the four food groups, categorizing foods and identifying each group's contribution to a healthy life-style. They will have the opportunity to prepare a nutritious snack, breakfast, lunch, or dinner from the foods that are most representative of their particular culture. Students will also have an opportunity to prepare recipes using the herbs grown by the Environmental Club. Finally, the students will collect all of their recipes into the *Pod Recipe Book*, which they will design and illustrate themselves. Each student will receive a recipe book to take home at the end of the year.

Summing Up: Conclusions and Considerations

These descriptions of the goals and activities of each club have been carefully created by the Pod 200 Team. They reflect the time and effort that have gone into developing this multicultural program. As with any change effort, it is clear that time will be a key element in determining how well the integrated multicultural curriculum will work: Time will be needed for the teachers to experiment with new ideas and refine current practices. Adequate funding will also be needed for the Pod 200 Team to continue the project.

In addition to issues of time and money, the Pod 200 teachers had to devote much of their energy to building professional relationships with each other and learning to work together to become a successful collaborative team. It was a process that involved learning important group skills, such as how to reach consensus and how to resolve conflict. Much of this learning was informal as the team would frequently get together to socialize and develop new friendships. Even during "formal" group meetings, the teachers seemed to enjoy one another's company. They have developed respect for each other as human beings and as professionals.

The children in Pod 200 have also had to learn how to work together. Instead of being in smaller, individual classrooms, the students spend their days in the large open classroom known as Pod 200. They must learn how to concentrate because of the noise of the other classrooms. In addition, the students have had to adjust to the personalities and styles of many teachers and to learn how to behave and present themselves in large groups of students. Nevertheless, when interviewed, several of the students said that they enjoyed the pod setup. Other than the fact that it can get rather noisy at times, all of the students who were interviewed said that they would rather be in an open classroom situation than in the traditional closed classroom. As one fifth-grader explained, "I really like the open classrooms. There is one pod and eight classrooms in it. It gets noisy a lot of the time, but you get used to it. And it helps you get to know the kids in the other classrooms."

Most of the students expressed positive feelings about the clubs. They said they enjoyed the club activities and had learned a lot from being in the clubs. When asked what club she was in, one fifth-grader eagerly responded:

> I belong to the Stamp Club. It's fun because we soak stamps and then make books with them. We went on a field trip and gave out T-shirts with new stamps that are just coming out. The stamps are of Elvis.

"We also make passports with our stamps," she added.

Another student explained that she was "in the Creative Arts -- singing group. We learn new songs -- we learn the rhythm of the songs and then sing them out loud. It is the biggest club!" It was evident that these students enjoyed participating in the clubs they had selected and took great pride in their accomplishments.

Students at the Disney School feel a strong sense of ownership in their school and take pride in the educational opportunities they have. This is reflected in the letter (which appears on the following page) of one Pod 200 student sent to Chelsea Clinton, in which he describes the Walt Disney School.

The Pod 200 students remain excited about their clubs and about learning more about their individual cultures, and ethnic, racial, and national groups. As the teachers work collaboratively to replace the traditional mandated, regulated, and generically designed curriculum with a student-driven, developmentally and cognitively appropriate, integrated program that is responsive to the needs of each child, Pod 200 could well be on its way to establishing a multicultural tradition of its own.

Walt Disney
4140 N. Marine Dr.
Chicago, IL 60613

Feb. 2, 1993

Dear Chelsea,

When, or if you leave Washington, take a stop at Chicago. Chicago has everything. You could hear the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Cubs game, Bulls game, and lots of other things. The best is Walt Disney Magnet School. We have the best [of] everything. We have Science, Social Studies, Math. and reading. We even have clubs we choose ourselves. We have exciting events. We went to see films that nobody has seen yet. We went to see Chicago's famous Orchestra. We went to Chicago's Historical Society. We went to the Science of Academy. We also went to see the Field Museum.

Sincerely,

Omar

Lompoc Valley Middle School Challenger Program

Marianne D'Emidio-Caston and Jon Snyder

I have a sense that I'm in a room and I smell smoke and I have to do something about it.

"Occasionally, though scarcely heard amid the cacophony of calls to fix the schools, the extraordinary efforts of ordinary teachers can be recognized. More often than not, that small sound comes from individual voices banding together to accept personal responsibility for change," says Rosemary Cabe, a teacher at Lompoc Valley Middle School, explaining why she became involved in the Challenger Program school-within-a-school.

Context

Lompoc is a community of approximately 40,500 people located on a windy promontory on the central California coast, one third of the way from Los Angeles to San Francisco. Economically, the community is supported by agriculture, Vandenberg Air Force Base, and a prison. A mild climate, fertile soil, and relatively affordable housing mean that migrant laborers, farm and ranch owners, air force personnel, and "snow birds" from northern climes all spend considerable portions of the year there. The 10,400 students who attend the district's two high schools, two middle schools, and ten elementary schools of the Lompoc School District reflect the economic and ethnic diversity of the community. The recent immigration of Southeast Asians to the area contributes to the multicultural rainbow of Latino, African-American, and European-American students already attending Lompoc schools.

Lompoc Valley Middle School is in the midst of implementing a teacher-initiated and teacher-led attempt to redefine the nature of the educational experience of their students. To carry out their collective vision for creating change, four Lompoc Valley teachers, Wynn Clevinger, Rosemary Cabe, Gail Meehan, and Gary Smith,[9] have established a school-within-a-school at Lompoc Valley.

The idea for the school-within-a-school program began several years ago when Rosemary took over Wynn's classes as substitute teacher and Wynn went on sabbatical for one semester. Because Wynn remained in the community, the two teachers began speaking together several times a week to plan curriculum, talk about children, and share ideas. They discovered they "really like[d] being equally invested in kids' learning." As Rosemary put it, "It's a great feeling when somebody else cares about them besides you." Still, little might have come of these teachers' exchanging their classroom experiences and knowledge of particular children and teaching practices if it were not for the common educational experiences and professional development workshops the two teachers had shared. "We read

[9]Though surnames are usually used when referring to people in studies such as this, the teachers involved prefer to be referred to by their first names.

the same stuff all the time. We have been through all the projects.[10] That's how we came together."

The South Coast Writing Project (SCWriP) is one such project. In SCWriP workshops, teachers write from personal and professional experience and share their writings with other teachers. The workshops support reflection and the development of a common language from which to discuss, make visible, and improve practice. Through these workshops, which took place before, during, and after the founding of the school-within-a-school, Wynn and Rosemary experienced the process of learning to write and, perhaps more importantly, the power that comes from sharing one's voice with others.

In addition, the SCWriP network provided the support for teachers to change practice in their classrooms and schools. During the workshops, each SCWriP participant makes a presentation to a group of other participants. Peer support and coaching follow the presentation. SCWriP participants then meet together throughout the following school year to share the changes they have made in their classrooms. As a "returning fellow," Rosemary also became a member of the SCWriP Steering Committee, where she engaged in systematic study of her classroom practice and discussed her struggles and successes with other SCWriP fellows. As they shared their personal quests for meaning in the classroom with each other and other SCWriP participants, both Wynn and Rosemary developed the competence and confidence to assume key leadership roles in an educational change effort.

The Creation of the School-Within-a-School Program

Following the semester when Rosemary substituted in Wynn's classes, Rosemary was hired as a teacher at the school. During the next five years, both teachers shared their ideas and dreams for ways to counteract the lack of community on the large, overcrowded campus. At one point, the school board discussed the possibility of creating a new school to manage the population increase in the district. Wynn and Rosemary assumed leadership roles in advocating that the "new school" should indeed be "new" and not the "old school" in a different building. When the board decided not to open a new school, Wynn, Rosemary, and two other Lompoc Valley Middle School teachers, Gail Meehan and Gary Smith, asked their principal for the opportunity to create a school-within-a-school for sixth- through eighth-graders, where the four teachers could establish a three-year program and share the same group of students over the three years. The principal agreed to their plan but said no to providing additional staff, materials, equipment, or planning time for the project.

The four Lompoc Valley teachers named their change effort "The Challenger Program." Challenger currently has 180 students, 60 in each grade, sixth through eighth. Students were randomly assigned to the program from the 1,136 members of the student body. The heterogeneity of the students is important to the team. "We want to create a

[10]The "projects" they refer to are the California State Subject Matter Projects, state-funded school-university partnerships for enhancing the teaching and learning of writing, social science, mathematics, and science through professional development opportunities for teachers.

program that will work for all students, the same kinds of kids that are in all our classes." The teachers take pride in the fact that the project allows equitable access to their program, although Challenger can still provide access only to those learners randomly selected, not to all learners in the school. The key issue, as the four teachers see it, is not whether all students can learn, but whether schools can work for all students. If Challenger does not work for *all* of its students, then it is back to the drawing board.

The Vision

The Challenger Program is driven by a desire for all school experiences to be centered around learners -- students, families, and teachers -- and their learning. Fundamental to this centering is the construction of powerful relationships among (and between) teachers, students, and families, and the building of a curriculum grounded in the experiences of the students and their connections to both the school and the community in which they live. The team of teacher-leaders is eager to provide opportunities for learners to share what they know and to learn from this sharing. Building on a commitment to equity, the team encourages diverse voices and views, believing active discourse builds stronger relationships. They need diversity because they believe that the more perspectives students and teachers share, the more the learning of all will be enhanced. The essence of their vision can be crystallized in three interrelated themes: changing learners from passive recipients to active participants in the learning process; providing continuity and accountability; and creating a human community.

Passive to Active Learners

The four teachers on the team worried, in Rosemary's words, that

> The kids are in a "school boy" or "school girl" culture and that culture is fed by anonymity. . . . The students and families have no ownership in the learning process. It's just like the old doctor-patient relationship. They look to teachers as "the experts." They are passive, they talk as if they aren't part of the process.

The teachers were concerned by the lack of student involvement in school inherent in such comments as "The teacher gave me a C. The teacher gave me an A." Such comments shouted that the "students don't own the learning process!" Passivity and lack of ownership lead to anonymity, disconnectedness, and irresponsibility. One of the teachers' goals for the program was to transform this passivity into activity. They recognized that if their students were to act on the belief that "the school is for them," the school and all the people within it would have to change. As Rosemary explains,

> We have found too many new ideas and directions in education which propose [that] what or how the teacher teaches is all that matters in the classroom. We doubt the assumption that simply by changing how teachers teach, students will become more successful learners. We believe that the structure and environ-

ment of the classroom, the vision of the teacher, and the capacity of the student will all need to be enlarged and humanized in order for education to meet the needs of our students now and in the future. We are rejecting the assembly line model, which sees our schools as factories with each isolated teacher at a particular grade level responsible for a specific component of a student's education.

Active learners and learning clearly demand a comprehensive shift not just in the traditional change targets of governance structures and course content but, more importantly, in the hearts and minds of the members of the school community -- the students, their families, the faculty, and the staff. This shift must also come from putting in place their new school structures, such as smaller classes, extended class periods, and collaborative and active learning, that allow teachers to know students and to act on that knowledge.

Continuity-Accountability

A second component of the teachers' vision was continuity and accountability. All four teachers agreed that to construct and maintain continuity, the school must provide "a consistent program for three years. . . . We reject the idea that bonding and reaching the full potential of our class community can be accomplished in the ten months between September and June of any one school year," says Rosemary. In addition, continuity provides a greater possibility of professional accountability for the success of students. Wynn explains, "The only way I can honestly find out if they're carrying anything over, to evaluate myself (am I making a difference?) is to keep the students in the project for three years." Because Challenger teachers work with the same sets of youngsters in both writing workshop and math over the course of the three years, teachers and students can form closer bonds and teachers have more opportunities to discover how their students learn best.

Besides the notion of professional accountability, which the four teachers take seriously, there are other important benefits to the continuity provided by maintaining a cohort group for three consecutive years. In past years, before the inception of the program, Challenger teachers faced a new set of students each fall as their former students were scattered and dispersed to other classes throughout the school. This is the problem facing nearly all teachers when every student in the class is new. Gary states,

> So much is lost at the beginning of every school year establishing community in my class. Now, when they come back, it will be just like we left a week ago. I won't have to teach them the rules for every lesson all over again.

Still another foreseen advantage is the increased potential for building on foundations from year to year: "The real change will be next year when they aren't shoved back into a textbook, when they continue to work on the same kind of social studies projects and the same kinds of things in math," says Wynn.

Given enhanced group interactions and consistent instructional methods made possible by three coherent years together, teachers expect to see growth in their students' academic,

social, emotional, and physical development: "Real cooperative learning is our goal. We don't have it yet and we know it will take time." Time is indeed an essential factor; for it is time together over three years, extended time for class periods, and time to plan that the new program relies on to build continuity and accountability, enough time to truly make a difference.

Community of Learners

The third component of the Challenger Program vision was to establish a community of learners that included students, families, and school staff.

> We want our students to begin to see themselves as lifelong learners belonging to a special school community bound together to achieve common goals, each person taking responsibility to do his or her part and to support and encourage every other member. We suspect that too few models of teamwork exist in our students' lives. By seeing their teachers cooperating, sharing, and supporting each other, negotiating decisions and practicing creative problem solving, we hope that our students will see the merits and consider the possibilities of this form of interaction.

Team members think that a community of learners is necessary to support the first two elements of their vision: "In order for the kids to be successful they have to buy into it, the effort and the motivation. That's what schools ought to be all about, adults learning, young people learning." Rosemary Cabe describes the ideal of a community of learners as her motivation for teaching: "That is the heart of teaching . . . the air of learning surrounding all of us."

The team members have entered their work together with eyes open. They realize that working together to continually recreate practice is a time-consuming and energy-draining journey -- a journey involving a risk far greater than remaining cut off in their separate classrooms in unchanging isolation. "It's an enormous amount of time this way and always will be," says Rosemary. But the teachers are energized, not discouraged, by the challenge because it is providing them with the opportunity to put their educational beliefs into practice. In an end of the year reflection, Rosemary writes:

> Our students chose the name and designed a logo for our school -- The Challenger Program -- with a knight in armor sitting on his horse, carrying a shield and a sword. How perceptive of them. If I search for an image to represent this past year, it is something like a little grass or a flower, maybe sometimes even a weed, trying to force its way up through a crack in the sidewalk. . . . Yet in the midst of this, a part of me knows that even while it was one of the hardest, most discouraging years, it was somehow one of the most promising and exciting years of my teaching career.

When all three components of the Challenger vision are transformed into practice -- when learners and learning are active, when school structures allow for continuity and

accountability, and when classrooms become communities of learners -- team members are convinced that their journey to create change will have been worthwhile. They write,

> We choose to involve ourselves in the ongoing process of our students' educational development. It is our belief that . . . [our] shared vision will enable us to develop in our students the capacity and ability to become the kind of interdependent and supportive community where students become truly responsible for themselves and responsive to each other.

Thus, by sharing their thoughts and ideas about how to create a community of student learners, the Challenger teachers themselves are coming together as active participants in building their own supportive learning community.

Vision to Action

To transform their vision into action, Wynn, Rosemary, Gail, and Gary have set about enacting a program that builds powerful relationships among (1) how students learn, (2) how curricula should be organized, and (3) how teachers can work together. Their first moves were, by necessity, quite simple. To combat the anonymity created when students were scattered throughout a variety of classes at the end of each academic year, the Challenger Program decided to keep the same groups of students together from year to year with teachers who knew them. Thus, Rosemary's two sixth-grade core or combined social studies and language arts classes would stay together and move into Wynn's core classes in seventh grade and into Gail's classes in eighth grade. Gary would teach math and science to Rosemary's sixth-graders and also to the program's seventh- and eighth-graders, at least until another science teacher could join the program. The three core teachers would all work together with a combined class of sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders during writing workshop time. In addition, students would keep collections of their work in all subject areas for the three years they were members of the program. Thus, by reviewing representative samples of student work over the length of the program, as well as by "sharing" the same students during writing periods, the three core teachers would be able to stay connected to the same students for their entire three years in the program. Rosemary emphasizes the importance of this "staying connected":

> Because our writing workshop is composed of a mixture of all students and because Gail and Wynn will each be working with students I had as sixth-graders, I remain vitally connected with their process and I learn valuable information about revisions I need to make in my program by finding out what doesn't seem to carry over with them to seventh grade.

Finally, the four teachers requested and received a common preparation period so that even when they could not share children they could integrate the content of their courses.

Challenger teachers explain the way their students are connected to the program thus: Sixth-graders are "in the program" for six of their seven daily periods. This means sixth-

grade students have four periods of core or homeroom classes a day and two periods of combined math and science classes with Challenger teachers, with the seventh period set aside for an elective, such as industrial arts or music, within the regular middle school. Seventh-graders remain "in the program" for four periods, including three periods of core or homeroom classes and one period of math. And eighth-graders stay with the Challenger program for three periods, including two periods of core or combined social studies and language arts classes, and one period of math.

Although these initial steps toward creating an interactive, stable, and personal learning community seemed smaller than the group's original vision for a completely changed school, Rosemary noted that "our program represented more change in the status quo than we realized when we started." In fact, the team's simple innovations helped create an environment with a changed conception of content, changed daily schedules, changed interactions and activities within the classroom, changed relationships among teachers, and changed relationships between the school and the families in the program.

Changing Content

Essentially, the Challenger Program is dispensing with the notion that knowledge consists of predetermined chunks of information to be discretely served to passively accepting students. "We need alternative ways to look at things," says Wynn. She continues:

> Change is the most difficult thing in the world when you have your curriculum all set up. You have 180 lessons for exactly 45-minute periods. No one really bothers you. If it's OK with you, there's no reason for change. You know exactly what you will be doing. It's hard to collaborate with other teachers, to break away from the history lecture or the discrete content areas when you are only trained in a single subject.

The Challenger Program wants to conceive of and construct knowledge that is connected to the world the students know so that this knowledge will become the students' own to use to make the informed choices and decisions they will need to shape both their school and future careers. Program teachers are transforming classrooms from content-centered to learning-centered and from teacher-centered to learner-centered environments. In the process, they are attempting the often difficult business of shifting the focus from teacher as final authority and dispenser of information to teacher as facilitator and collaborator in supporting student learning. Paradoxically, such transformed classrooms require "stronger" teachers. For the construction of learning experiences *with* students requires teachers to have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that can transcend traditional disciplines and notions of pedagogical competence.

Wynn offers specific examples of the way content is integrated so the students can see connections between ideas and across disciplines:

> When I'm doing the Middle East, the students can be learning calligraphy and arabesque art. Or when we study Japan, they can learn haiku and brush

painting. We need to incorporate the arts and music in the time periods. There are times in social studies where the students do math, like when they are studying the Phoenicians and they're on a ship and they need math to navigate.

Gary adds, "When Rosemary does certain things in social studies, she'll tell me about it and I'll try to do the same kind of things in math."

Another "in practice" example of the changed conception of content is the use of central or key themes that cut across traditional subject areas. Themes are wide-ranging and may focus on such diverse topics as "Science and Technology in Modern America," "Theories of Evolution and The Nature of Survival," "the Vietnam War," and "Rain Forests of the World." In this thematic approach to curriculum, specific content is presented as it is needed to help students understand the central topic being studied. Thus, when students study "Ancient Egypt," one unit in their larger study of "the Development of Civilizations," they consider the construction of the great pyramids and their historical, religious, and social significance for the early Egyptians. At the same time they are learning about pyramids and how to measure the volume of a pyramid, they may also study other three-dimensional forms, such as prisms and spheres. Measurement skills are integrated into the class's overall study of ancient Egyptian history and culture, allowing students the immediate opportunity to use these skills. By placing this kind of instruction within the context of broader, more inclusive themes, it is easier for students to see the need for and value of these skills. Building knowledge through themes helps students make sense of what they learn. And the team members have become convinced that when learning makes sense, students become active participants in their learning.

Daily Schedule

Content cannot be integrated unless the day is "de-chunked." This means providing extended blocks of time for students and teachers to work together each day. These extended periods are essential if students are to construct knowledge based on their ability to connect course content to life and to connect content areas to each other. Challenger teachers have discovered that only the sixth-graders, with six of their seven school periods spent "in the program," have the kind of schedule conducive to their vision of continuity and accountability. As a result, the program is "negotiating" for one more collaborating teacher, a science teacher, who is eager to enter the Challenger Program. If schoolwide budgetary issues can be resolved, the addition of another adult will provide the personnel and time necessary to create a schedule in which seventh- and eighth-graders can have the same six periods within the program as sixth-graders currently have. By restructuring the daily schedule so that all Challenger students can spend six out of their seven periods in the program, the team believes they will come closer to realizing their three-part vision for building a strong and interdependent learning community, creating continuity and accountability in the classroom, and transforming passive learners to active ones.

Besides keeping 60 students at each grade level together for the full three years of middle school, extending class periods, and combining subjects in interdisciplinary study,

another traditional school structure the program has changed somewhat is the grouping of students by grade level. Every Wednesday, for writers' workshop, students are grouped so that the eighth-graders can work with the younger sixth- and seventh-graders. Wynn and Rosemary are clear that it will take time for the cross-age groupings to really work. For instance, early in the year, student "comments were all based on personality." After a year spent working with the mixed-age groups, however, Challenger teachers harbor high hopes that "when these sixth-graders get to eighth grade, they will have three years of writer's workshop behind them. They'll know how to really help each other with the writing process." As students share their writing in small groups, with the facilitation of teachers and older students, they develop more sophisticated standards for considering and improving the quality of their written work. For instance, students already are commenting that a piece of writing "shows me" rather than "tells me," and they are using more description and detail to support their ideas.

Interactions and Activities within the Classroom

Structural changes do not amount to a hill of beans if what happens during those longer blocks of time over three years does not also change. The Challenger Program emphasizes three pedagogical tools to transform its vision into reality:

- *Cooperative interaction* -- group work in which the task and the rewards are structured cooperatively so that students are held accountable for their own learning as well as the learning of the group.

- *Peer teaching* -- students instructing other students, which benefits the teaching student because the act of teaching requires a "higher level" of knowledge. This process benefits the learning student because often another student has the language and the time the teacher does not. Peer teaching benefits the teacher as well because it removes her from the traditional role of sole dispenser of knowledge.

- *Reflective processing* -- the sharing of personal understanding and meaning as a regular portion of a "lesson." The object of reflective processing is to take the necessary time to make sense of experience. To elicit the processing of personal meaning the teacher may use such prompts as "What did I learn?" "What strategies did I use to learn?" "How do I feel about what I learned?" "How does what I learned fit in with what I already know or already believe?"

The teachers think that these tools encourage the formation of a learning community. This community is created through teacher and student collaboration and through their sharing a sense of responsibility for what happens in the classroom. Two vignettes provide a taste of the educational feast shared by members of the Challenger community.

The writer's workshop is still an awkward time for the students. They are seated at movable desks facing the center of the room when they begin the lesson. Although it is early spring, the students still seem tentative and shy with each other. They appear

uncomfortable working with students of different ages. Today they are reading a short story called "Oranges." On the chalkboard is a circle with the word *Orange* written in it. The teacher has drawn five spokes from the center of the circle. At the end of each spoke she has written down a particular segment of the lesson. The five segments include "Silent Reading," "Jump-in Reading," "Text Render Golden Lines," "What If," and "Write Off a Line." Each spoke represents a component of the lesson. Each component is designed to encourage students to think about and react to the story in a different way, from a different part of their own experience. Through their varied responses to each lesson segment, the students construct personal meaning from the text.

Silent reading becomes the first step in the process of making sense of the story. Silent reading is actually silent. Even students who do not appear to be reading do not disturb the others. The text is then read by different students, who take turns, "jumping in" to read whenever they want to. The jump-in reading begins with Wynn, who reads several lines aloud, and then picks a student to continue reading. From that point on, students take turns as they feel inclined. Jump-in reading gives the story the vitality of multiple voices. There is, however, no pressure from the teacher to make everyone read. There is a sense that reading aloud is embarrassing for some of the students. Many read quietly and are difficult to hear. Not everybody reads.

In "Text Render Golden Lines," students use colored pens to highlight the particular line or lines that stand out for them. The class then reads these selected lines aloud, creating a new rendering of the text. This segment of the lesson seems less threatening. Nearly all students participate. Often the same lines are highlighted by many students and the recurring recitation creates a powerful sense of cohesion among class members. "What If?" is a prompt used to extend the text beyond the author's words. It is an opportunity for students to make inferences from what is written to create new directions for the story. "Write Off a Line" asks the students to choose a line from the text that is particularly significant to them in order to develop a piece of their own writing. Wynn clarifies the task: "Start your own piece of writing with a line from the story. How can you connect this line with something in your own life?" After Wynn solicits several models, the students begin to write their own stories. Like her students, Wynn writes, too. There is plenty of room for creativity and most of the students seem to have little difficulty getting started. One girl begins with this line from the story, "Bright red rouge . . ." She continues, "I remember my grandmother always wore rouge." She has made a connection between the story they have read together and her own life.

Ten minutes later, most students have written at least half a page. Some are rereading their work, making changes or adding new ideas. At a signal from Wynn, students move their desks to face to each other and begin to share their work. "At least have one person listen to your writing. Discuss it. Tell how you feel about it," Wynn says. "What did you really like?" The students read their work to each other, and the class takes on a restaurant-like buzz as the students quietly discuss their writing in small groups. One group is made up of two boys and two girls. While the first three share their work, one of the girls withdraws from the group, putting her head on the desk. One of the boys encourages her, "Come on, it's your turn. You can do it! Go ahead, try it!" His enthusiasm is infectious, and the girl begins to read her story.

Combined, the components of this lesson allow students to develop and strengthen all of their language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. As the class studies the story "Oranges," each student has the opportunity to actively connect with and engage the text. Through the integration of the reading, writing, speaking, and listening components of the lesson, the students begin to discover what this story "is about" or what it means for them. By sharing their responses, the whole group hears the diverse ways that the text has been interpreted, which leads to deeper understandings, a greater appreciation of the diversity within the class, and a stronger learning community.

* * * *

It is a morning in late April. Rosemary's sixth-grade class has just completed several group projects on ancient Hebrew civilization. Groups of students chose a particular aspect of that culture to study and present to the class. The projects have been weeks in the making and today is presentation day, the day of reckoning. The students set up the classroom with tables arranged in a square; one table is placed in the front and center for the presenters. One student has the responsibility for videotaping the event so presenters can later watch and critique their own work.

The students present a broad range of information, covering the common life, art, religion, government, medicine, important wars, and rulers of the period. They use charts and maps, models and written reports. Some are comfortable speaking in front of the group. Others speak haltingly and forget details. While not everyone takes notes, students in the audience are conscious of any little noise that might be picked up during the videotaping. They move their chairs with great care so as not to scrape them across the floor.

The Reflective Process

At the end of the presentation, the group receives the applause of their classmates. Rosemary asks, "Before we turn off the tape . . . can you give some . . . hints that would help the next group? Can you share any thoughts you have about how this project worked for you? Processing is important so we want to have it on the tape." These questions are an example of the reflective processing that becomes an integral part of their efforts. And it is this level of interaction between Rosemary and her students that brings the meaning of the experience home to all of them. Reflective processing is also an indicator of trust and safety. It is a natural part of the classroom experience. As Rosemary emphasizes, "It's just as important that you listen to each other's processing part."

One boy begins, "It's not as easy as it looked. I was really nervous, but I think I did okay. You may think you have a lot of information, but then it ends up being not so much." Another comments, "Don't write it down because you can't make eye contact with the audience. It's better if you just know everything." Another adds, "I didn't really make contact because I was really nervous." A girl, somewhat amazed, realizes, "I thought it would be easy. I thought I had a lot to say, but I didn't." The students are honest in revealing what they have learned from their presentations and their classmates show the respect that the difficult investment of honesty deserves.

Reflecting on the day, Rosemary speaks of the importance of processing. "Collect, Select, Reflect. We do things then we reflect so we can do them better. We act as if these processes are givens," she says. But they are not. "You have to teach them." Rosemary wants the students to realize the *process* of learning.

> *How did you learn about it?* It's the process rather than the product that they can learn to apply to the next project. We have to consciously bring them to pay attention to *how* they do it. Ask questions like: What was that like for you? What do you think about the way you did that? What made you decide to do it this way or that way? We make too many assumptions. We need to pay attention to these things 'cause they don't naturally think about it. Now I'm hearing things like, "I think my process was really good but my product wasn't that great." I hear things filter into their conversation so I know they are becoming aware that learning is a process. . . . They have to own the process, own what they do.

In the rush to cover content, essential elements of learning can often be ignored. By emphasizing process, the Challenger Program makes sure there is room for understanding not just the content, or *what is learned*, but also *how students learn* the content and what this learning means to them.

If the community of learners Challenger teachers envision is to be more than just a glittery shade, Rosemary and her colleagues believe that the teachers in the program must apply the same standards they set for the students to their own work. "How do you get the students to do something when the teachers don't model it for them? How many of us really look at our process?" asks Rosemary. They also believe they must reflect with each other, continually examining and evaluating their own teaching processes. Rosemary states, "We feel most comfortable addressing the role of learner and teacher as team members."

While these vignettes are singular moments, they represent the types of classroom interactions fostered by the Challenger Program. They offer a sample of the possibilities when students genuinely own the learning process and an authentic position in a learning community. When this happens, Challenger teachers are convinced, "We can make a difference!"

Changing Teacher Relationships

For teachers and students to work differently together, teachers must work differently together. Thus, one of the first steps the Challenger teachers took was to negotiate a common preparation period. This opportunity to meet within the school day and not on the exhausted edges of their private lives makes it possible for the teachers to "really stay in touch and maintain consistency over the three-year period," says Rosemary.

The close communication that exists among the four teachers is evident. It helps that they have known each other for years and respect each other's work. Gary, for instance, believes the reason the Challenger Program is working for the sixth-graders is "because

Rosemary is an excellent teacher." Wynn enthusiastically describes her sense of professional collaboration and community building: "Teamwork takes time as well as the capacity and ability to give and receive encouragement and support. I really like this. . . . It's a great feeling." Rosemary asserts that it is the teachers' working together that makes the journey to change possible. "It would be impossible to do this by myself. When I'm ready to throw in the towel, Wynn or Gail won't let me."

At the end of the first year, Rosemary writes about their collaboration and its parallels with the process approach to student learning:

> We began to see parallels in the process approach to reading and writing with our own approaches to teaching. We realized we did a lot of "pre-teaching," by gathering ideas, materials, texts we loved, pictures that stimulated discussion, music that created mood, and our endless dialogue of "What do we want to accomplish? What is the best way to go about it?" We appreciated response and feedback . . . and knew that revision was a valuable aspect of growth. As collaborators, we reminded each other of our audience and our purpose. Talking about what we were doing, what we were seeing, what we could do differently, and what we were learning from our observations became such a natural part of our teacher dialogue that this process spilled right over into everything going on in our classrooms.

Changing Teacher-Family Relationships

Student achievement in school does not reach its full power without recognition and acknowledgment from the home and the community. The Challenger Program makes continuous efforts to engage families in the education of their children and considers parents and other family members important members of the Challenger team. The first step the teachers took to involve parents in the program was to hold several meetings with families to share the program's philosophy and style and to provide an avenue for families to share their wisdom with the school. But these initial meetings did not reflect the broad representation of Lompoc families that the Challenger staff had hoped for. As Rosemary explained, "We had parent meetings. . . . At our first, over 50 percent of the families came, but relative to the families in Lompoc, they were mostly white and at the higher level of income." While pleased with the turnout, the teachers were concerned, Rosemary said, that "we weren't getting the ethnic diversity we have represented in class."

As a result of suggestions from parents, the program teachers decided to hold a small planners' meeting and dinner for eight families representing the four major ethnic groups (white, African-American, Latino, and Southeast Asian) in the school. The function of the planners' meeting was to solicit ideas on ways to involve more of the families in the school-within-a-school, ways that would meet the program's goal of establishing family-school partnerships in support of student learning. At that meeting, the parents requested that the program hold more informal meetings. "The parents requested a 'smaller deal,'" as Rosemary put it, "dessert, not dinner. [They] suggested a better use of the time would be to invite speakers on special topics of interest." Acting on that advice, over the course of the

first year, "we've had a therapist who talked about self-esteem and typical behavior of adolescents," she explained. At each of these less grandiose meetings, "we share another piece of the program. . . . We ask the parents, 'What do you want the school to look like?'" Other meetings have focused on the California standardized achievement tests and the new state curriculum frameworks. Because of their more informal nature and the immediacy of the topics being discussed, these meetings have drawn in many of the new and lower-income families who had previously shied away from attending meetings. In addition, to reach out more effectively to all families, "we set up a telephone tree, [and] made bilingual calls with two interpreters," Rosemary said. The telephone tree is used to personalize invitations to the family nights as well as to keep families informed of important events within the program, and within the community-at-large. For example, parents are notified of school board meetings whenever issues that directly affect the school-within-a-school program are being discussed.

The Challenger Program is also intent on making sure that what happens at school is visible to families. Wynn believes that "since the processes of learning are different from the way the parents learned in school, it is invaluable to have the parents see the class. . . . We can't just send the book home." Over the first year, the team has continually explored and experimented with a variety of formats for helping parents and families to better visualize the diverse ways in which their children are learning. For instance, even though families were often reminded of the open invitation to observe and, if they wished, to participate in classes, not as many took up the offer as the teachers had hoped. At one planning meeting, Rosemary shared an idea that had come to her on the way home from school:

> We can use the videos the kids are making and use a news format. We can have them talk about the event [students' taped class presentations] and then splice the tape so that the parents can see that learning experience on tape. And the kids can remember what they did during the year.

By welcoming new ways to make the program more visible to Challenger families, Rosemary's colleagues provided her with the support and fertile ground necessary to nourish the idea and make it work. The video plan to drive home news of the program was soon well on its way. The completed tape of student work has since been used very effectively during family-night meetings as well as at the program's year-end celebration. The video project has clearly been a success in capturing the learning process in action.

Parent-teacher conferences are considered the traditional means to inform families of the progress of students. The Challenger Program sees these conferences as a crucial opportunity for students to be accountable for what they have learned. By the second-term conferences, the students have progressed toward accepting more responsibility for their learning, an important goal of the program. They have compiled collections of their best work from each class to share with their families and teachers as they "lead" the conference; students are clearly expected to direct or provide the focus for the conference. "Some of them are doing well with this, others not so well," according to Gary. Undaunted, these teachers are working slowly, recognizing that change takes time and effort. Many of the parents are warming to the idea of students' taking ownership of their learning. For

instance, after his conference, one student gleefully reported, "My parents were really proud of me. They even bought me a SEGA!"

Struggling with Authenticity

Conceptual, structural, and pedagogical changes act together to create a different kind of experience for the entire school community. The following vignette exemplifies the extent to which the Challenger vision has been transformed into practice within one year.

Following an absence, Rosemary returned to her two sixth-grade core classes. Her custom is to give a reward of donuts to the classes that "behave" for the substitute. One core class was praised in the substitute's notes so they had donuts coming. Those donuts, visible on the side table, were an aromatic slap in the face to the other class. As the donuts sat out alluringly during the course of the period this sunny spring day, Rosemary returned a set of papers to the class the substitute had not praised. She said she thought these assignments did not reflect their best efforts and compared their work unfavorably with that of her other core class. It may not have been the best thing to do, but Rosemary was disappointed.

With three minutes left in the period, the uneasiness in the classroom erupted into angry, yet controlled, frustration. With raised hands, students complained:

> You care about them more than us!
>
> You are always comparing them to us and we are always the bad ones.
>
> You gave them donuts and you didn't give us any, but you made us look at them.

And then the bell rang!

Some teachers would have ignored the whole incident. After all, why should the group get a reward when they have not earned one? Besides, there is social studies and English to study and little enough time to get through the curriculum. But Rosemary was troubled by the students' energetic vehemence and the fact that the issue was left unresolved. She immediately went to her colleagues with the story and asked Gary if she could trade classes during math time so she could continue the discussion. He agreed. Later, reflecting on the incident, Gary commented:

> I don't know if we impose it on them or not, but it seems that each group tends to take on a class character. That class is just more feisty. They're smart, they're just more feisty. When something like the donut incident occurs, it's really important to get it out and get it settled as soon as possible *before* they go home. They needed to decide on something as a class. Besides, if Rosemary asks me a favor, even if we weren't in the school-within-a-school, I would do it for her. We're friends. It doesn't help me if the kids see teachers as being unfair. One period of math is no big deal.

What Rosemary and her colleagues knew was that her students' ability to express their feelings about their peers and about her was as important as any lesson she could teach them. Expressing their strong feelings of unfair treatment and rivalry with the other core group, while painful for Rosemary to hear, was part of their taking responsibility for their life in school. The students felt safe enough in her class to tell her their real feelings and Rosemary and her colleagues recognized and acknowledged their right to do so.

Amid the feelings of rage and pain at the sense of injustice, heightened perhaps by the adolescent stage of development, Rosemary called the group together as "friends." She purposefully used the term *friend* to indicate that she accepted that her actions contributed to the problem and that she, like the students, needed to be a "good listener." As the students expressed their sense of discriminatory mistreatment, the tone of their comments changed from "How can you do this to us?" to "How can we solve these problems before we all get angry and hurt?" Following several weeks of problem-solving discussions in homeroom with both groups, Rosemary reported that the donut incident resulted in a decision to have three or four representatives of each sixth-grade core class meet to discuss the issues as they emerged, "like a mini tea party. . . . So now we have representative government and the students feel better. They feel they are represented." Though the incident began "emotionally," it evolved into a living lesson in the workings of the democratic process. In the history and social studies books, democracy is a concept "covered" in the study of Greek and Roman history. In the Challenger Program, democracy becomes more than a concept. The idea is grounded in the reality of the students' own experience; students learned about the workings of representative government because they needed to use it to resolve the donut incident.

This incident, which might go unnoticed -- let alone get resolved -- in a more traditional setting, did not slip through the cracks in the Challenger Program. The program offered these important structures and processes: Learning was not limited by traditional conceptions of content; teachers' schedules were flexible enough to adjust to the learning demands of the students; and the team was supportive of teacher collaboration.

Tensions and Dilemmas

The journey from what is to what can be is complicated, complex, and never a straight line of progress. Minuscule adjustments bump into deeply rooted personal and institutional regularities. The first year of a comprehensive change effort, even one with clarity and motivation, can only begin to construct program characteristics that may eventually become embedded regularities. Challenges to change constantly surface. One student confronts teachers over just whose responsibility it should be to assess her performance: "It's your job to tell me what is wrong so I can fix it. I shouldn't have to judge my own work." Another decides to "forget" to come to the scheduled family conference. Rosemary thinks through the new roles required of her students:

> A few of my students expressed anger or frustration at the fact that they felt I was withholding from them that which they believed they were entitled to. . . .

Perhaps they felt as though just when they learned the game called "School Success," I had changed the rules.

The teachers try to make sense of their experience as they experiment with unfamiliar forms of relationships and instructional approaches. Their separation from the rest of their colleagues at the school concerns them. Time, energy, and resource issues, such as their inability to hire another teacher, sap their strength. They know they need time to hone their ideas in practice, and they need patience and perseverance. As Wynn comments, "Perseverance is the key. We're ready to have this year end and start over next year."

Rosemary, Wynn, Gary, and Gail certainly do not claim to have fully transformed their vision into reality, or to have the answers. During our first meeting, they were careful to point out: "We're in the process. We haven't found out anything. We don't know what it will look like, how it will feel, what we will be three years from now." In the first year of their work together they have, however, taken several huge steps. They have made a commitment to a learning-centered school. They have spent a productive year inventing actions consistent with their commitments. Perhaps most importantly, they have found the strength to recommit themselves.

The Challenger Program has also found itself on the horns of at least three inevitable dilemmas in school change. The first dilemma is the tension between individual and organizational needs. As individuals, these teachers desire change and have banded together to change, yet they are embedded within an organization responsible for more than one particular group. They have decided, as a small community of believers, to forge ahead -- with or without the rest of the school. At the school level, this manifests itself in the predictable animosity created when any group separates itself or is singled out from the "whole." The Challenger Program teachers have been "granted" common preparation periods and the program is the subject of this case study. It has been videotaped by the national Impact II office, and also receives monthly visits from the Santa Barbara County Office of Education. Clearly, Challenger teachers have been singled out for attention, disrupting notions of equal treatment for all Lompoc teachers, causing new tensions among school faculty, and altering traditional staff alignments. Rosemary reflects:

> I think we learned this year that by attempting to draw people into a smaller community within our very large school, we invariably ended up leaving other people out. In the process of trying to establish our identity in the Challenger Program, as teachers we seemed to become distanced and less a part of the whole school faculty.

At the administrative and management levels, the district and the school must decide if Lompoc Valley Middle School should be organized into multiple schools-within-a-school or whether the Challenger Program should strike out on its own -- escaping the larger organization by forming a school in its own building, free from the larger organizational demands of Lompoc Valley Middle School.

A second dilemma is the tension between the inherent ambiguity of teaching, which requires flexibility and flow, and the inherent desire for certainty, which requires control and

the specific placement of responsibility. On the one hand, there is the need for teachers, time, and content to be fluid enough for integrated and student-centered approaches to learning, as well as to allow for the kinds of interactions found in the donut incident. On the other hand, there is the desire to assign responsibility to specific individuals for the delivery of specific content by a specified time. Schedules, curriculum guides, and traditional assessment procedures are all attempts to take "chance" out of learning, to offer some certainty that the desired outcomes of schooling will be guaranteed by standard inputs.

This tension is heightened when teachers share the responsibility for student learning. The Challenger teachers' belief that student outcomes are enhanced as a result of their collaborative efforts conflicts with the desire to assign a clearly identified and rewarded task to each individual teacher. In the case of the desired science teacher for next year, Gary is doubtful that another teacher will be assigned to the program because "they [the administration] can't account for the collaboration and integration of content areas. Who is responsible for what learning outcomes?" Without assignment of individual responsibility for inputs, such as who is going to teach specific skills or content, it is difficult to assign responsibility for student outcomes. Challenger wants to accept community responsibility for both.

A third inherent tension faced by the program is between the values of choice and the values of equity. For instance, the Challenger Program wanted to make sure they had the same kind of students as everyone else in the school -- an equity-driven concern that a particular subset of families would choose this type of education for their children and skew their efforts. The program wanted to be able to say that their families are like all other families. They have to work for a living and have the same conditions inhibiting their engagement in school activities as other families. These families have not entered the program with an "unusual" commitment or an atypical power to choose "something better" for their children. The teachers wanted to be able to say, "If we can make it work with these students and their families, so can you." Therefore, students were randomly assigned to the program.

As they moved into the year, however, the teachers realized that family engagement would be improved and the program strengthened if families had the power to choose whether they wanted to be in it. Challenger teachers have come to believe that if families had selected the program for their children initially, their efforts to involve families could have been applied to enhancing the caliber of preexisting involvement.[11] Choice equals power and the vision of the program is families with the power to realize the quality of education they want for their children. Still, while the random selection of students for the new school-within-a-school may have hindered the program's progress, the teachers can indeed say that they have accomplished what they have with "regular" students.

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[11]Their belief was reinforced in the second year of the Program when the number of family requests to enter Challenger was double the available slots. In general, the engagement of those families that chose the program has been greater in number and intensity than that of the families that had no say in selecting the program. The teachers hope that because "assigned" families had the choice of opting out of the program (a choice only two families made), these families will exhibit the engagement of the "choice" families.

In teacher selection, another instance of the choice-equity tension, the Challenger Program opted for choice. A self-selected group of teachers, a group who by their own admission put in inordinate amounts of time and energy, formed their own community. Unlike the families, who were initially selected at random, the teachers chose to be involved. Thus, while their efforts with students might be exceptional, the argument can be made that their work is not a viable model for other schools. "No wonder the program is so good," critics could complain. "They took some of the best teachers in the school." In addition, there are concerns about the caliber of the educational experience for those students who are not in the Challenger Program. Other equity issues arise if the building divides into multiple schools-within-a-school. What about the differences between school programs? Can they be separate but equal? Will they equally foster student growth and advancement? Also, how will the teachers be selected for each program? And which program "gets" the teachers who do not choose to change?

The Challenger Program, like the school restructuring movement as a whole, is clearly facing unresolved and perhaps irresolvable issues. As is the norm in school-change efforts, the teachers in the program suffer from inordinate and unrelenting demands on their time. Rosemary reminisces, "I hardly get out of the room anymore. I remember getting out of the room." Still, Wynn says, "Bring on next year. . . . It is a wonderful time to be in education and to be out there embracing it." The opportunity, as Rosemary says, "to think about children and build our schools around them" continues to fuel their progress. Perhaps, in some locations, educational conditions for youth may be about to go up in smoke, but the Challenger Program teachers feel they have the power to kindle the flames of their students' minds, and their own.

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The Foundations School: The School of Choice

Lynette Hill
With the Assistance of Alice Weaver

Housed within the Florence B. Price Elementary School, a brown brick three-story building surrounded by the rubble-strewn lots and projects of Chicago's south side, is the Foundations School.[12] In a neighborhood where drug-related crimes and drive-by shootings are common and familiar occurrences, where the value of human life is called into question every day, this teacher-designed and teacher-directed school offers living proof that school can be a place where people count; a place where children, parents, and teachers are welcomed and respected, where children's educational horizons are stretched and expanded, and where genuine learning can and does happen.

Established in September 1992, the Foundations School serves 140 children in grades K-6. Thirty percent of these students come from the surrounding neighborhood and 70 percent are bused in from other parts of the city. Classes are small, with approximately 15 to 20 students in mixed-age groupings -- a far cry from the larger, single-grade classes in more traditional public school settings. The school wishes to remain small as "current research on Chicago school reform indicates that small schools are most conducive to increased collaboration among staff, students, and community, and to the creation of a vested community of learners."[13] Admission to the Foundations School is by choice, on a first-come, first-served basis, and the student population is 100 percent African-American, with 80 percent of the students living at or below the poverty level as designated by current federal guidelines. Although located within the Price School, Foundations operates autonomously under the leadership of its own teaching team.

The Foundations School embodies the vision of nine Chicago public school teachers who wanted to create a teacher-directed, child-centered, ungraded, and multi-age public school that worked for teachers and children. Deriving its name from the teaching team's firm belief that the new school's purpose should be nothing less than to set the foundations for each student's lifelong learning, this school-within-a-school provides hard evidence that it is possible for teachers who believe that all children have the ability to learn to create an educationally challenging learning environment responsive to their students' needs. The teachers who came together and worked to make this school happen saw their role as facilitators in the learning process; believed in whole language, child-centered classrooms, and an interdisciplinary approach to learning; and were able to transform these beliefs into an action plan for educational change.

The Foundations Team

The Foundations School was designed and developed by Lynn Cherkasky-Davis, a kindergarten teacher with 15 years of experience in Chicago public schools, together with

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[12]In September 1994, the Foundations School moved to a new site with more space in the Wendell Phillips High School on the near south side of Chicago.

[13]Excerpted from ***The Foundations School Proposal, July 1992.***

eight other Chicago public school teachers: Jean Becker, Doris Clark, Brenda Dukes, Alan Foss, Marie Kielty, Daniele Norman, Ann Smith, and Margaret Tysver. A learner-centered school, Foundations is a place where children "thrive on complex ideas and rich social interactions and are not consigned to an atomized curriculum of skills and drills," according to Harvey Daniels, co-director of the Illinois Writing Project and a major Cherkasky-Davis supporter.

Cherkasky-Davis's colleagues refer to her as an energetic, enthusiastic, passionate, and visionary teacher, relentless in her quest for educational excellence. Those who have worked with Lynn Cherkasky-Davis see her as an extraordinary educator -- a leader and a learner. Sylvia Peters, former principal at the Alexandre Dumas Elementary School where Cherkasky-Davis taught, observes:

> Lynn's gift is to start where the child presents developmentally and build on that. She encourages and supports [them] . . . in using their own initiative and inventiveness to learn, and expects their immersion in literacy. Ms. Davis carefully designs the class environment to achieve this goal. . . . Lessons are planned from child-driven questions. . . . Her holistic philosophy of authentic education is unusual in a traditional and highly rigid school system.

Commenting on Cherkasky-Davis's whole-language program at Alexandre Dumas, Daniels describes her kindergarten thus:

> Her classroom is a purposeful maelstrom of activity. She has 29 at-risk kindergartners at Dumas, and here are . . . the highlights I've noticed: Kids read constantly, at home and at school, selecting their own books and sharing them with parents, classmates, and teacher. Kids write and draw before, during, and after their readings. Children take a tremendous amount of responsibility, keeping attendance, publishing their own books, editing each other's work, moving about the many learning centers. Parents are involved, reading books to their children every night, and visiting the classroom often to assist. . . . Kids work with fourth-grade reading buddies . . . they exchange correspondence with their pen-pals. All this, by the way, occurs among children who no one expects to be able to read or write.

Cherkasky-Davis sees her role within the classroom as encouraging and supporting the lifelong learning skills of her students and to providing them with every opportunity to be successful in life. She describes herself as a facilitator of the learning process:

> I value and accept each child's unique qualities and varied family experiences. I create classroom opportunities in which I participate as learner along with the children in activities that build the foundations for lifelong learning in a pluralistic society. In short, I do not teach subjects. I teach children! In my role as planner and facilitator, I orchestrate a space where children grow cooperatively [along with] the adult learner; where the foundations of literacy, understanding, analysis, equality, and respect are formed. . . . I strive to instill a desire in my students to produce in a cooperative, collaborative

manner, and to contribute to our society, in other words: to make a difference.

The teachers who have assisted Cherkasky-Davis in her quest to establish an autonomous teacher-led school share her energy and commitment to creating an educational environment in which students can become self-directed learners, problem-solvers, and risk-takers within a collaborative and caring learning community. These eight Chicago teachers bring to their work a variety of teaching skills and talents. Ranging from reading, art, and drama specialists, with three to four years experience within the system, to a special education teacher who is a 28-year veteran of Chicago public schools, the team has collectively taught both primary and middle grades as well as mixed-age groupings. In addition to initially coming together to learn more about the whole-language process at Chicago Teachers Applying Whole Language (TAWL) meetings, they had all worked with Cherkasky-Davis at the Alexandre Dumas Elementary School. Although team members had many different teaching experiences, they shared a common vision: They wanted to change their schools and classrooms from bastions of bureaucracy, fear, and indifference into better places for children to learn and teachers to teach.

This case study describes how the Foundations School came into being. It details the long and often arduous process involved in making an educational dream a reality: the tenacity and hard work of nine Chicago teachers; how the team came together to pursue the possibility of creating their own school; the steps forward as well as the steps back, as these teachers grappled to put their special vision for public education into practice.

* * * *

Kindergarten teacher Cherkasky-Davis had struggled long and hard within Chicago's 26,000-teacher school system to reach the inner-city children in her classroom, the children who had already been left behind or given up on as "unteachable," "who no one thought or cared would ever achieve or find meaning in education," said Cherkasky-Davis. A master teacher and the recipient of numerous teaching and leadership awards, including the City of Chicago Superior Public Service Award for 1992, the 1991 Professional Best Teacher Leadership Award from ***Learning*** Magazine, and the 1991 Alexandre Dumas School "Teacher of the Year," Cherkasky-Davis had participated in countless teacher workshops, conferences, and in-service and staff development meetings over the years. Looking back on her long teaching career in the Chicago Public Schools from her current vantage point as teacher-facilitator at the Foundations School, Cherkasky-Davis recalls when she realized she needed to find a network of like-minded colleagues, teachers who could work together and support each other in the hard work of school reform. Although she had benign support from her school principal and was gaining more recognition from the Chicago public school system for her work in empowering her students as active learners, it was not enough. Cherkasky-Davis expressed her frustration and her need to reach out to other colleagues who shared her vision of a child-centered school.

> I was running my whole-language, developmentally appropriate kindergarten with only the nod of the principal, the sneer of colleagues and the questions of "my parents." I needed something more. I needed more support, a network

from which I could learn, colleagues who thought like I did and would share strategies.

After devoting many years to making a difference in the classroom by developing her craft -- shaping a curriculum structured around the developmental needs of children and the resources of the community, using whole-language strategies for teaching reading and writing, helping her fellow teachers to use reading and writing across all subject areas to develop and strengthen students' literacy skills -- Cherkasky-Davis wanted to do more to inform teachers and parents of the benefits of creating learning-centered classrooms.

Although she was recognized both locally and nationally for her teaching accomplishments, although she had written articles in professional journals and given numerous workshops to educate parents and teachers about her nontraditional classroom, Cherkasky-Davis was rapidly becoming unhappy with her current work in teaching. She was approaching that all-too-common stage of burnout and was looking for a way to revitalize herself and her teaching career.

Starting Out: Networks for Change

Recognizing the clear need for support from colleagues who shared her holistic approach to teaching and learning:

> to nurture natural, healthy growth based on children's interests -- not to present a limited, fragmented, prescribed, and predigested "curriculum" as the path to knowledge. . . . to emphasize the connectedness and interdependence of the world . . .[14]

Cherkasky-Davis joined a number of professional organizations, including the Network of Progressive Educators, the national organization of Teachers Applying Whole Language, and various early childhood groups. In 1988, Cherkasky-Davis decided to create a Chicago chapter of TAWL to provide a way for inner-city teachers to network and share whole-language strategies. She began by getting information from the TAWL national organization and then worked with the Chicago Board of Education to develop the local program. Although only five people attended the first meeting, over time the group grew. In addition to discussing whole-language teaching and learning, the Chicago group addressed other issues such as teacher empowerment and student assessment. Soon, a core group of 15 teachers decided to meet more often. Meeting both formally and informally, they took advantage of the opportunities to receive support, suggestions, and ideas from each other to improve their practice. As Cherkasky-Davis exclaimed, "I [had] found my soulmates."

To strengthen their existing network and provide each other with more built-in support, this core group moved to three of the same schools the following year, with five of

[14]Excerpted from *The Foundations School Proposal, July 1992.*

the teachers, including Cherkasky-Davis, going to Dumas, an inner-city school in the South Woodlawn section of Chicago. Cherkasky-Davis attributes the team's successful consolidation to "careful networking." Now, according to Cherkasky-Davis, "We were a united front. . . . Our power was growing." The next year, with the support of the principal at Dumas Elementary, all 15 teachers from the Chicago TAWL group were hired to teach at Dumas's newly created "school-within-a-school." At Dumas, they formed another network to provide support to all teachers interested in developing and implementing more innovative approaches to reaching and motivating children. Now, they could work together to put into practice their holistic vision of a learner-centered school -- a school that would encourage the physical, social, emotional, cultural, and cognitive development of children by providing a child-centered environment, rich in multisensory experiences and positive social interactions.

The group finally had a supportive principal who offered them the teaching and leadership opportunities they had been seeking. Cherkasky-Davis became co-chair of Project CANAL (Creating A New Approach to Learning), a federally funded project that provided monies to Chicago public schools with low-income children in racially isolated areas; she assumed new responsibilities for developing creative teaching programs to raise learning standards and student achievement levels in these schools.

But all of the problems did not go away. Although appreciative of the professional and leadership opportunities that Dumas offered, the teachers were becoming ever more frustrated with the lack of support from some of their colleagues, the noncollaborative environment, and the political back-biting that hindered their practice. Cherkasky-Davis described the problems the reformers were beginning to face from the more traditional teachers.

> The passive aggressive, and outwardly aggressive stance of one quarter of the faculty was starting to interfere with the work of the principal and our "school-within-a-school." . . . Our work, collegial support, and reputation became intimidating for the Old Line.

In addition, their supportive principal at Dumas, Sylvia Peters, had accepted another position as one of the directors of the Edison Project, a corporate program for underachieving students in Chicago public schools, and she was leaving the school. Despite this unsettling school environment, the team "dug in" and would not be moved. But events were clearly coming to a head. Resistance to change was growing among the old guard. With the loss of the principal who had hired the core group, and the lack of clear leadership at Dumas, the traditional teachers were bringing increasing pressure to bear on the reformers, refusing to acknowledge new teaching approaches, throwing out the math manipulatives that had been ordered, reverting to basal readers, phonics workbooks, and textbooks, and desks that were bolted to the floor. Aware of the adage that "it sometimes gets worse before it gets better," the group made a bold decision: They would take their own empowerment one step further and design and establish *their own school*, a school where they could create their own curriculum and pursue the holistic kind of teaching they believed in. Even though Cherkasky-Davis knew "there was no money in the system, that wouldn't stop us. . . . Now some great and dynamic teachers were going to start their own school. After all, we knew who the experts were!"

The Change Process

In the early winter of 1991, Cherkasky-Davis received official recognition and support for her innovative teaching practices from Impact II, a nationwide educational nonprofit teacher networking organization dedicated to fostering teacher empowerment by providing grant money for creative classroom projects, conducting workshops, and arranging teacher visits across schools. The support she received initially took the form of an Impact II Disseminator Grant, which enabled her to share and disseminate information with other interested teachers about a publishing project the students in her kindergarten called "Look Out Random House," which Cherkasky-Davis had successfully developed within her own classroom. In addition, Impact II had selected Cherkasky-Davis as one of 50 outstanding teachers from across the country to attend its 1992 Summer Institute on the Future of Education in Snowbird, Utah. Representing the culmination of a yearlong Impact II project, "Inventing the Future of Teaching," this national institute would provide her with further opportunities to collaborate with like-minded reformers and to share her knowledge of how to create a teacher-directed alternative to the traditional school. The institute would give Cherkasky-Davis national exposure and important time to network with other reformers to shape and solidify her vision for the new school.

Yet, although Cherkasky-Davis had Impact II recognition and the core group was still together, the situation was growing progressively worse at Dumas. During the long winter, the winds of discontent whipped across the school: The momentum for change was building and the path ahead suddenly became clear. As Cherkasky-Davis explained,

> We wanted our own school or an autonomous section of another building. We knew the voice of reform meant nothing if it was only a governance issue, if it didn't emanate from the classroom which, as we know, is the only place it really matters. The voice of the teacher would be heard!

It was March of 1992 and the Foundations School was conceived. Now, Cherkasky-Davis said, "we needed to be born."

Seeking support for their project, the core group and individual members met with the media, the city council, the Chicago Museum coalition, and other community groups. Although neither support nor additional monies for the project were forthcoming, the small band of reformers refused to give up. Meanwhile, the struggle was taking its toll; the group's ranks were diminishing and their original core of 15 now numbered 12. One teacher had taken another job; one could not take the pressure and the work; another left to concentrate on family problems.

Manna from Heaven

In the early spring of 1992, the Chicago Teachers Union received $1.1 million from the MacArthur Foundation to reward ten reform programs designed to break the mold of public education in Chicago. And the Quest Center, a branch of the Chicago Teachers Union, was formed. Devoted to recognizing and supporting innovative programs in city

schools, the new center was interested in receiving imaginative and workable proposals that would provide new models for creating school change. The team took another step forward; they attended a weekend seminar on how to write a grant proposal. They followed this up by writing their own proposal to Quest -- a curriculum design for the new school. To make the proposal more solid and workable, the teachers gave up their spring break, devoting a minimum of eight hours a day to revising their initial work.

In May 1992, the teachers submitted their proposal to Quest. It was ranked first out of 60. The Quest Center agreed to fund and support the school-within-a-school project if the new, teacher-designed school could be housed at Dumas. But in order to keep the school at Dumas, the teachers needed written approval from both the acting principal and the Local School Council. The assistant principal -- now acting principal in the absence of Sylvia Peters -- refused to even read their proposal. A teacher who believed in quiet classrooms and a textbook-directed approach to learning, she did not approve of the "radical" teaching methods of Cherkasky-Davis and her colleagues.

Discouraged yet determined, the teaching team decided to go directly to the Local School Council for the approval they needed, but they were unable to reserve space on the council agenda. They sought assistance from the Chicago Public School Office of Reform Implementation and from the media, but to no avail.

Breaking the Mold

With time running out and summer closing in, the teachers decided to send their proposal back to Quest, requesting the grant again and official recognition as a "Quest School," with no conditions or strings attached. The center responded with support, extending their deadline for the group to get Local School Council approval. This time, the Quest Center attempted to get on the Local School Council agenda to promote the school project, but was also denied time.

The center, which had rated the Foundations School proposal number one, was clearly sympathetic to the teachers' plight. Unable to get approval for the new school from the Local School Council, the center agreed to provide the Foundations team with the grant money, official recognition, and educational resources to start up their project.

Now they had Quest Center support and the MacArthur Foundation behind them. But the struggle to launch the new school was not over; the reformers needed board of education approval to find a site and to be declared a school. In the late spring of 1992, after the teachers had spent weeks lobbying the Chicago Board of Education for support, agreeing to become part of another school building and to find a local principal to satisfy state requirements that did not provide for teacher-led schools, the board finally approved the teachers' plan. But Cherkasky-Davis and her group were still left with the difficult and discouraging task of finding a place to house their school.

Finding a Home

It was the beginning of July and still no space had been found for the new school. The teachers knew they could not count on board of education financing to renovate a school that had been closed or to rent space in one of the city's parochial schools. The team needed to find a rent-free space within an existing school building -- and to find it soon. In the eleventh hour, they found an advertisement in a district bulletin for space in the district office. The board of education approved the location and it seemed that their luck had taken a turn for the better. At the same time, in accordance with state law, the teachers found a principal for their school. Everything seemed to be falling into place. Then the district superintendent said he could not allow the teachers to use the district office space because it would look as if he were opening a new school during a period when many underutilized schools had been forced to close. The team needed to find a site within a functioning school building. The Board had only one remaining meeting scheduled for the summer. If the teachers did not find a place to hold their school by then, they were simply out of luck.

Concluding that their only hope was to return to Dumas and negotiate with the principal, Cherkasky-Davis decided to speak with her again at the end of a district principals' meeting. Cherkasky-Davis told the principal that if their school were a success, she would receive great recognition; and, if the school failed, then she would have the satisfaction of saying "See, I told you so!" But the new acting principal was not interested. She had made up her mind that no teacher-directed school would exist within Dumas and she was not about to change her decision.

Sitting nearby during this conversation was Carl Lawson. After witnessing Cherkasky-Davis's rejection, he walked over to her and introduced himself. Explaining that he was the principal of the Florence B. Price Elementary School, he said that he would be very much interested in housing the Foundations School. As a matter of fact, he told her that he happened to have five rooms available on the third floor. Elated by Lawson's offer, Cherkasky-Davis quickly expressed her interest and appreciation and proceeded to negotiate the number of classrooms. She said that she needed eight, nine, or ten rooms. The principal said he could give her six. Cherkasky-Davis said that she could be happy with eight. Lawson gave her seven.

It was already the second week of July. The last board meeting was to be held the next day. Cherkasky-Davis immediately faxed the Local School Council members her latest proposal for housing the Foundations School. In less than 24 hours the plan was approved by the council and ready to be submitted to the board. Finally, it looked as though there was a light at the end of the tunnel! But that feeling would be short-lived. The superintendent informed Cherkasky-Davis of another regulation governing board of education meetings: the Open Meeting Act of the School Reform Code, enacted in 1988, which stated that notice of all board meetings must be posted in the community at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting to allow all community members to attend. Once again, the reformers' hopes were dashed. They knew that there was no way to provide the community with 24-hour notice of their meeting, and that the next board meeting would not be until the end of August -- too late for Cherkasky-Davis and her team to open their school in September.

While the board of education went into closed executive session, Cherkasky-Davis and her colleagues sat in the lobby outside the meeting room and cried. As they realized that all their hard work and effort had come to a disappointing end, the group shared their despair and their plans for the future: Some thought they would leave the city to teach in the suburbs; a few said they might leave teaching altogether; others considered returning to Dumas. As the teachers were about to leave, one of the board members came out of the conference room and announced that there would be a continuance -- the board would adjourn for 48 hours, to obtain necessary legal information about another issue under consideration.

With no time to waste, the Foundations team went out into the community, putting up signs and posters informing the public of the upcoming board meeting. Through a simple twist of fate, they were now in compliance with the Open Meeting Act of the School Reform Code and back on the agenda. On July 10, 1992, the board approved the team's plan to house the Foundations School at Florence B. Price Elementary; at last, they were officially a school.

The teachers devoted the rest of the summer to advertising the Foundations School in local newspapers, making and putting up posters, and distributing brochures to community organizations, libraries, churches, hospitals, schools, and stores. They also recruited children through advertising on an educational access channel and through an electronic network, which allowed them to contact other public schools for students. In addition to publicizing their project and recruiting students, the team used the summer to design their curriculum. Their days were long and full, but they were revitalized by the new challenge. The teachers continued their recruitment efforts until they had enough students to utilize every teacher in the group. By the middle of July, three more members of the team had dropped out because of personal and family problems. The initial group was down to nine. By nothing short of a miracle, Cherkasky-Davis believed, the Foundations School was ready to open for the 1992-1993 school year. Although the team had expected the road to be rocky, in their efforts to establish a new kind of Chicago public school, they had become pathfinders. Now, the first teacher-designed, teacher-directed, and teacher-led school in Illinois was setting a precedent and establishing a model for others to follow.

The Foundations School Model

The Foundations School has many unique components that distinguish it from other public school programs. The teaching team explain their program as a "holistic, progressive model" and "collaborative initiative, which creates a new public school utilizing museums, universities, and other community resources of Chicago as an innovative response to educational reform."[15] Specifically, the nine teachers see their school as different from most Chicago public schools because it seeks to promote the physical, social, emotional, cultural, and cognitive development of children by providing an ungraded, child-centered

[15]Excerpted from *The Foundations School Proposal, July 1992.*

environment rich in multisensory experiences. "These experiences" according to Cherkasky-Davis, "are designed to build self-esteem, develop and promote a love of literature and learning, encourage positive social interactions, sustain creative and critical thinking, and motivate children to grasp academic excellence."

The team explains their experiential and holistic view of teaching and learning like this: "As teachers, our goal is to nurture natural, healthy growth based on children's interests -- not to present a limited, fragmented, prescribed and predigested 'curriculum' as the path to knowledge and true wisdom." In keeping with the school's experiential approach to learning, "every child will be a curricular informant and make a contribution to the classroom from personal experience. . . . students will construct their own knowledge through immersion in hands-on, primary source experiences."[16]

Perhaps most important, these teachers believe that for genuine learning and teaching to happen in the classroom, teachers themselves must assume new roles and responsibilities as educational risk-takers and stakeholders in designing and establishing their own schools. In accordance with their holistic view of the integration of all learning, the teachers see their school as a collaborative venture linking teachers, students, parents, families, and the community in networks and partnerships that work together to discover and construct their own learning.

In the Classroom: Transforming Ideas Into Action

Cherkasky-Davis's leadership begins and continues in her own classroom. One of her greatest successes has been the creation of the publishing and bookbinding company that her students have named "Look Out Random House." This publishing project, which Cherkasky-Davis originally started at Dumas in 1991 with a grant from Impact II, has been brought to the Foundations School and, with further Impact II support, has moved beyond Cherkasky-Davis's kindergarten to become a schoolwide project. Envisioning "Look Out Random House" as a collaborative process for developing students' reading, writing, editing, design, and business skills, Cherkasky-Davis describes the project activities that go on daily in her class:

> As a culminating experience to many of our whole-language projects we publish and bind many of our works. We are also now in the business of designing and binding the works of other school-age authors and using the monies earned to replace some of our consumable materials. Our writing table activities have blossomed into thoroughly researched, process-oriented, artistically promoted, completely published pieces of literature. This has been a natural extension of the whole language activities that go on . . . daily in our classroom.

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[16]Excerpted from *The Foundations School Proposal, July 1992.*

A major goal of this "hands-on" process, says Cherkasky-Davis, has been "to entice children to write, illustrate, and publish books that may be housed in the class or school libraries and circulated to the entire school community," and also to develop their "company" into a real business where children "design, create, and bind the covers of students' books from other classes for a fee, [and] design their own advertising campaign to solicit business." To further their knowledge of the publishing industry, they have also taken trips to a local publishing company to see their work in action, and representatives from other companies have come to the school to see the children's work and show them what their companies do.

The project has provided the children with hands-on experience in manipulating many different kinds of materials as they have become familiar with laminating, spiral binding, long-reach industrial stapling, sewing, and tooling techniques. Cherkasky-Davis has also trained family volunteers to assist the children in typing their stories and binding their books.

In addition to participating in the "Look Out Random House" Company, the students at Foundations engage in many other hands-on learning activities. For example, Cherkasky-Davis's classroom is arranged to provide many opportunities for children to explore, experiment, discover, and create their own learning. The room is filled with thematic learning centers where, according to former Dumas principal Sylvia Peters, "the students research any learning issues they empower themselves to collaboratively construct and solve." In Cherkasky-Davis's class, these centers include a family living area, a space for cooking, a woodworking and carpentry area, a block area for building and construction, a fine arts area for painting and musical instruments, a math and science center where children can experiment with puzzles, rods, cubes, and other manipulative materials, and a book center. In keeping with the school's belief in the importance of reading and writing across the curriculum, each learning center is also equipped with writing and reading materials, such as books, charts, and maps, which are always available for the children to use.

This kindergarten classroom clearly belongs to the students. Former principal Peters describes how the students shape their own learning:

> Their struggles with words and letters, their ideas, their sense-making, their risk-taking, their resourcefulness -- THEY are the center of this room. Even during teacher-directed lessons, it is clear the students are the curricular informants. The students know they are powerful. These students who come from literacy-poor home and community environments are exposed to and create reading and writing experiences every day. These experiences are based upon the children's own knowledge, culture, and environment.

In what other ways does the Foundations School work for children? In addition to the thematic learning centers within each classroom, at Foundations a variety of schoolwide themes are explored and developed in mixed-age groupings, enabling students to engage in a variety of multimedia research projects to study such themes as deserts, rivers, rain forests, families, and peoples of the world.

At the Foundations School, instead of classrooms being cluttered with curriculum guides, basal readers, and often inappropriate textbooks, classrooms are colored with

thematic learning and discovery centers, student writing and research projects, geography and science books, a wide range of world literature, and books examining multicultural themes. The teachers at Foundations foster an environment that encourages students to take risks, because they believe that it is better to try and not fully succeed than not to try at all.

Parents and Teachers Work Together

In addition to creating a child-centered curriculum, the teachers at Foundations think that parental involvement is critical to the education of their students. In keeping with their belief that parents and teachers share a mutual responsibility to work toward providing the best possible education for children, the school has created a formal agreement detailing the responsibilities of both as partners in the educational process. Parents *and* teachers must sign this agreement when a student enters the school. According to its terms, parents, or other family members responsible for the child, are expected to be full participants in the child's education by volunteering three hours per week to the school program, attending three out of four parent conferences during the school year, and supervising their children's homework and study time. Each teacher is expected to respect parents' interests and concerns, to respect children's individuality, to create an educationally challenging curriculum, and to have ongoing conferences with parents and students about student progress.

This formal Parent-Teacher Agreement clearly identifies the expectations held by the teachers of the Foundations School and the responsibilities that parents, or other family members, must assume. The parents must be committed to the education of their children. One parent, who was assisting in one of the classrooms, remarked on how much she appreciated the opportunity to become more actively involved in her children's schooling. She said she was particularly pleased with the "small size of the classes" and the school's "new approach to learning." As a parent, she also appreciated how the school celebrated diversity. She felt fortunate that her children could attend the Foundations School.

Teachers' Roles and Responsibilities

At the Foundations School, in addition to classroom teaching, each of the teachers is responsible for a different component of the school program. For example, one teacher is responsible for student assessment and portfolios; another takes care of Parent-Teacher contracts; someone else is responsible for the parent newsletter; yet another schedules outside presentations, school tours, and seminar sessions for educators interested in learning about the school; and another teacher arranges the weekly "Teacher Talk" support groups to discuss teachers' concerns and problems. Cherkasky-Davis is largely responsible for acting as liaison between the Foundations School and their host school, Price Elementary, as well as for writing grants, facilitating seminars at the school, and creating a professional library for herself and her colleagues. Price Elementary School principal Carl Lawson sees his role as facilitator, enabler, and counselor. He also manages the building, coordinates staff schedules, develops budgets, and assumes responsibility for legal matters. He believes his job is to give support to the experts -- the teachers. Lawson explained that he is primarily responsible for setting the climate at the school, alleviating any undue stress, and helping

teachers to feel good about themselves. Lawson has taught both elementary school and university students, and considers himself first and foremost a teacher. The Foundations School teachers feel that Lawson is certainly a person who can make things happen. He has allowed them to house their school within the Price Elementary School and has given them the freedom and autonomy to run their school as they see fit. Lawson supports the team's innovative methods of teaching and hopes that Price School teachers will observe and learn from them. He believes teachers need to be trained to look below the surface each child presents, to find and work with the qualities that make each child special.

Obstacles and Opportunities

Although the Foundations School program has had a positive beginning, there have been many obstacles along the way that had to be overcome: The teachers had to learn how to work effectively as a group, how to set up a budget, and how to prepare a school system for their teacher-led efforts -- the largest obstacle of all.

The teachers at the Foundations School have been working with a university collaborator, Bill Ayers, since the school began. Ayers, a professor at the University of Illinois, has been intensely involved with Chicago school reform. He had worked with several of the teachers while they were at Dumas and is now a formal partner in developing and refining the Foundations School program. His role entails documenting the program and evaluating individual teachers. Ayers states that he works with the teachers on a peer-counseling model, offering constructive criticism of classroom practices and visiting regularly to evaluate the team's progress. He also conducts Professional Development Seminars, but most importantly, he is a very valuable resource person who is just a phone call away.

Ayers believes that the Foundations School "encapsulates a lot about school reform in Chicago." He thinks that the teachers themselves are to be commended for their hard work in designing and developing the school and then working together to make it function successfully. "To find a group of professionals who act as if they should control their professional lives is rare," he says. Ayers praises Cherkasky-Davis as an "irreverent and eccentric teacher in the system . . . [who] has been marginalized as well as held on a pedestal." He considers her an outstanding leader because she is willing to take risks and is not concerned about those who might not approve of her style. He believes that her greatest survival tools are her sense of humor and her ability to defuse difficult situations. Cherkasky-Davis, he says, has the uncanny ability to lighten the spirits of the team when they become discouraged.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward

The Foundations School has been in operation since September 1992. During the course of the 1992-1993 school year, the teachers experienced many challenges: They were trying to start a new school, fight the system, and be the very best teachers they could be.

In the process of breaking new ground, they had great expectations for their new model for educational change. Many times during the year as they worked to push the program along, it was, "one step forward and two steps backward." Ayers outlined the teachers' uneven path to progress like this:

- great expectations
- a serious crisis in confidence
- regrouping [their] strength and energy
- arriving at a new level of maturity

For Ayers, these steps have been "painful to participate in and watch."

Ayers followed up his outline and statements with these explanations: He said that the teachers began the year excited about starting their own school. "In their minds, they thought, 'We'll run a great child-centered school this way -- let's go!'" But, Ayers believed, there was very little consideration of the fact that "running your own school means having to make difficult decisions regarding teacher and student recruitment, curriculum, and teacher leadership." He raised the following questions:

- What if one of your own teachers isn't good?
- What if you can't recruit kids?
- What if parents don't think you're worth anything?
- What if you don't think you're any good?
- How do you work with the Local School Council?
- How do you remediate failing teachers?

"The charge to run a school often leaves out the difficulty of *actually running a school*," Ayers observed.

Tough Questions and Hard Decisions

The teachers had to make painful decisions. First of all, they had to acknowledge that Cherkasky-Davis was the lead teacher. The team initially believed that every decision could be made by consensus, but they quickly found out that very little is accomplished if every decision depends on the unanimous agreement of the group. The team found themselves forced to address such questions as: What is leadership in this restructured effort? What is Cherkasky-Davis's responsibility as leader? What skills and talents are required? According to Ayers, these questions and concerns accounted for many of the initial tensions and problems that confronted the teachers.

In October and November, the teachers experienced their first real crisis. The attitude of some of the teachers was "If I don't get my nonnegotiable demands met, I'm walking!" Cherkasky-Davis was responsible for working out the problems among the staff, which were becoming increasingly burdensome and troubling. What was most difficult was that there was no real formality to her role as team leader. She was a peer but not a peer, a teacher but also coordinator of the school program. This problem remains unresolved.

Another conflict the teachers experienced was working within a traditional school with traditional teachers. They struggled to have a professional relationship with the Price faculty, because they felt that Price teachers often perceived them to be "know-it-alls." The Foundations School teachers felt that they were also looked on as "rebels." This challenge -- to develop a more pleasing work environment for all teachers -- required daily effort on both sides, especially on the part of the Foundations School staff.

Finally, Ayers stated that he believed the Foundations teachers will continue to face obstacles, as this is to be expected with any pioneering effort. He thinks, however, that the teachers must concentrate on being the best teachers that they can be -- proving over time the power of their commitment to providing a quality education for all children. Right now, according to Ayers, "celebrity outweighs accomplishment." He believes it is important for the team not to reinforce the notion, held by some, that they are know-it-alls. To this end, he suggests that the teachers limit school visitors to one designated day per week. Excellent teaching must always be the foremost activity on the agenda.

Signs of Change

The teachers of the Foundations School are moving in the right direction. They have passed several key landmarks. Although they still have many battles to win and problems to solve, there are strong signs that genuine and lasting change can be achieved. These signs are evident in the school's successes and achievements in these important areas:

- *Peer Coaching*: The teachers have had numerous opportunities to observe and evaluate each other's teaching.

- *Portfolios*: Each student at the Foundations School is graded pass/fail based on performance as demonstrated or qualified by the materials found in his/her portfolio.

- *Telephones in Each Classroom*: The teachers are now able to communicate directly and frequently with parents via their own classroom telephones.

- *Library Cards*: One hundred percent of the students at the Foundations School have and use Chicago Public Library cards.

- *Inclusion of Special Education Children*: Children with special needs are now mainstreamed within the regular classrooms.

- *Parental Involvement and Support*: The parents take an active role in the education of their children. They are also extremely supportive of the teachers and the school (in its first year, the school lost only eight students out of 140).

- *Community Support and Involvement*: The school has received widespread support from the local teachers' union, the central office, local businesses and

agencies, and the Chicago Board of Education. (For example, when the teachers were faced with a major budget crunch as they approached the 1993-1994 school year, and the new school was told that it would have to close its doors unless it grew by at least two students per classroom, Cherkasky-Davis and her colleagues were able to rally sufficient support from parents, local agencies, the union, and the media to increase enrollment and keep the school open.)

- *Positive Publicity*: The Foundations School is now recognized by the Chicago public school system and local colleges and universities as the demonstration site for training new teachers and revitalizing the practice of veteran teachers. For example, the school has served as a training site for education students from the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois, and National-Louis University. Researchers, university educators, and preservice and in-service teachers spend time in classes seeing school programs in action. Cherkasky-Davis also holds ongoing workshops for teachers, graduate students, and other educators on such issues as assessment, outcome standards, conflict resolution, mixed-age groupings, and parent involvement.

- *The Foundations School Sets Precedent*: The Foundations School has clearly broken the mold for Chicago public school education. It is now officially recognized by the district office, which is providing active assistance in funding and rehabilitating the school's new space. The Foundations School finally has its own budget, independent from that of its host school. As the school has demonstrated that educational change is possible, the road has been paved for similar ventures.

The teachers think that some of the school's greatest successes have been in scheduling and programming. For example, in a program that the team calls "banking time," the children come to school 15 minutes early each day and then have a half-day of school every three weeks to make time for a half day of faculty planning. In addition, the school's theme-based approach to curriculum is centered around an innovative programming plan whereby each teacher divides her class into seven groups, with each group studying a specific aspect of the central theme several afternoons a week with a teacher who is responsible for teaching only that segment of the theme. For example, the schoolwide theme "Families" is broken down into subthemes such as "Family Traditions," "Families throughout the World," and "Oral Family Histories," each of which is studied in greater depth in mixed-age classes several afternoons a week with a teacher responsible for that particular subtopic. Thus, the groups from the morning classrooms go to different, mixed-age classrooms several afternoons a week, for a one-week period, to study one particular aspect of the family theme in more depth. The groups then rotate, going to another class and another teacher to study another part of the theme for several afternoons the next week, and so on, for a seven-week period, until all the classes in the school have had the opportunity to explore seven different subtopics of the general theme. Within the seven-week period, each small group has the chance to examine another aspect of the theme with a different teacher, who also increases his or her own knowledge and proficiency in a particular subject by being able to focus on

one specific slice of content for seven weeks. Groups stay with one teacher for approximately three afternoons a week and each afternoon class works collaboratively to complete a specific project relating to the content area they are studying. Group projects involve research on the topic under study, including the use of hands-on primary source materials, allowing students the opportunity to develop and present their knowledge through developing their own creative work or presentations -- such as illustrated journals, books, plays, videos, and models -- that support active and experiential learning. The mixed-age groupings -- each afternoon class includes kindergartners through 12-year-olds -- provide a way for structuring the classroom as community, where children of all ages work together in a family-like setting.

Finally, Cherkasky-Davis has been particularly pleased with the success of the school's weekly "Teacher Talk" sessions. These meetings have provided the Foundations School faculty with a valuable opportunity to come together every Wednesday after school to discuss and plan curriculum, lend support to each other, vent frustrations, and build new friendships. Cherkasky-Davis often refers to these sessions as "therapy." During a typical group meeting a designated teacher might discuss her own teaching practices and assessment methods. The group might then focus on new educational research, curricular issues, and reviewing the needs of specific students. Cherkasky-Davis and the other team members believe that these teacher support sessions have helped to unite the team and to improve their teaching skills.

The Future of Education: Teacher Voices and Visions

Ultimately, the teachers think that their own commitment, dedication, and perseverance in refining the program are among the most critical elements in creating and sustaining a successful school. They have a clear vision of the kind of school they want to have, of what education should be, and of how they want to transform teaching and learning.

Brenda Dukes, a middle-grades teacher and initial team member, expresses her vision:

> I would like to see a collaboration among teachers, parents, and students so that there is more of a connection made between what the students do in school and what their lives are like outside of school. Sometimes it is very easy for school life to become so arbitrary and irrelevant for the students. They can really begin to feel isolated from the outside world as they know it. I feel that we need to make school life more relevant to their outside world -- we need to bring the two together.

Dukes firmly believes that for education to work for children "teaching and learning [have] to be more interactive. Personally," she says, "I would like to remove myself from the center of the curriculum and put the students in the center."

Former special education teacher and Foundations faculty member Doris Clark thinks that the group's biggest hurdle in becoming a teacher-led school was "to get autonomy within

the system" so that the team could have control over scheduling and budgets, as well as over curriculum.

The road to establishing the Foundations School has not been smooth. The group has faced many obstacles and challenges since starting out. Nevertheless, the school has proven that a teacher-led and teacher-designed reform initiative *can* work and become a viable model for other such ventures. Cherkasky-Davis and her team remain optimistic about and committed to their vision of education -- to prepare and empower students and teachers as active learners and risk-takers who can make the important choices necessary to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century and to change their own lives. For Cherkasky-Davis, that means "starting to build tomorrow's schools -- today!"