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ABSTRACT

Effective schools research, as elaborated by R. R. Edmonds and others, gives a picture of what successful urban schools look like and helps identify the characteristics that led to success. This paper offers the proposition that looking at a school as a caring community provides a way to show effective schools by providing a framework to make sense of their characteristics. The ethnographic case study of one urban, low-income, predominantly Latino, elementary school serves to illustrate what a caring community looks like in actuality, in terms of structural (formal) components and cultural (informal) attitudes. The school is also interesting in that overcrowding has resulted in the operation of three tracks on a year-round schedule. Findings from this study illustrate at least three ways in which community and effectiveness are related. In the first place, as a shift toward the valuing of persons occurs, student achievement and test scores come to be seen in the context of personal growth and development, resulting in more of a push toward achievement. Then there is a shift toward linking individual well-being with the well-being of the whole school. In the third place, the affective dimension of the school is valued and regarded as legitimate. To grasp what makes effective schools work, it is necessary to move beyond merely identifying their characteristics. (Contains 57 references.) (Author/SLD)

Beyond "Effective Schools Research":

Cultivating a Caring Community in an Urban School

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association

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ABSTRACT

Effective schools research, as elaborated by Edmonds and others, gives us a picture of what successful urban elementary schools look like and helps us see some of the characteristics or pieces which make up those schools. However, what we do not see are the relationships between these characteristics, nor do we know if the pieces identified are all the major variables. In this paper, I offer the proposition that looking at a school as a caring community provides one way to view these effective schools by providing an overarching framework or lens through which to examine and make sense of their characteristics. The ethnographic case study of one urban, low-income, predominantly Latino, elementary school serves to illustrate what caring community looks like in actuality, both in terms of structural (formal) components and cultural (informal) attributes. The findings from this case study illuminate at least three ways in which community and effectiveness are related: First, as a shift toward the valuing of persons takes place, student achievement and test scores are seen in the context of personal growth and development, resulting in more, not less, of a push toward achievement. Second, there is a shift toward linking individual well-being with the well-being of the whole. Third, in the context of a caring community, the affective dimension of the school is valued and seen as legitimate. I conclude with some thoughts on why we must move beyond merely identifying the characteristics of effective schools, if we are to genuinely grasp what makes these schools work and how to transform other schools.

Research abounds which details the woes of urban schools (see, e.g., Comer, 1980; Haycock & Navarro, 1988; Kozol, 1991; Kozol, 1995; Poplin & Weeres, 1992). Student violence and dropout rates are high, teacher morale is low and turnover is high, alienation between and among various groups is commonplace, shrinking resources and worn-out facilities have become the norm. Urban schools which serve predominantly low-income students of color frequently rank at or near the bottom of their districts and states in various measures of student performance (Haycock & Navarro, 1988; Valencia, 1991). Furthermore, students of color who attend urban schools are much more likely to drop out, join gangs or become teenage parents, and much less likely to graduate from high school or go on to college than are their middle-class, suburban peers.

However, there are urban schools which successfully educate low-income students of color. Documented by "effective schools research," these schools are proof that not all urban schools faced with typical inner-city problems are doomed to failure (Edmonds, 1979; Rosenholtz, 1985). Characteristics of these schools include strong and supportive instructional leadership, high teacher expectations, clear goals, a safe and orderly environment conducive to student learning, careful evaluation of pupil progress, a schoolwide academic emphasis, and salient parent involvement.

Effective schools research, as elaborated by Edmonds and others, gives us a picture of what successful urban elementary schools look like and helps us see some of the characteristics or pieces which make up those schools. However, what we do not see are the relationships between these characteristics, nor do we know if the pieces identified are all the major variables. In this paper, I argue that looking at a school as a caring community affords one way to view these effective schools by providing an overarching framework or lens through which to examine and make sense of their characteristics. The

case study of one urban elementary school serves to illustrate what caring community looks like in actuality, both in terms of structural (formal) components and cultural (informal) attributes. I also offer some thoughts on why we must move beyond merely identifying the characteristics of effective schools, if we are to truly grasp what makes these schools work and how to transform other schools.

Examining Effective Schools

Effective schools research has played a major role in establishing links between school climate or ethos and student achievement. The work of the late Ronald Edmonds (1986; 1979) in urban elementary schools, and the work of Michael Rutter and his colleagues (1979) in British secondary schools provides substantial evidence that, in contrast to the findings of the Coleman report (Coleman et al., 1966), schools do make a difference--that there are recognizable and measurable differences between effective and ineffective schools, particularly in the overall climate or ethos of the school (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer & Wisenbaker, 1979; Lightfoot, 1983). However, effective schools research has not been able to ascertain how such schools develop, and in fact provides us with a caution that efforts to change ineffective schools into effective schools are doomed to failure without an understanding of change processes and the commitment of key participants to change (Boyd, 1991; Tornatzky, Brookover, Hathaway, Miller & Passalacqua, 1980).

As a result, while we know that these schools tend to have certain common characteristics, we still understand little about how a school becomes effective, or if the same process applies in every case. Furthermore, because much of the research is correlational and based on a narrow definition of learning centered around standardized test scores, rather than a variety of learning assessments (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1993;

Van Galen, 1993), we do not know if these schools are effective because they possess the above characteristics or if those characteristics are the natural result of becoming effective. We do not know if these are the only characteristics common to effective schools, nor can we be sure that the precise elements have been identified, since these characteristics may be mediated by other, hidden variables. Perhaps even more importantly, we do not understand the interactions and relationships of the elements which characterize effective schools. Boyd (1991) cautions that the findings from effective schools research have repeatedly been found to be simplistic and the research on which the findings are based suspect. Research has not shown that schools can simply decide to become effective or to adopt certain practices and develop effectiveness.

What we do know about the change process in those schools which have undergone significant improvement is that change is often arduously slow and must be precipitated by particular catalysts (Fullan, 1991; Sarason, 1990). Yet additional research has shown that merely making structural changes in a school does not necessarily produce the kind of improvement for which we might hope (Weiss, Cambone & Wyeth, 1992). In fact, in successful urban schools, there exists a particular culture or ethos or climate which pervades the school, and which stakeholders in the school recognize as central to the school's success. Some have labeled this phenomenon "community" or a "sense of community" (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Sarason, 1974; Sergiovanni, 1994; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko & Fernandez, 1989).

Community and Effectiveness

Research from a variety of disciplinary perspectives presents the argument that the best schools are places where a strong sense of community or "family" exists. This research includes perspectives from sociology (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Oldenquist, 1991),

psychology (Hobbs et al., 1984; Maehr & Fyans, 1989), philosophy (Bernstein, 1987; Bryk, 1988; Noddings, 1992), and educational practice (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1994; Willis, 1995). In addition, theoretical writings argue for the necessity of building community within societal institutions, including schools, to counter growing alienation and isolation (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985; Kirkpatrick, 1986; Rousseau, 1991; Selznick, 1992). A brief description of what community entails from these social science and philosophical perspectives follows.

A variety of sociologists argue that community includes a mutual binding to a common goal and shared set of values (Tönnies, 1887/1957), the building and fulfillment of social identity, cooperative endeavors for the common good (Oldenquist, 1991), ritual and ceremony, in which narratives describing the community's history are told and retold (Bellah et al., 1985), and a particular attitude and commitment on the part of the members, who view themselves as part of the community and thus feel an obligation to carry out certain responsibilities for the good of the whole (Ladd, 1959). According to these writings, in a school we would expect to see clearly articulated goals and values about schooling which various stakeholders agree upon, cooperative projects between adults and students, a sense of pride in the school and a feeling of belonging to it, the telling and retelling of important stories about the school's history, and the celebration of significant events.

Writings from psychology identify a community as a group which shares a "sense of community" (Chavis & Newbrough, 1986), including a feeling of individual and collective membership or belonging, having mutual influence over one another and the group, sharing an emotional connection with other group members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), caring for one another, sharing values, and having individuals' needs met (Hobbs

et al., 1984). Caring school communities would thus promote a sense of belonging among both adults and children, school staff and community members, by making sure that members felt safe on the campus, seeking to address individual needs (both academic and emotional/personal), even at times, bending rules and policies to benefit individuals, and actively caring and taking responsibility for all members, including parents.

Writings from philosophy distinguish different kinds of community, arguing that communities formed primarily around self-interest are not true communities, while organic models of community, which emphasize the good of the whole, can easily subsume the individual within the group (Kirkpatrick, 1986). Authentic community is intentional, inclusive, heterogeneous, self-critical, mutually-binding, without evil intent, grounded in altruistic love, trust, and mutual respect (Bernstein, 1987; Kirkpatrick, 1986; Palmer, 1977; Rousseau, 1991) , where "individual persons mutually relate in and through intentional love for each other for the sake of the other" (Kirkpatrick, 1986, p. 207). Just as parents desire the very best for their own children, in an authentic community members desire the very best for all other members. The distinction between "my children" and "those children," for example, is broken down.

Under this model, the school would not be good enough unless it were good enough for the teachers' and administrators' own children. Diversity, whether ethnic, religious, linguistic, or of opinion, would be celebrated and used to enhance the entire school community. The inherent worth of each person along with the need to work together for the common good would both be upheld. Empowerment, along with a sense of ownership and responsibility for the school, would exist among all stakeholders, including students. Leadership and participatory opportunities would be

widely available.

Educational research has tended to characterize schools with a strong sense of community by their shared values about the purpose of the school, participation in shared activities, and relationships characterized by caring and collegiality. This is often fleshed out through a schoolwide mission or vision, collaborative teaching, and the presence of rituals, ceremonies and traditions (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Sergiovanni, 1994).

Research in schools, guided by these various theoretical orientations, has linked the presence of community or a sense of community with several benefits to stakeholders in the larger school community. This sense of community apparently provides benefits not only in terms of student achievement and motivation (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Wehlage et al., 1989), but also in the reduction of student feelings of alienation (Bryk et al., 1993; Wehlage et al., 1989). It benefits not only students, but also teacher morale and collegiality, teacher-administrator relationships, and even school-parent-community relationships (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Comer & Haynes, 1991). How do these benefits occur?

While we are only beginning to understand how a sense of community provides such benefits, we know that classroom environment or climate can positively or negatively affect student motivation, which in turn is linked to achievement (Ames, 1987). Furthermore, a causal link has been established, at least at the high school level, between the psychological environment of the school and student motivation and achievement. As Maehr and Fyans (1989) report in a study of tenth graders, utilizing multivariate and path analysis, "School culture and peer achievement press are indeed the critical variables in determining motivation and school achievement at this stage of

life" (p. 233).

What then are the critical elements of classroom culture and school culture which seem to contribute positively to student motivation and achievement? Not surprisingly, they include many of the elements cited above in connection with descriptions of community and sense of community. Praise and encouragement, mutual respect, a feeling of belonging, clear goals, high expectations for self and each other, emphasis on caring, positive interpersonal relationships, minimizing of competition and comparison, a sense of safety (both physical and emotional), tolerance for mistakes, giving people choices, ownership and responsibility, and valuing the worth of individual persons are some of the characteristics of school and classroom culture which have been associated with positive student motivation and achievement (Ames, 1987; Maehr & Fyans, 1989; Maehr & Midgley, 1991).

The danger again, however, is in creating a list of characteristics that equal community, just as we have a list of characteristics of effective schools. For it may not be the characteristics themselves, but the relationships between them, which are actually important (Wheatley, 1992). Yet statistical analyses of test scores and surveys must invariably end up as just such a list. To adequately examine a complex construct like community in its context requires a somewhat different methodology (Yin, 1989). To see how a school, particularly a pluralistic, diverse urban public school, perceives, embodies and defines community is the focus of this particular study.

The Study

This study explores the nature of "community" in the context of one urban public elementary school. By reporting on an ethnographic case study of a school characterized

by a positive climate and sense of community, effective site-based management, teacher collaboration and collegiality, significant parent involvement and enthusiasm, and student-centered curricular and instructional approaches, I provide a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 3) of how community is cultivated in one school site. Those factors which promote the development of community in schools and classrooms, and the relationship between manifestations of community (such as a positive ethos, shared values, and caring relationships) and student motivation and achievement are examined in the context of this school. Finally, I elaborate themes which seem to underly the structures and culture of the school in terms of cultivating community.

To be able to grasp the complexities of relationships between and among various members of the school community and to gain a variety of perspectives on the school's ethos, mission, and goals, I conducted a single-site case study (Yin, 1989) over a period of one year. Case study methodology enabled me to examine what it means to insiders and onlookers for a school to exhibit community, the process of becoming a community, and the larger context in which this process took place, including the historical background of the school. That is, has the school always been this way, or did it recently go through a major transformation, and, if so, what particular factors seem related to this transformation?

The selected school was chosen on the basis of recommendations from personnel working with urban schools undergoing reform. Initial achievement criteria were used partly as the basis for selecting the school, because I was interested in the relationship between effectiveness and community. While standardized test scores at the school were not stellar, they were higher than other local public schools serving similar populations. Furthermore, the school had gained a reputation for instructional and curricular innovation

and for success in implementing site-based management principles, and it had been cited by an independent evaluator as one of three schools undergoing restructuring in Los Angeles which were doing particularly well.

Almost 250 hours of participant observation of classrooms, schoolwide activities, faculty meetings, governance council meetings, and parent meetings, along with semi-structured (audiotaped) interviews with students, parents, teachers and administrators regarding their perceptions of the school climate, culture, ethos and other aspects related to community, were the primary means of data collection. In addition, school and classroom documents were collected to provide historical and social context. These data coupled with field notes were analyzed using the constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The Site

Jackson Elementary School is located 16 miles from downtown Los Angeles and is part of the second-largest school district in the nation, the Los Angeles Unified School District. Adjacent to industrial and commercial areas, the school serves a neighborhood population residing in apartment buildings and tiny single-family homes. Due to the industrial nature of the area, the majority of the residents are blue collar workers or unskilled laborers. Many families are immigrants from Latin American countries, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. The socio-economic status of the community and the students in the school is lower class to lower-middle class. Many families frequently move into and out of the area as jobs and rentals change. The percentage of transient students at Jackson has increased over the past eight years from 50 percent to 65

percent, which ranks it in the top 5 percent of schools for transiency in the district.[1]

In spite of the high levels of transiency, the racial and ethnic composition of the school has changed only slightly in the past eight years. The majority of students are Hispanic, and the percentage increased from 85.6 percent in 1989-90 to 92.6 percent in the fall of 1995. In contrast, the percentage of white students decreased from 10.7 percent to 3.2 percent during the same time period. The African-American and Filipino student populations have remained fairly constant at about 2 percent each, with an occasional Native American, Pacific Islander or Asian student completing the picture. From 1991 to 1996, enrollment at Jackson increased from 797 to 1170 students, 90 percent of whom are eligible for Title 1 services and 76 percent of whom are classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) Although classrooms and teachers were added in both 1994 and 1995, overflow students continue to be bused out of the area.

Over 95 percent of the students at Jackson qualify for free or reduced-fee lunches and breakfasts under the Federal Lunch Program, up from 82 percent ten years ago. In 1993, 26.1 percent of the students' families received AFDC, a higher percentage than most other schools in their region of the district.

Achievement test scores, based on norm-referenced tests given in both English and Spanish, have fluctuated so much over the past eight years, that it is impossible to draw any significant conclusions regarding student achievement based on those scores, other than to say that the scores generally fall below the 50th percentile in reading,

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[1]Transiency rates are computed by adding the number of students who enter after the start of the school year with the number of students who leave after the start of the school year, and dividing the total by the total number of students at the school. Although there are several ways to compute transiency rates, this method is used by the Los Angeles Unified School District and other districts in Southern California.

mathematics and language. This indicates that over half of the students are below grade level in these areas, but these scores are within the average range for other California schools with similar populations.

Jackson is staffed by a principal, an assistant principal, a bilingual/Title 1 coordinator, a full-time counselor, two special education teachers, and 40 regular education teachers. Of those teachers, 38 teach full-time and 4 share contracts. In addition, a number of support personnel provide services to the school one or two days per week (school psychologist, adapted physical education, nurse, music, speech). Each of the 39 classes (pre-kindergarten through sixth grade) has a part-time aide (three hours per day), and additional aides provide support on the playground, in the library and computer center, and in the workroom. Twenty-two classes (kindergarten through sixth grade) are bilingual (Spanish and English), while fourteen are English-only. The pre-kindergarten class has two sessions each day--one in English and one in Spanish. Special education instruction is provided in the student's primary language.

Due to overcrowding, the school operates on a year-round schedule. The 1170 students and 42 teachers are divided into three tracks. Each track attends school for two months and then is off for one month. The tracks are staggered so that only two tracks are at school at any given time. Teachers must rove every month between the 26 classrooms. Because this schedule results in fewer instructional days for each track, the length of the school day has been increased to make up the difference. Due to the year-round schedule, the only extended time when no classes are in session is the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. The school year begins in early July and ends in late June.

Manifestations of Community at Jackson

There are many circumstances which make unlikely a strong sense of community at a school like Jackson. The fact that the students and teachers are never all there at the same time, due to the year-round schedule, is one such circumstance. Another is the fact that students and parents come from a variety of linguistic, ethnic, and national backgrounds. Nevertheless, community was fostered through a variety of structural (formal) and cultural (informal) mechanisms. Some of these were deliberately implemented for specific purposes and others developed gradually or accidentally. The structural mechanisms in particular were not necessarily instituted because of a desire to build community. Nevertheless, they helped to foster community by providing conditions which allowed it to flourish. Observations over time revealed that the way things were done at Jackson, the unwritten rules and norms, often reflected a value of community or cultivated a sense of community throughout the school. Below are some of the patterns which emerged.

Cultural (Informal) Manifestations of Community

There was no more potent example of a caring community than that manifested in the teachers' relationships with one another. According to many of the teachers at Jackson who previously taught elsewhere, the spirit of helping, caring, and sharing which existed among the faculty there was unique in their experience. There were several different ways this spirit manifested itself.

On a professional level, teachers were willing, even eager, to share educational ideas with each other. I heard dozens of stories like the following, told to me by one bilingual teacher:

[An upper-grade teacher] walked in here the other day and said, "Oh, you're doing

> Africa? I have a bunch of Kwanzaa posters and things. I'll bring them by to you." I didn't even have to ask. She just looked and saw, and said, "I'll help."

This was in contrast to a spirit of competition that existed in a number of schools at which Jackson teachers had previously taught. Two teachers described the contrast this way:

> **A former school**: "It was a very private staff. A lot of very deep problems on the staff. And they had a feeling of competitiveness. They would rather not share the materials because they wanted their class to outshine everybody else's class, rather than wanting the school to look good in general."
> **Jackson**: "To have teachers pulling together and trying to help each other and feeling like, 'Hey, if it benefits the kids, who cares if it's my idea or your idea or if I spent the money for the book or if you spent the money for the book? Let's make sure it gets put to good use...Who cares whose idea it is that ends up on the bulletin board out there? If it looks great and makes the school look good, so what if it doesn't have your name on it?'" (Primary bilingual teacher)

> **A former school**: "Brand new teachers would come in and would just be left to the wolves. They weren't supported--because everybody was feeling very threatened, and everybody kind of felt like they were an island, and there were real cliques that started developing. New teachers against old teachers, bilingual teachers against English teachers."
> **Jackson**: "It's such a difference at this school--the teamwork of people, and the way people work together and share ideas and are open and friendly....I feel a willingness to share what I know, where at my other school, when I'd try to share things, it was like, 'Well, who does she think she is?' And so I got to the point where I wouldn't. I'd do things, I'd go to classes, I'd get things, I'd get really fired up. I'd do them in my class, but it was an island. Here, I feel like I can present things and it's listened to and people are receptive to it and open to it." (Intermediate English-only teacher)

The attitude of helping and caring extended beyond the professional level at Jackson. It was not uncommon for teachers to assist each other when personal emergencies arose or to interact outside of the school context. When a teacher needed to leave school early because her baby was sick and needed to go to the doctor, other teachers uncomplainingly stepped in to help cover her class. Perhaps this was because so many of them also had young children and knew that they might one day need the favor returned. When a teacher's son or daughter had a birthday party on a Saturday, several faculty told me it was not uncommon for a dozen Jackson teachers to show up at the party

with their own children. Wedding and vacation photos were passed around the lunchroom. When one teacher's husband was hospitalized with cancer, other teachers brought meals to the house so the teacher could spend more time at the hospital.

Administrators exhibited this same ethic of care toward the teachers. They had no problem stepping in to cover a class if a teacher had an emergency. If a teacher needed to teach on a day his child was out of school, the administrative staff did not mind if the child came to Jackson with her parent for the day, spending the day in her parent's classroom or visiting in another room. This personal/professional crossover helped to solidify the feeling of family at the school. Teachers felt free to care for each other because they knew the administrators would support them as well.

In addition, a number of faculty had their own children attending Jackson, and other teachers were proud of the fact that their colleagues felt the school was good enough for their own children to attend. One teacher chose to teach at Jackson (over other schools where she interviewed) because she felt comfortable having her two children attend school there. When asked if Jackson was the kind of school that teachers and administrators would want their own children to attend, most responded enthusiastically, "Yes!" Those who expressed some doubts did so because they wanted their children to attend a private religious school or because they had some reservations about upper-grade student behavior. But even those with doubts expressed confidence in fellow teachers, the curriculum, and the instructional program. They felt they could trust their own children with their colleagues. Administrators felt the same way about the faculty, and took every opportunity they could to publicly praise them, individually and corporately, for their efforts. They said,

They're a younger than average group of teachers, very caring group of teachers,

and they really, really love and care about the children.

No one turns their back on people here--they just don't do it. And there's not one person that folks, not one, that folks look to as being selfish and unsharing, which is unusual, really unusual.

Another way that community was cultivated was by the welcoming attitude the school exhibited toward parents. In addition to formal programs in which parents could be involved, parents could (and did) volunteer in classrooms and were encouraged to visit regularly. Programs were held both during the day and at night to accommodate different schedules. Parents I spoke with said they always felt welcome at the school. This was fostered partly by the principal's Open Door policy. Her office was right next to the main entrance, and her door was never closed in the entire time I observed at the school. Parents, teachers, students, classified staff, and outside visitors all had access to the principal and assistant principal. The school receptionist was bilingual, so that parents could generally be addressed in their native language.

Another manifestation of community was the sense of ownership, responsibility and pride in the school that members of all stakeholder groups exhibited. Teachers did not wait for administrators to take action--if they thought something would be best for the school, then they took the initiative to get the ball rolling, drafting a memo to the principal or attending the site council to make their ideas or requests known. Teachers saw it as their responsibility to help improve the physical appearance of the campus and to choose the curricula most appropriate for their students. Parents requested a Parent Center, but took it upon themselves to fix it up. They also expressed a desire to sponsor fund-raisers on behalf of the school. When neighborhood youth spray-painted graffiti on school buildings, the principal addressed the whole student body, "If you see anyone writing

[graffiti] on the school over the weekend, please tell your parents and have them call the police. We want to take care of our school." One sixth grader told his teacher that he knew who had written the graffiti. He couldn't tell her their names, but he would make sure that it didn't happen again, and over the next several months I observed at the school it did not. Pre-kindergarten children were taught how to clean up their play area, fourth graders scrubbed their desks before going off-track, and sixth graders routinely swept their classroom floor.

While organizations are known for their standard operating procedures, communities are characterized by norms and values. Schools do have standard operating procedures, and Jackson was no exception. But school personnel operated the organization in a community-like manner, by flexibly enforcing rules and policies. They recognized that mitigating circumstances must be taken into account. For instance, though there were expulsion and suspension guidelines from the district, under the new site-based management the school now had some discretion in how those guidelines were applied. When a student brought a weapon to school, it was supposed to result in automatic expulsion, but an administrator shared that at the elementary grades, students often do not mean to do harm--they are just showing off. Though they must justify their actions to the district when they do not follow a policy, administrators used their own discretion in such situations, rather than indiscriminately enforcing a policy.

Finally, Jackson's school culture promoted and valued diversity and minority viewpoints. There was a climate of tolerance toward differing opinions at the school. In classrooms, there was repeated evidence of students being pushed to look for alternative solutions and to express differing views on issues. One second-third grade class almost came to blows in creating their new society because some students wanted the law to

require that Christmas be celebrated while other students, including two Jehovah's Witnesses, argued that they should not make that mandatory. The teacher used the situation to allow the students to explore differing beliefs and respect for those differences.

Furthermore, teachers recognized that even though most students were Hispanic, a variety of other cultural, racial and language groups were represented at the school. Care was taken to gear the educational program toward all students, not just those that were Limited-English-Proficient or of a particular culture or religion. For example, the holiday program in December featured songs in English and Spanish, songs about Hanukkah, Christmas and winter, traditional Mexican dances, and stories from other continents.

Parents were given freedom to attend a wide range of governance and committee meetings at Jackson and others connected with their region of the district. They also were encouraged to express their viewpoints and occasionally sent a delegate to the site council to lobby for a particular program, piece of equipment or class.

In decision-making situations, minority viewpoints were encouraged. While decisions were generally made by consensus or majority, it was not uncommon for a person with a dissenting opinion to convince others to change the way they viewed the situation. Parents and teachers both expressed the view that they felt they were heard and respected for their ideas and opinions. Of course, there were still conflicts and differences of opinion, but the school fostered an environment where it was safe and legitimate to express an opinion, even if that opinion was not widely shared.

One teacher felt this way:

> The majority of the faculty, I would say, is pretty much able to express their feelings. Most of them. There are still those who are more vocal than others, and...at times you have to say, "Wait a minute. We have a voice too." And there are those who will never open their mouth, and then later will say, "Well, I didn't think..." But most of the faculty, I've seen at some time or another, will say what they're thinking....I

> think most of the time, [the dissenting voice] gets heard. In fact, I've seen times that someone's brought something up and...you see all of a sudden, it shifts directions completely....I have not seen many of the staff members be timid to express their viewpoint, whether it was agreed with or not.... And though there are some things that have kind of been decided, this is the direction we want to go, as far as in terms of Storyline [integrated curriculum], in terms of Mathland [mathematics curriculum], I haven't seen anybody going around patrolling classrooms, and saying, "You will do this." And there are some teachers who are very up-front about, "Okay, I am just not doing a Storyline right now. I'm doing this and this." ..I've certainly felt that I have had the freedom to teach in the way I thought best....There are some teachers who are not using [Mathland], and I haven't seen anybody stomping their feet about it.

Thus, teachers were not only free to express divergent viewpoints, they were free to make curricular and instructional decisions which might be different from where the school as a whole had chosen to go. Though most teachers were using the hands-on math curriculum, thematic teaching, and core literature, there was no sanction against teachers who felt more comfortable with math textbooks, science and social studies units, and basal readers. Training was usually voluntary and so was implementation.

Structural (Formal) Manifestations of Community

While school structures were often put in place for entirely different reasons, there were numerous examples of structures being modified or utilized to promote a sense of community or a sense of ownership at Jackson.

One of the key structural elements of Jackson School was its site-based management (SBM). This came about as a result of a district-wide reform effort (LEARN) in 1993. Jackson, along with 33 other schools in the district, became the first to participate in a restructuring model, which has since been adopted by about 150 schools in the district. Under LEARN, Jackson School is able to control 100 percent of its budget, make hiring and termination decisions (subject to contract and state regulations), adjust its yearly calendar and day-to-day schedules according to its needs, solicit external funding through

grants and business partnerships, deal with the media and other public entities as it sees fit, adopt its own curricuia and textbooks, and provide professional development according to its needs and goals.

The evidence regarding site-based management indicates that it is a "fairly weak intervention" (Murphy & Beck, 1995, p. 178), promising more than it can generally deliver (Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Weiss et al., 1992). Yet at Jackson, because of the sense of community that existed prior to the change to SBM, this structural mechanism was, in a sense, co-opted to further the school's goals toward building community. The autonomy they received through SBM contributed toward furthering a sense of ownership regarding the school.

For example, the site council decided to place 8-by-12-foot carpet pieces in classrooms to allow a whole class (up to 34 students) to comfortably gather on the floor for group activities and stories. The district estimate was higher than they were willing to pay, so they began to solicit outside bids. When they received a 40 percent lower bid from a private firm, the district came back and underbid the outside bidder by about five dollars (Kindy, 1995). Now 19 classrooms have carpeting and the other 7 will receive it when the oldest building on the campus is renovated. A sense of responsibility, ownership, and empowerment was fostered through this event, and the retelling of this story helped to keep alive that sense of what "we" could and did accomplish.

Closely related to site-based management was Jackson's emphasis on shared decision-making. This too came about largely as a result of the restructuring which took place in 1993. Decisions about hiring, expenditures, student placement, curriculum, and parent involvement, which used to be controlled largely by either the central office or school administrators, were now made by groups of teachers, parents, classified staff, and

administrators at the school. The site council, made up of teachers, parents and classified staff, met monthly after school in the library. Administrators attended meetings but did not vote on the council. The council oversaw governance decisions, including budget expenditures, such as the recent installation of air conditioning in the school auditorium (unheard of in this district) and the renovation of the library to create a state-of-the-art Computer/Media Center. Yet, rather than being handled in a strict or formal way, decisions about council issues were often made very casually, just as in a family decisions are usually not made by a formal vote. The consensus model meant that concerns were discussed until no one had anything else to say, and if there were no objections, people moved ahead.

In addition to the decisions handled by the council, decisions that in the past or at other schools were made by the principal alone were delegated to teacher/administrator committees and teacher/parent committees. For example, the Hiring Committee consisted of several teachers, the two administrators and the coordinator. This committee met with prospective candidates to determine whether or not they would be a good "fit" with the rest of the staff and the philosophy of the school. Several new teachers commented how much it impressed them to be interviewed by a committee, not just by the principal. And a veteran teacher asserted that Jackson staff were careful not to bring in the old-school teachers who believed in the perfectly quiet classrooms. They wanted people who were willing to try new ideas and who were able to initiate

Jackson's principal made it clear that this hiring by committee had had a significant impact on the culture of the school. She said,

> And since we've come into LEARN, and we hire by a personnel committee, it really, I think, results in higher quality teachers. Not only are you careful when you hire, but if you've taken part in the hiring process, you don't stand back and

> look at them as a newcomer, a rookie that has to pay his or her dues, the way some people do. Once you've participated in the hiring process and you're the one who helped select them and you had a whole array of people to select from, and you chose these teachers, your whole mindset is different. Instead of looking back at them, and watching what they do, observing, you reach out to them and you nurture them. And I really see the difference in the bonding of the new teachers and the staff--it's better, it's quicker, and the whole staff, I think, reaches out and supports the new people. (Principal)

Those teachers hired under this new system commented repeatedly how much the veteran staff reached out to them, providing support and help in those first few months of adjusting to the new school.

Because the school was now free to regulate its own calendar and schedule, a number of creative scheduling decisions provided additional support for building community at Jackson. This was the second year the teachers were able to engage in collaborative planning times by grade level. Each group of teachers met weekly for one hour while their classes received physical education instruction on the playground, which was supervised by a retired principal the school hired for several hours per week. Each class was led by the classroom aide, and six classes met on the playground at a time. Because first and second grade teachers, for instance, spent one hour per week together, they could trade ideas, discuss curriculum articulation (what is taught from grade to grade) and introduce new teachers to the procedures and norms of the school. These groups also spent one meeting a month in the Computer Center, instructing each other on the use of educational software. Thus, the kinds of interactions which had previously occurred on an informal basis now had a formal structure to them, and several teachers articulated the help these collaborative times had been.

One of the most significant scheduling decisions, in terms of fostering community among the faculty, was the way recess and lunch were scheduled. First through sixth

grade classes all had recess at the same time, which meant that approximately 650 children were on the yard during this 20-minute slot. They were closely supervised by classroom and playground aides, and younger classes were further assisted by Play Leaders, students from fourth, fifth and sixth grade classes. Lunches were staggered so that some children ate first and played afterwards, and others played first and ate afterwards. This allowed the teachers 20 minutes over recess and 30 minutes over lunch where all the teachers (excluding kindergarten and pre-kindergarten) were free at the same time. Otherwise you would have a "divided faculty" that did not know each other because they never saw each other, one staff member commented.

Several structural mechanisms helped to promote community for students as well as teachers. There were a myriad of student leadership opportunities available at Jackson, including, but not limited to, the traditional Student Council, which had elected schoolwide officers, as well as classroom representatives. In addition, older students (fourth - sixth graders) could volunteer to be Play Leaders (assisting younger classes on the playground during recess and lunch), Safety Leaders (monitoring hallways and bathrooms during recess and lunch), and Future Teachers (volunteering in younger classrooms when off-track). The Future Teachers program was able to capitalize on what many see as a detriment to community--the fact that not all students are in session at the same time--and turn it into a positive contributor. Students also took turns (by class) being the color guard for the all-school morning flag salute. Schoolwide programs, such as the Famous Americans presentation in January or the Holiday Program in December, gave whole classes the opportunity to perform before their peers and parents, and presentations were given two or three times to make sure that all classes could attend. When a Parent Center was dedicated in one corner of the campus, a group of Ballet Folklorico dancers

(which rehearsed after school and was directed by a Jackson teacher) performed for district personnel, Rotary Club guests, and school parents.

Jackson staff members were very aware of the diversity of needs represented among their students and sought to address those needs in a variety of ways. For example, students who were new to the United States from Spanish-speaking countries were placed in bilingual classes, but the English level of those classes was often well beyond the newcomers' abilities. The bilingual coordinator, recognizing this problem, decided to hold a Newcomers' Class twice a week, where she worked with fourth, fifth, and sixth graders who needed assistance in learning basic English vocabulary. In addition, the school instituted a Reading Recovery program last fall and had five teachers currently being trained and tutoring first grade students who were reading below grade level.

The Guidance Committee, made up of administrators, the school counselor, the school psychologist (who visited one day per week), and the teachers and parents of students being discussed on any given day, met weekly and provided a mechanism for discussing struggling students and recommending appropriate action, including referrals for special education testing, as needed. The school counselor (still deemed a luxury on many elementary campuses, but considered an essential staff member at Jackson) met with students individually and in groups to help them cope with family problems, learn how to develop friendships, or resist pressure to join gangs or engage in substance abuse.

Curriculum and instruction at Jackson also contributed to a sense of community, even though decisions about curriculum and instructional methods were generally made on the basis of promoting academic achievement and sound pedagogy. Cooperative learning groups were common in classrooms at all grade levels. Students learned what it meant to be a part of a group and how to collaboratively solve problems. A newly-adopted

mathematics curriculum at the school was built around group problem-solving, and a highly-integrated curricular model in which all teachers voluntarily received training also promoted group interaction, critical inquiry, and cooperation. In one first/second grade classroom, the students worked on a literacy activity in cooperative groups for almost an hour with practically no direction or intervention from the teacher. Students provided comfort, expert assistance, and mediation as needed.

Finally, parent involvement programs also fostered a sense of community by providing structures where parents felt comfortable at the school. Weekly Parent Meetings were open to all, and topics generated by the parents themselves. The Community Representative, a part-time school employee, was the key person in linking parents to the school, and she was the first person to whom parents generally went when they had a problem with something that happened at the school. The Parent Center, a remodeled shed in a corner of the campus, was the brainstorm of a group of parents, who spent countless hours repairing it so it could be used for adult ESL classes, creating a tremendous sense of empowerment in the process.

While restructuring did not cause the sense of community, many of the structures that were put in place in the last few years helped to foster community by promoting interaction, collaboration, group problem-solving, dialogue, and a sense of ownership and empowerment. Conversely, the fact that a strong sense of community existed at Jackson prior to restructuring helped provide a smooth transition into more participatory forms of governance.

These are just some examples of how community manifested itself at Jackson. In investigating the school's history from the perspective of long-time teachers and classified staff, it became apparent that the school had not always been this way, either structurally

or culturally. The development of community at Jackson occurred over many years, beginning with teacher relationships and the priority of creating a safe school environment, and spreading out to include all stakeholders and a myriad of instructional, climate and governance issues (Beck & Murphy, in press; Kratzer, 1996).

Underlying Themes

While correlational studies have examined what effective schools look like, and research on goal theory presents evidence that student motivation and achievement are positively affected by school and classroom climates characterized by community (Ames, 1987; Maehr & Fyans, 1989), the question of how a caring community relates to effectiveness has not yet been adequately answered. I believe that the story of Jackson offers at least three answers to this question. First, as a shift toward the valuing of persons takes place, student achievement and test scores are seen in the context of personal growth and development. This results in more, not less, of a push toward achievement, but for different reasons and perhaps with different manifestations. Second, there is a shift toward linking individual well-being with the well-being of the whole. Teachers recognize that how their students do affects them and how one student does ultimately affects the others, so it is in their best interests for them to help each other do as well as possible. Third, in the context of a caring community, the affective dimension of the school is valued and seen as legitimate. So much of what goes on in schools is not about achievement and test scores, but is about how people feel and treat each other. The definition of effectiveness needs to be broadened to include elements such as levels of trust and respect, a sense of belonging and fun. Each of these themes is expanded on below.

Achievement Seen in Context

First, when a school sees itself as a caring community, as Jackson did, the values of that school begin to shift. As a result of focusing on the inherent worth of each person, school personnel also began to look at student achievement differently, no longer separating it from its larger context and no longer viewing it as an end in itself. Rather, achievement was seen as one means to personal growth and development, to the future well-being of today's children. Helping students become excited about learning became one legitimate goal of instruction. Long-term views were taken, focused around in-depth professional development for teachers and aides, along with instructionally-sound curricular and instructional methods, rather than expectations of incremental increases in standardized achievement test scores. The decisive factor in making such decisions was "what's the best thing for the kids." The motivation behind seeing students achieve changed, resulting in more, not less, of an academic press because the stakes were higher. But the emphasis on academics was also broadened, rather than being limited to what was measurable on standardized tests.

Test scores were therefore viewed within a larger context. The principal recognized that students would be asked to take tests all their lives and she communicated to the teachers that that was why students needed to learn how to take tests well. While test scores are valued by large segments of society and are reported to the media and the public, the attitude of the staff was that one test was not an effective measure of what students know, and the norm-referenced tests they were required to give were not particularly good tests anyway. Yet, since they had to use the same tests for now, teachers should not change their curriculum, but should spend a

little time teaching test-taking skills, so that their test scores would rise. Raising test scores would provide the school with additional resources and support which would allow them to do the things they believed in, until such a time as assessment caught up with student-centered, thinking-centered instruction.

However, this belief that standardized tests did not adequately capture a true picture of student learning was not used as an excuse for poor student achievement. Virtually every meeting at Jackson centered largely around how to improve the quality of instruction and student learning. The staff had embraced the belief that a truly caring community would do all it could to help its members become competent. This competence included, but was not limited to, academic competence (Noddings, 1992). This belief and press toward developing the whole person is a strong component of community, according to psychologist Nicholas Hobbs and his colleagues (1984), who argue that the "maintenance of community requires competent members" (p. 43). It is the striving and intention to both care for students and transform current conditions to provide them with an excellent education that is one hallmark of authentic community (Kirkpatrick, 1986).

Link between the Individual and the Whole

Secondly, in a school which sees itself as a caring community, the well-being of individuals within that school is linked together with the well-being of the whole school. There no longer exists a dichotomy between self-interest and altruism (Rousseau, 1991). Through enlightened self-interest (Selznick, 1992), each member recognizes the link between the other members and herself. As one upper-grade teacher at Jackson said,

It's like they [the students] already have been gypped so much, you know, I feel

> like we should give them not only every penny, every ounce of energy, every resource available, but we need to go out and find more because I've been in middle schools. I've been to the high schools, and I have two choices. I can either do the best that I can to make sure that these kids have a bright future ahead of them, or I will be supporting them one way or the other. You know, like I'm supporting their parents now, like I'm supporting their little brothers and sisters now.

This teacher recognized that her life and future were intricately connected with those of her students and it propelled her to further action. When teachers have embraced this connection, they will not be satisfied until the school is good enough for their own children to attend, which is exactly what happened at Jackson. How unlike a school described by Michelle Fine: "A teacher yelled from his seat: 'It's outrageous and sensationalist to compare my children and their schools to these kids and their school!'" (Fine, 1991, p. 194). When the school is good enough for a teacher's own children, then the distinction between "mine" and "theirs" is broken down and the values of community have permeated.

This is also why teachers were willing to spend their own money buying supplies or spend their off-track time preparing materials for their classrooms and students. One teacher commented, "I know so many people who spend so much of their free time generating their own materials and spending--when I spend 150 bucks on posters, that's my 150 bucks, and I don't mind at all because to me this is where I work and I get so much out of it!"

Teachers not only lived out this ethic, but they taught it to their students as well. In one primary class, a Reading Recovery teacher returned with the first grade boy he had been tutoring and told the classroom teacher that Alonso was having problems remembering the letter "m." Alonso's teacher pointed to an "m" on a chart, asking him what it was, and when he could not remember, she made him an "M" card with the

capital letter on one side and the small letter on the other. She handed him the card and had him say "M" a couple of times. Then she turned to the rest of the class and said, "Alonso has a project to learn this letter. He'll put the card in his pocket and every now and then he'll take it out and say the letter, so you all are going to help him learn the letter M." When I talked about this situation with the teacher at a later date, her response was that of course this was how they needed to help each other. "This is a community," she said, "and kids need to learn how to care for each other." Thus, at Jackson, the needs of the individual were closely connected with the needs of the whole, and effectiveness was recognized not as an average test score, but as what met the needs of each individual at the school. Jackson stakeholders understood that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Integrating Affective Concerns

Thirdly, a school as caring community has a place for the affective dimensions of school life, which are central and powerful but often overlooked in effectiveness literature. Those experiences which really stand out from our own school experiences are often those involving our emotions and self-esteem. We remember teachers who had an emotional impact on our lives, either positive or negative (Morrow, 1991). By broadening the definition of effectiveness to include the affective domain (e.g., sense of belonging, trust, respect, fun, meeting needs), we examine not only test scores and attendance rates, but also the relationships, ideology and motivations of people in the school, as Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot points out in her description of "good" schools:

> "Goodness" is a much more complicated notion that refers to what some social scientists describe as the school's "ethos," not discrete additive elements. It refers to the mixture of parts that produce a whole. The whole includes people, structures, relationships, ideology, goals, intellectual substance, motivation, and will. It includes measurable indices such as attendance records, truancy rates,

> vandalism to property, percentages going on to college. But it also encompasses less tangible, more elusive qualities [emphasis added] that can only be discerned through close, vivid description, through subtle nuances, through detailed narratives that reveal the sustaining values of an institution (Lightfoot, 1983).

As the focus shifts toward facilitating process and relationship and away from describing and analyzing tasks (Wheatley, 1992), all the elements that make a school what it is can be celebrated and valued. At Jackson, student engagement in learning, collaboration in solving problems, and creativity in real-life situations became just as much a part of "effectiveness" as test scores. The language, writing, and negotiation skills built through peer editing during Writers' Workshop, and the math, engineering, and collaborative problem-solving skills developed through the "rebuilding" of Kobe, Japan, were indicators of learning that will probably not be substantively reflected on standardized tests. Nevertheless, learning did occur.

In addition, the ways in which adults and students relate to each other become valuable indicators of the health of the school. At Jackson, teachers routinely assisted students in ways that affirmed their strengths, while simultaneously pushing them to strive for excellence. Teachers treated students with dignity, apologizing when they overreacted, but also expecting students to treat them and one another with respect and fairness. Reciprocity of relationships was evidenced when parents had opportunities to assist teachers who were struggling with Spanish vocabulary, and older students served as future teachers in the classrooms of younger students. Teacher assistance and care for each other has been previously described. Administrators saw themselves as servants of both teachers and parents, going out of their way to provide resources for individuals in both groups, and looking for ways to help lessen the burdens and stresses of teaching and parenthood. This was the reality of Jackson. Effectiveness was generated by such

patterns of relationships (Wheatley, 1992).

It would be easy to focus on structures such as site-based management, shared decision-making or parent involvement to explain Jackson's success. But what gave these structures meaning and what made them work at Jackson, because they do not work everywhere (Murphy & Beck, 1995), was the school's sense of itself as a caring community. The structures were merely means to an end--that of valuing persons in community. Community was what gave these structures their power. Jackson staff were interested in redefining effectiveness because they recognized that a number or a rank means very little in the context of real people and schools. This is why researchers too must look beyond the characteristics of effective schools, if we are to genuinely understand what makes these schools work and how to transform other schools. A catalog of characteristics helps a little by shedding some light on a few of the parts. But reproducing characteristics does not reproduce the phenomenon. New discoveries in the sciences, such as quantum physics, help us understand that it is the relationships between elements, not the elements themselves, which are the reality. Might this not be true in organizations as well (Wheatley, 1992)?

Conclusion

Jackson Elementary School illustrates that community and diversity can co-exist and, in fact, complement one another. It also exemplifies a school which has struck a balance between community and achievement, using the values of community as the motivation for encouraging achievement, but keeping in check the tendency to let accountability concerns dominate.

A great deal has been written recently about urban schools which have been particularly effective and about schools which exhibit a strong sense of community (e.g.,

(Sergiovanni, 1994; Smith, 1993). These schools and the teachers who teach in them are successful not only because of their hard work, but in part because they exist in an environment which enables them to cultivate not only excellence but also community (Comer, 1980). This study has attempted to shed some light on what that cultivation process looks like in one school. In so doing, it may provide insight into why many schools remain "intractable" (Sarason, 1990) in the midst of major reform efforts. It may also provide insight into how urban schools might be positively transformed, resulting in benefits for students, teachers, parents and all those connected with the school.

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