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ABSTRACT

The Center on English Learning and Achievement (CELA) has been studying the characteristics of successful English programs in middle and high schools. This report discusses the findings of the first two years of their 5-year Excellence in English study and focuses on the educational practices that support student literacy as well as the characteristics of teachers' professional lives that accompany student achievement. The report addresses the issue of teachers' professional environments. The study considered in the report examines professional contexts to understand how they relate to what happens in the classroom. The report discusses features of the professional contexts that permeate the diverse sites that CELA has been studying; data were collected at eight schools in Florida and New York. The report notes that a series of site-specific case studies are also being developed to provide in-depth views of particular teachers' professional experiences and how these in turn are related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment in their classrooms. Findings reported suggest common characteristics in teachers' lives schools and districts they teach in nurtured a climate that (1) orchestrated coordinated efforts to improve student achievement; (2) fostered teacher participation in a variety of professional communities; (3) created structured improvement activities in ways that offered teachers a strong sense of agency; (4) valued commitment to the teaching profession; (5) engendered a caring attitude that extended to colleagues and students; and (6) fostered a deep respect for lifelong learning. Contains a table and 44 references. (NKA)

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ED 429 295

# EXCELLENCE IN ENGLISH IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL: HOW TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LIVES SUPPORT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

JUDITH A. LANGER

CELA RESEARCH REPORT NUMBER 12002

CENTER ON

ENGLISH LEARNING

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JUDITH A. LANGER

The National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement
The University at Albany
State University of New York
1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12222

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**National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement**

University at Albany, School of Education, B-9
1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12222
http://cela.albany.edu/
518-442-5026

The Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA) is a national research and development center located at the University at Albany, State University of New York, in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Additional research is conducted at the Universities of Georgia and Washington.

The Center, established in 1987, initially focused on the teaching and learning of literature. In March 1996, the Center expanded its focus to include the teaching and learning of English, both as a subject in its own right and as it is learned in other content areas. CELA's work is sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, as part of the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment.

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# EXCELLENCE IN ENGLISH IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL: HOW TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LIVES SUPPORT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

JUDITH A. LANGER

## INTRODUCTION

As part of the Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA), I have been studying the characteristics of successful English programs in middle and high schools. In these programs students are performing better than similar students in comparable schools, and my colleagues and I have witnessed exemplary teaching and professionalism. This report discusses the findings of the first two years of our five-year Excellence in English study. The study focuses on the educational practices that support student literacy as well as the characteristics of teachers' professional lives that accompany student achievement. By literacy I mean more than just the simple act of reading words. Today's English language arts classrooms need to help students develop the kind of high literacy that enables them to write about, talk about, and extract meaning from knowledge and experience in all the ways that school, work, and day-to-day life demand at the verge of the twenty-first century.

But what kinds of professional and classroom environments and practices lead to the development of such literacy? In this paper I address the issue of teachers' professional environments. This issue is often overlooked, yet it is an extremely important one, particularly at a time such as this when widespread calls for change in literacy education require sound conditions for decision-making as well as enacting change. The issue of teachers' professional communities has not been addressed much in the field of English, yet there has been a growing focus on this fundamental topic within the research on policy (e.g., Fullan, 1991; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Little & McLaughlin,1991; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996) and also some work suggesting that the conditions that affect teachers' professional lives will in turn affect student performance (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1994; Louis & Miles, 1990; Louis & Smith, 1992; Talbert & Perry, 1994). The Excellence in English study recognizes the deeply contextualized nature of both teaching and learning (Dyson, 1993; Myers, 1996; Turner, 1993) and therefore examines the contexts that shape teachers' professional lives.

The work is anchored in a sociocognitive view of learning (Langer, 1987; 1995) heavily

influenced by Bakhtin (1981) and Vygotsky (1987) that contends that learning is influenced by the values, experiences, and actions of others within the larger environment, and that the ways of thinking as well as the knowledge learned are necessarily affected. Teachers as well as students are part of a larger-than-classroom context. Just as students' heteroglossic and multiple voices carry the echoes of the primary *and* secondary groups to which they belong as well as affect what the students bring to and take from the learning experience, so too do teachers belong to a larger context. Classrooms and the teachers who shape them are part of professional and social communities that are themselves multivocal and thus affect teachers' professional knowledge and actions. It is largely within these professional contexts that teachers' notions of what counts as appropriate knowledge and effective communication gain their meanings. It is also in these larger professional contexts that professional concerns and educational reforms are encountered, new approaches discussed, and pedagogical routines adapted. The importance of teachers' professional lives becomes particularly acute at times when schools are called upon to reform their programs, since effective reform requires a vision of the kinds of learnings that are sought and the kinds of approaches most likely to achieve them.

A number of policy studies have focused on educational reform networks (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988). These studies indicate that although professional networks differ, by and large they can provide purpose, collaboration, commitment, and community. They also provide participants with a language to talk about their work, a group of colleagues with whom tacit knowledge can become overt, new modes of professionally shared inquiry, and a renewed sense of purpose and efficacy. However, Little (1990) reminds us that there is a persistence of privacy and non-interference within the teaching profession. Cohen (1995) charges that coherence in policy is not the same as coherence in practice and that systemic reform is not well matched with the nature of instruction, and cites the need for studies on how instructional practice is constituted or how it might be changed. Louis, Marks and Kruse (1996) examine school characteristics that support the development of professional community, identify contexts in which it more readily emerges, and connect it to the responsibility teachers take for student learning. Combined with Little and McLaughlin's (1991) study of teacher collaboratives outside the teachers' schools of employment, we see a growing body of literature identifying particular contextual features that can support professional communities and their effects on teachers.

Previous studies in English have usually focused on one or another layer of the system that affects what gets taught and learned: on the details of the classroom interaction (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979), or on the contexts that shape departmental policies (Little & McLaughlin, 1991; Siskin, 1994; Stodolsky & Grossman, 1995), or on the networks that connect teachers to the ideas in their field (Lieberman & Grolmick, 1996). But few have focused on the aspects of the English language arts context that involve the networks within teachers' professional lives and how they affect students' opportunities to learn. The series of studies I have undertaken in my work for CELA will not only describe the nature of the various communities that are implicated in the daily life of the effective English classroom, but will also focus on the trade-offs involved in the decisions that get made about what to teach and how to teach it. The sociocognitive framework on which the work is based (Langer, 1987; 1995; Vygotsky, 1987) implies that if students are to gain high literacy, it will be because such literacy is an integral part of the cultural ways of knowing and doing that underlie how their classrooms operate and work gets done. How this is affected by the professional lives of teachers is the focus of this paper.

## THE STUDY

The Excellence in English study examines professional contexts in order to understand how they relate to what happens in the classroom. Of particular interest is how various images of English as a subject and of student proficiency in English are constructed within these contexts, and how these images are reconciled by the teacher. The professional contexts include the work-related environments teachers participate in locally and at greater distance, the institutional frame of professional opportunities and support provided by their districts, and the inter- and intra-department interactions that sustain their efforts on a daily basis. This paper will discuss features of the professional contexts that permeate the diverse sites we have been studying. A series of site-specific case studies are also being developed to provide in-depth views of particular teachers' professional experiences and how these in turn are related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment in their classrooms (see list of case studies in reference section).

**Project sites**

To identify the sites we would eventually study, we solicited recommendations from university and school communities for schools where "special" things were happening in English teaching and learning. We made it clear we were looking for schools where teachers had been involved for some time in professional efforts to improve student achievement, and where such factors as attendance, enthusiasm for learning, and student achievement had improved. We did not want to study the lone, heroic teacher, but rather sites where there had been more widespread successful efforts to improve learning and achievement in English. We visited all programs that were recommended by at least three independent sources. We then made the final selection based on the teachers' and administrators' willingness to work with us over a two year period as well as each school's ability to contribute to the overall diversity of student populations, programs, and locations in our sample. We limited this study to four states — Florida, New York, California, and Texas — that include great diversity in student populations, educational problems, and approaches to improvement. Our sample includes a high representation of schools and districts serving students who live in poverty and are low performing.

During the first two years of the study — the time period reported in this paper — we studied eight programs in Florida and New York. Seven of the eight participating schools were places where students were "beating the odds." Statewide standardized test results indicate that the students were performing better than other students in demographically similar areas. The eighth school, at the edge of an old, industrial, small city, was selected as a point of contrast. It is the high school in a district that had recently made substantial efforts to reform the elementary schools and had consequently seen a payoff in increased achievement at the early grade levels. Though such changes had not yet taken place in the secondary schools, they were expected to.

TYPES OF SCHOOLS

| | |
|---|---|
| Florida: | 2 inner big city high schools |
| | 1 inner big city middle school |
| | 1 ex-urban big city middle school |
| New York: | 1 inner big city newcomers' high school |
| | 1 small city high school |
| | 1 ex-urban big city middle school, dual language program |
| | 1 suburban middle school |

In years three and four, our sample will include other schools in California and Texas where students are beating the odds, as well as more typical schools as points of contrast.

***Participants.*** We worked collaboratively with two teachers and their students as well as their various teaching and administrative colleagues, in each of the eight schools. While seven of the eight programs (some falling within a departmental structure, some into reorganized teams or clusters) had been determined to be excellent based both on reputation and scores, the teachers with whom we worked were recommended by district administrators as particularly successful within those programs, and also willing to collaborate with us. Thus, this is a study of specially regarded teachers within seven high achieving programs, with one more-typical school as a contrast; together they will be the focus of this paper. Due to the nature of the research, we also interacted with the other professionals with whom these teachers co-planned, co-taught, or otherwise interacted professionally, both in school and out. We also selected six student volunteers in each classroom, collecting their work and discussing their classroom activities, engagement, and learning. The students were chosen to represent the range of performance within the class as perceived by the teacher.

## Design

A nested case design was used, with the professional community (the people with whom the teachers shared and gained professional ideas and knowledge, both within and apart from their workplace, both close to home and afar) as a case, the teachers as cases within a case, and the

classes, including the student-participants, as cases embedded within. For analysis, this design permits us to shift lenses among the three contexts as ideas for instructional and programmatic change are considered, discussed, and enacted. One field researcher worked with each program, following the key teacher's professional contacts and experiences as well as the classroom activities and interactions. In addition, one particular field researcher worked closely with the central office staff from one of the districts. This research helped us develop an understanding of the staff's roles in the professional lives of the teachers from the central office perspective. The field researchers, Paola Bonissone, Carla Confer, Gladys Cruz, Ester Helmar-Salasoo, Sally Kahr, Tanya Manning, Steven Ostrowski, and Eija Rougle, each studied one or two programs for two years; hence we were able to study the teachers' professional and classroom lives over time, with two sets of students. The sample, thus far, involves two years each with 16 teachers working in 8 schools and includes some 430 students and 96 student-participants. The student-participants, representing above average, average, and lower performing students within each class, discussed classroom activities and expectations from their perspectives and maintained portfolios of their work to discuss and share with us.

**Procedures**

Our data-gathering occurred simultaneously in both the professional and school communities, permitting constant comparison among perceptions, plans, and actions from the participants' and observers' perspectives. We kept in touch with relevant district and school administrators, including the principals and language arts coordinators, to learn about their goals, special emphases, and views of English language arts, as well as their concerns and plans related to national and state issues. We "shadowed" the teachers' professional interactions and experiences via telephone, email, or in person whenever possible. We also collected all pertinent materials and communicated with the teachers and relevant others about their perceptions of these experiences and their relevance to the teaching situation. In addition, we tracked the teachers' perceptions of and experiences with state and national reform efforts — where these experiences originated, their substance and nature, and the teachers' responses to them.

Each field researcher worked very closely with each teacher, attempting to understand the

kinds of professional communities in which that teacher interacts (print, non-print, in person) and gains ideas, and how these affect the teacher's and students' in-class experiences. Beginning with a lengthy interview/discussion about concerns, goals, and plans for change, we carried on a collaborative dialogue with each teacher to understand the relevant professional networks and how these networks influence the teacher's knowledge and decisions and ultimately get translated into the teacher's plans, class activities, students' participation, and assessment of learning.

Each field researcher spent approximately five weeks on site per year. At the beginning of each semester, the field researchers spent a week to interview district personnel about their plans and reflections, interview the new student volunteers, gather information about the teacher's professional and classroom plans and goals, and make plans for data gathering for the year. Later in the year, researchers spent two weeks on site observing classes and professional interactions (i.e., department and team meetings, professional conferences, book clubs). In each instance tape recordings were made, field notes taken, artifacts collected, and relevant adults and students interviewed. Throughout the year the researchers were in weekly contact with their teachers for on-line reports of plans, activities, and discussions of professional experiences and reflections and of student work. Portfolios were maintained, and samples of student work from more distant sites faxed to the site researcher for the research team's weekly discussions. This paper draws on this collection of unpublished data (referenced only within the text when used).

## Data

Data consist of field notes, audiotapes, email messages, and artifacts including portfolios and in-process journals kept by all participants, as well as in-process case reports. The team focused on the multi-vocal constituents of both the teachers' professional world and the students' class experiences, as these are related to instructional interactions and students' learning.

***Full-Project Team.*** Because the teachers were collaborators in helping us understand the factors outside as well as inside the classroom that affect teaching and learning, the teachers interacted on email on an ongoing basis about the participating classes and the influences on them. The field researchers and I monitored and participated in these conversations, providing

themes for discussion that emerged from the issues the teachers raised and from the patterns that seemed to be emerging from our ongoing analyses. Thus, the teachers' input helped influence the ways in which we grounded, interpreted, and refined our various findings.

***Collaborative Dyad.*** Each teacher and field researcher communicated via email approximately once a week to develop, discuss, and reflect on the teacher's professional interactions as well as class lessons, activities, and other relevant events. They discussed professional thoughts and experiences as well as the ways in which the teacher made decisions about classroom activities, the interactions that occurred and the evaluations made.

***Case Study Sessions.*** The field researchers and I met on a weekly basis for case study sessions. During these sessions, each field researcher presented an in-process case study report based on the patterns they had been observing in terms of professional networks, teaching, and learning — with data from the various data sets as evidence. These sessions also provided opportunities for cross-case comparisons and the recursive testing of emerging patterns.

## Data Analysis

The data were initially coded for focus on type of community: professional, classroom, and social, as well as for instruction, curriculum, and assessment. This scheme served as an indexing system that allowed us to later retrieve and more carefully analyze data from one subsection of the data pool and compare it with another, and to generate data-driven sub-categories for later study. One level of data analysis was ongoing, focusing primarily on professional networks and instructional approaches, the knowledge sources that informed these approaches, the activities and interactions in which they were carried out, and the learning to which they led. These analyses involved a continual cycle of testing, revising, and refining by returning to the data as well as to the teachers themselves for confirming or disconfirming evidence. These ongoing analyses were augmented by other analyses at the end of each year to characterize the instructional activities and interactions that supported the students' learning. The various data sets were keyed to each individual teacher and classroom, providing multiple views of each particular instructional context, and permitted both in-depth case studies and cross-case

principles to be developed. In each case, we have triangulated the data, drawing on various aspects of the professional and classroom communities for evidence.

## VARIETY AMONG SITES

As indicated in the following table, the eight sites vary in organizational and programmatic features as well as in student populations. The schools ranged from a 100% African American and Hispanic student population to a 97% White student population, and from 84% of the students to 5% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch.

### SCHOOLS IN THE EXCELLENCE IN ENGLISH STUDY

| School | Student membership | % free or reduced lunch | Selected features |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Florida** | | | |
| Ruben Dario M.S.* | 83% Hispanic<br>12% African Amer.<br>4% White | 80% | team & decision-making councils; reading and language arts across areas |
| Highland Oaks M.S.* | 47% White<br>23% African Amer.<br>27% Hispanic | 34% | interdisciplinary teams; academic wheels; collaborative partnerships |
| Miami Edison Sr. H.* | 92% African Amer.<br>8% Hispanic | 38% | collaborative departments and teams; writing and English in subject areas |
| Wm. H. Turner Tech.* | 63% African Amer.<br>33% Hispanic<br>4% White | 45% | dual work related academies; workplace experience; Coalition of Essential Schools |
| **New York** | | | |
| Hudson M.S | 92% White<br>4% African Amer. | 5% | interdisciplinary teams; active departments |
| King M.S. | 33% Hispanic<br>21% African Amer.<br>43% White | 40% | interdisciplinary teams; active departments; dual language |
| International H.S.* | 48 countries<br>37 languages | 84% | academic teams; internships; portfolios; exhibitions |
| Tawasentha H.S. | 97% White | 12% | curriculum teams; facilitators |

* An asterisk denotes participants' preference to use real names. In such cases, the actual names of schools, project teachers, and their colleagues are used. For the schools not marked with an asterisk, pseudonyms are used throughout this paper.

Below, I will briefly describe each site and highlight significant features of its English language arts program.

**Florida**

Miami-Dade County Public Schools is the fourth largest school district in the country. It serves the highest proportion of minority and free lunch students in the state of Florida, and faces the host of problems shared by most inner-city areas. Its non-native English speakers represent a total of 116 languages; within this diversity, speakers of Spanish and of Haitian Creole are the largest groups. High student achievement and grade-appropriate instruction are expected in each classroom throughout the district, and these have paid off. Students beat the odds by outperforming comparable students on the Florida Writes! exam achievement test, the literacy area that has received particular instructional attention by the English language arts professionals in the district. In 1997, all four schools whose programs we studied scored above the state standard on this exam.

Miami-Dade County has long been involved in cutting edge efforts to improve English achievement, most recently including Pacesetter, the New Standards Project, the Dade County Writing Institute, Dade County Council of Teachers of English, and the Dade Reading Council, professional development for all teachers in the education of English language learners, and the creation of interdisciplinary teams. The countywide English language arts and reading supervisors are an unusually cohesive group who keep up with the latest research and reform efforts in their field, continually sharpen their own theoretical grounding, and always rely on teams of teachers in the district to explore, recommend, and grow with them to enact change. Each year, despite hard-earned achievement gains, they set new goals, continually striving for even higher successes. The English teachers we studied have all been involved in successful efforts to improve student achievement.

***Ruben Dario Middle School.*** The school is in a pleasant-looking pastel-colored neighborhood, adjacent to a highway. It is surrounded on three sides by small, seemingly comfortable houses

and condominiums built within the past 20 or so years. However, many of the homes built to accommodate one family now house several, and it is advisable to use caution on the streets. The school's locale includes an area reported to be one of the poorest in the city, and gang-related incidents appear to be on the rise. Ruben Dario opened in 1989 and was chartered as a Title One school three years ago, as soon as Miami-Dade County middle schools became eligible.

The school serves a poor and linguistically diverse population. Of the 2083 students who attend, approximately 83% are Latino, 12% African American, 4% Anglo, and 1% other (Asian, Indian, multi-racial, as categorized by the school).[1] Approximately 14.5% of the students are categorized as Limited English Proficient; approximately three-fourths receive free or reduced lunch. The school's poverty rate is one and one-half times greater than the statewide average, its minority rate is three times greater, and its percent of English language learners is fifteen times greater. Its absentee rate is below the state average and it operates at approximately 119% capacity. Ruben Dario has a diverse full time staff: 51% Hispanic, 23% Black non-Hispanic, and 21% White non-Hispanic. Students' scores on the annual Florida Writes! exam have steadily improved, with performance above the statewide standard. Florida's standard for grade eight requires at least 50% of students to score 3 or higher on a scale of 0 to 6. In 1997, 86% of the Ruben Dario students did so.

The mission defined by the school is to join with parents and representatives of the community to generate excellent students in a productive learning environment. It is known as a safe school, a haven. The students are extremely well-behaved and the school is well-equipped with books and technology. In addition to a range of after-school extra-curricular programs, morning and afternoon tutorials are offered to students who wish to participate. Reading has become a focus not only in language arts, but across the curriculum. For example, once a week there is a schoolwide reading period during which everyone, teachers and students alike, stop what they are doing to read for 20 minutes. The reading/language arts teachers meet with other faculty to discuss and model new instructional approaches and materials. Ruben Dario has a low percentage of students failing, with only a 1.2% average retention rate. Teachers and administrators maintain good interaction with the families, who are said to "respect teachers, want their children to behave well in school, and to learn."

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1. To describe each school's racial/ethnic make-up, I've used the terminology supplied by the school and/or district.

The major organizational structure is interdisciplinary teams, creating smaller clusters of teachers (representing the major subject areas) and students. Interdisciplinary team meetings focus on students' joint needs and problems. The department structure maintains focus on the curriculum, instruction, and assessment within each subject area, and teachers of the same discipline meet weekly to exchange ideas and discuss issues. High student achievement and grade-appropriate instruction are expected in each classroom, and achieving this goal is a responsibility shared by all. Team leaders and department heads meet in either a Team Ambassador Council or a Curriculum Ambassador Council. Here, new ideas are developed and decision-making is shared. Teachers' ongoing professional development is a priority, and funds for conferences, professional trips, and in-service offerings are readily available. Collaboration and professional commitment are high. There are some 30 extra-curricular clubs at Ruben Dario, each with a teacher sponsor. Student attendance at after-school tutorials is high. The school's atmosphere is comfortable, "low key," and friendly, with a good rapport among faculty, administrators, and students alike. However, "rules" of good behavior and fairness are important, and supported by all. At the beginning of each year a planning book, with the rules printed on an introductory page, is given to each student. These are referred to throughout the year. All adults share the responsibility of helping students abide by the rules. Academic success is the central focus, and the school has been recognized for its repeated above-average performance on standardized tests, including increasingly high scores on the Florida Writes! exam.

***Highland Oaks Middle School.*** Highland Oaks is located in the northern portion of the city in an area that is more middle class than those of the other schools we are studying in Miami-Dade County. However, the area is currently undergoing rapid change, and the makeup of Highland Oaks' student body is shifting quickly. Unlike the past, White students now are in the minority; 47% of the students are identified as White non-Hispanic, 23% African American non-Hispanic, 27% Hispanic, and 3% other (Asian, Indian, or multiracial). Thirty three percent of the students receive free or reduced lunch. Of the full time staff, 28% are African American and 13% Hispanic.

The school is surrounded by small houses and mini-malls; one side is adjacent to a public park. Built some 20 years ago, the concrete school building is large and modern, with well-tended grounds. However, it is overcrowded. With a 1732 student enrollment, Highland

Oaks presently operates at 128% capacity. Teachers and administrators are working extremely hard to maintain student achievement, even as the student body changes. Their effort is paying off. The students have scored above the state standard on the Florida Writes! exam, with 86%, as opposed to the 50% standard, scoring 3 or higher.

The school defines its mission as "to cultivate well-rounded citizens . . . for our multicultural and changing world." It has a widespread plan designed to raise students' performance on standardized tests as well as to engage in challenging literacy activities. In addition to standardized tests, faculty stress such products as demonstrations, exhibitions, and portfolios as evidence of students' learning. The school is divided into interdisciplinary teams as well as departments. The teams meet four days a week and focus on students' academic and social well-being, school morale, and discipline. The departments meet every Friday to focus on curriculum and instruction within their disciplines. As students move through the grades, they have opportunities to specialize in areas of interest. This begins with their introduction to a selection of "wheels" in such areas as vocation and the arts, which offer an array of related experiences within nine-week cycles. Thus a student in a vocational wheel might study graphics for nine weeks and then move on to manufacturing.

Highland Oaks provides many opportunities for faculty decision-making and collaboration. For example, for the past several years, faculty has been selecting and working toward actualizing the Coalition of Essential Schools principles (Sizer, 1992). Administrators and teachers work side by side as team partners to achieve their goal. They also work together to raise student literacy across subject areas. Team discussions and professional workshops that focus on writing and reading ensure that ideas are shared and then worked through by the teams or departments. Parent and community connections are also strong. The active PTA meets weekly, in the morning and also in the evening. The PTA members know what is happening at school and volunteer time and effort in any way they can. Highland Oaks also has "public partners," and is part of the marketing council of local businesses where ideas as well as work are shared. School-community cooperation is high.

***Miami Edison Senior High School.*** This large school, housing 2430 students (116% capacity), is in a congested urban location, sided by a four-lane road with heavy traffic. The oldest school in the county, its original structure was built in 1917 to serve the local, wealthy, and mostly White

residents. Now, housing projects and urban ghettos define the area. It is known for its transient population; newcomers stay until they have enough money to move out. We were told that weapons are a greater problem than drugs in this school. Across the grades, there is a 92% representation of African American students, the majority of whom are of Haitian or Jamaican origins. Fewer than 1% of the student population is White, and 8% is Latino. Twenty five percent of the student body has been designated as Limited English Proficient. Thirty eight percent of the students receive free or reduced lunch. Through concerted effort, the school scored above the statewide competency score in 1997, with 71% of the students scoring above a 3 on the Florida Writes! exam.

The school has a large, culturally diverse teaching staff who have been described as "energized and energizing." Edison sees its general mission as providing students with alternatives for success; there is a belief that the students can and will learn, and succeed. It offers a multi-tiered English curriculum for students (including language, composition, and literature courses and a Pacesetter program). The school is divided into multidisciplinary teams, with a focus on students' well-being. Active academic departments meet to focus on curriculum, assessment, and academic progress. Of the teachers we studied, we were told, "they use strategies we know work, and they keep students at the center of learning." A semantics course that focuses on language use, structure, and understanding is offered as an elective, and has generated sufficient interest from teachers in other disciplines that biweekly lunchtime seminars are now offered to colleagues. A Saturday Lab School has also been instituted to help students hone English and study skills and prepare for exams. These Saturday sessions are taught by a large range of teachers who meet before and after the two-hour classes to discuss teaching strategies, evaluate progress, and develop professional knowledge and approaches. Edison also offers many after-school options, including a community adult and night school, a 500 Role Models Program, and such community events as Haitian Night and Back to School Parents' Night. Although Edison had been identified as low-performing, there has been a large-scale effort to change this. The principal and teachers are proud of students' recent improvement, and are continuing to enact ways to help the students progress even further.

***Wm. H. Turner Technical Arts High School.*** A specialized/alternative school of choice with a student population of approximately 2119, Turner Tech was built in the 1960s but reorganized in

1993. It is a "two for one" school, offering a combined academic and vocational program, with both high caliber academic education and hands-on technical training and apprenticeships. The purpose is to offer well-integrated programs that prepare students to excel in their goals, be they higher education or the workforce. Turner Tech is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, and seeks to develop the "habits of mind" advocated by Sizer (1992).

The building is located on a broad four-lane road, a few miles west of a major interstate highway. It is surrounded by small pastel-colored houses, most with iron bars covering windows and doors, primarily for reasons of safety. Within a few blocks of the school are large commercial strips where fast food stores, a pawn shop, and many other small shops are located. The open design and ample grounds of the well-kept, pastel-colored school are inviting. Part of the school, the Agri-science Academy, lies beyond the parking lot and across the nearby canal. Here students can specialize in various areas of agriculture, while also learning their regular academic course work. In fact, the school itself is divided into seven academies, among which all teachers and students are divided: Agri-science, Applied Business Technology, Finance, Health, Industrial Technology, Public Service/Television Production, and Residential Construction. Students select a career academy upon entering the school. Each academy accepts the range of students who can find some aspect of the academy in which to further develop their skills and abilities while preparing themselves for college and/or the job market. Many local businesses provide financial support as well as real-world opportunities for equipment, awards, and expertise.

Within each academy, teachers work in cross-disciplinary teams to develop integrated thematic units that apply "core learning competencies in their respective academic disciplines within the context of the students' selected career major." The teams meet several times a semester for two to three hours each, and department meetings are held three times a year to permit an opportunity for teachers to maintain connections within their disciplines. Nearly half the teachers also meet in critical friends groups to share plans and to discuss ways to improve student work fundamental to their pioneering efforts.

Students can gain certification in one or more state-approved technical skill or vocation within or across academies. In addition, all Turner Tech students participate in hands-on experiences both in the workplace and at school. The school has developed many rich

partnerships with local businesses, who have come to play active roles in students' education. In their junior and senior years, students can participate in on-the-job internships. Student performance is good, and approximately 99% of all students are promoted. Student projects such as demonstrations, portfolios, and exhibitions are often used for both self-assessment and more formal assessment of students' acquisition of course-related knowledge and skills.

The school's mission is to "develop information-literacy and lifetime learning skills among all students" that will enable them to enter the world of work with skill and confidence. All students can enroll in the school, but they must maintain good attendance to stay. Students who earn two or more Ds on a report card are put on probation.

Some 63% of the students are of African American non-Hispanic heritage, 33% Hispanic, and 4% White non-Hispanic. Forty-five percent of Turner Tech's students receive free or reduced lunches; approximately 6% of the students have been designated as English language learners. In addition, more than 10% of the student population at Turner Tech participate in the Exceptional Student Education program — the highest mainstreaming rate in the county. The school has maintained a consistently above-county attendance record, 95% during the 1997-98 year. English performance has been good, too. In 1997, 90% of the students scored 3 or higher on the Florida Writes! exam, with an average score of 3.6. Not only do more of Turner Tech's students continue to surpass state standards, but they are closing the gap with the more middle class schools in the state. In 1997, for example, 78% of the graduating class went on to some form of higher education.

## New York

The programs we studied in New York are located both in New York City and up to 150 miles away. This permitted us to examine a range of successful programs both within and outside of densely populated major metropolitan regions.

***Henry O. Hudson Middle School.*** This middle school is in the middle class suburban area of Schoonhavn, a few miles outside a medium-sized city. Real estate agents find the school district

fact that the district's per pupil expenditure is below the statewide norm. For example, on the state test of English reading effectiveness 97% of the students scored above the state minimum standard, in comparison to 82% statewide. The attendance rate of 96% is quite high in comparison to the statewide average of 91%. Although some 90% of the student population is White, with only two or three students of color in each class, mainstreaming has added another kind of diversity in that special education and physically challenged students are in every classroom, often accompanied by specially-assigned aides.

Built 30 years ago, the school serves 1250 students. Five percent are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Among the school's goals are the development of students' academic growth, personal growth, and social skills, with a strong emphasis on issues of diversity. The district's leadership in English language arts is exceptionally well-regarded both statewide and nationally. Because school faculty are involved at all levels of planning, decision-making, and change within the district, the teachers are sought out for collaborations and special initiatives by the state education department and by professional associations.

Hudson is on a two-lane road, surrounded by fields and a mix of garden apartment complexes and private homes. The school's mission is "Empowering all students to succeed in the 21st century." Hudson's brochure, "At a glance," states the school's philosophy:

> At Hudson,
> Every student is important,
> Every staff member is part of an educational team,
> Every parent is treated as a player and
> Every community member is welcome in our schools.

Hudson is an "exciting learning community: thoughtful, stimulating, reflective, engaging, and engaged" (Rougle case report, 2/28/97). The school is divided into three houses, both physically and organizationally. Each house is divided into interdisciplinary grade-level teams of four colleagues, each representing one of the major academic areas. The teams invite shared expertise; however, instruction itself is most often subject-specific, with team teaching occurring only in specially planned instances. Team meetings are held on a daily basis and focus on student support even more than on curriculum. Priority for students' well-being, in addition to concerns about academic development, is evidenced by the thorough participation of student support staff

(i.e., counselors) as well as teachers in team meetings. Teachers work closely with their disciplinary colleagues, in department meetings, before the school day, and at other times as well. Disciplinary planning, sharing of ideas, and coordination is frequent. In addition to interdisciplinary teams and departments, teachers meet weekly in grade level clusters. Collegial sharing both in and out of school is constant.

Community involvement is an integral part of the district's policy: Hudson has a Strive for Success evening tutorial program where parents and children work together, and parent volunteers are encouraged to participate during the school day. Students are given opportunities to volunteer in the community, including helping in nursing homes and the community center, assisting with reading programs at the library, and working in the town's parks and recreational programs. Parents are involved in many curricular as well as extra-curricular committees. A document, "Language Arts Expectations," was revised by a committee of teachers, parents, and administrators. Here, key instructional goals and concepts are discussed and a framework for performance specified. Parents are represented in the building cabinet, the school's decision-making group. Support for the school is strong. Hudson consistently maintains its higher than comparable scores (above similar schools) and its reputation for excellence.

***Abraham S. King Middle School.*** This school is located on the outskirts of New York City. It is surrounded by a residential area of one-family and small multi-family houses. The multicultural neighborhood is quiet and relatively secure. The school is a short walk from Main Street, with an array of local stores and restaurants in easy reach. The school district has received many development grants as well as awards for excellence; King was recently named a Blue Ribbon School because of its collaborative initiative in helping students reach high standards. Despite high levels of poverty and student diversity, 89% of the middle grade students scored above the state reference point in English language arts/reading in comparison to 82% statewide. With a student body of 890, approximately 33% of the school population is of Hispanic origin, 21% African American, 43% White, and 3% Asian or Pacific Islander. Some 40% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The school defines its mission as providing an "education of excellence" to all students.

The district has earned a reputation for grant-getting innovations and structured instructional efforts that support students' academic performance. To support science and English learning,

students are involved in high-interest opportunities such as the fish farm, where they are involved in the living study of fish raising and development, and they write and speak about their learning. As part of the Regents biology course, students have an opportunity to work with doctors at a local hospital. Two other programs to enhance student performance are Project Success, a transition orientation program from elementary to middle school, and Be The Dream project, an offering of additional enrichment to ninth graders. The school has a strong community outreach program as well, and community involvement is actively sought. English as a Second Language classes and other programs for adults are offered after school hours, and all programs include parent components.

In addition to many special instructional programs for students, the assistant superintendent for instruction and the principal of King Middle School were awarded a special grant by the state to plan, and then implement, a voluntary two-way bilingual program in which monolingual English speaking students learn and receive increasingly more course work in Spanish, and Spanish speaking students learn and receive increasingly more course work in English. The teachers meet often, not only to coordinate curriculum efforts, but to translate all course material into both languages when such two-way translations are not available. Because the content in both languages is the same, the students also have opportunities to work with each other as classmates and collaborators. At King, we studied this two-way bilingual program.

Teachers and students at King are divided into interdisciplinary teams; those in the two-way bilingual program are further grouped as English- or Spanish-dominant within this program. The usual school curriculum is followed, and exposure to the new language develops from 10% exposure for sixth graders, at the beginning of the program, to a target of 50% by grade eight. At King, all teachers are required to teach reading.

Teachers within each cluster have daily opportunity to interact with one another to discuss and plan curriculum, assessment, and instruction. There are monthly department meetings as well. As in all the districts in which we are working, professional development is valued, and a variety of support incentives are offered for teachers to participate both within and outside the district. The dual language program is considered highly successful by the New York State Education Department and was recently one of a few programs selected to "star" in a film about successful instruction.

***International High School.*** International High School is a highly innovative, studied (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Flak, 1995) and reported (e.g., *New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Annenberg Challenge Journal, National Public Radio, NBC News*) high school designed to turn recent teenage newcomers to the United States into academically successful graduates. It is in a commercial area of New York City, a block and a half away from an elevated train line. A small, alternative school (approximately 450 students) within the New York City school system, it uses some rooms in the basement of LaGuardia Community College, constructed 20 years ago. The school is surrounded by tall warehouses and industrial buildings; diagonally across from it is a correctional facility. A renovated factory with retail shops and a self serve Asian cuisine cafeteria are across the street from the college's main door. The building has many open lounge areas where the community college students congregate, and International students move through these areas with ease. International has been a joint venture between the New York City Board of Education and the Board of Higher Education for more than a dozen years.

The school's mission is to enable its students to "develop the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural skills necessary for success in high school, college, and beyond." The school was one of three developed to address the needs of students who have recently moved to the United States. To enroll, students must have been in the country less than four years and have scored below the 21st percentile on the Language Assessment Battery. It is open to students from across New York City, and some students travel on the train for as much as an hour in each direction in order to attend.

It is truly an international school; 48 countries and 37 languages are represented — 39% of the students speak Spanish, 15% Polish, 12% Chinese, 6% Bengali, and each of the other languages represents less than 4% of the total. Eight-four percent of its students receive free or reduced lunch. The school is known for its remarkable achievement record; more than 90% of its students go on to college, and have done so throughout its history. The school is part of the PROPEL (Program Reorganization Promoting Excellence Through Language) effort, and is linked to many educational projects with high aspirations for students, such as Arts Connection, Opportunity to Learn, Center for Collaborative Education, Coalition of Essential Schools, and New Visions for Public Schools.

International offers a restructured schedule and instructional program for the students and a

highly collegial environment for its teachers. Its statement of educational philosophy follows:

1. Limited English proficient students require the ability to understand, speak, and write English with near-native fluency to realize their full potential in an English-speaking society.
2. Fluency in a language other than English must be viewed as a resource for the student, school, and the society.
3. Language skills are most effectively learned in context and when embedded within a content area.
4. The most successful educational programs are those which emphasize rigorous standards coupled with effective support systems.
5. Attempts to group students homogeneously in an effort to make instruction more manageable preclude the way in which adolescents learn best, i.e., from each other.
6. The carefully planned use of multiple learning contexts in addition to the classroom (e.g., learning centers, career internship sites, field trips) facilitates language acquisition and content area mastery.
7. Career education is a significant motivational factor for adolescent learners.
8. The most effective instruction takes place when teachers actively participate in the school decision-making process, including instructional program design, curriculum development, materials selection, faculty hiring, staff training, and peer evaluation.

The students receive a complete high school curriculum that is taught using a content-based English as a second language approach. In addition to their course work, students are required to complete two career education internships in the workplace. They also have an opportunity to attend classes at the community college, and between 200 and 300 students a year take at least one college class.

The school is divided into six interdisciplinary clusters of five teachers and approximately 72 students. These teachers collaboratively develop an integrated curriculum related to large and unifying themes that cut across curriculum areas, such as "Origins, Growth, and Structures" and "Motion." Each cluster studies two themes per year, one each semester. Because students in each cluster speak a number of languages, the target language for reading, writing, and speaking is English (though students who share another language may use that language to help one another).

Faculty teams develop curriculum, student schedules, and projects for assessment within a set of portfolio parameters; faculty collaboration is at the heart of the program. The teams have two

scheduled meetings weekly, one for one hour, the second for 2½ hours. Faculty also serve on a school coordinating council and steering committee. Parents and students are also active in the day-to-day working of the school, both as translators and aides. For example, students serve as clerks and secretaries in the school's office.

Because the program is activity based, involving both activity sheets and collaborative as well as individual work, portfolios provide a record of student work for assessment. Conferences between students and teachers are frequent. Demonstrations and exhibitions are also used for assessment purposes, and students are required to develop and present seven large-scale projects for graduation. Self-reflection about performance is an ongoing aspect of the educational program, thoughtful engagement in the curricular ideas is the norm for all students, and reading, writing, and speaking with and about those ideas in English as soon as possible is considered essential. The level of discussion is quite high, as is the academic success, as evidenced by the students' college acceptance record.

***Tawasentha High School.*** This high school is on the outskirts of a small, poor city that was a thriving mill town during the industrial revolution and has lost business, industry, and jobs throughout the latter part of this century. Few of the residents are college educated, and by and large most parents hope their children will receive a high school diploma. Because it is an aging community with a relatively low tax rate, a growing number of homes have been purchased recently by young, college educated couples, who have higher educational aspirations for their children and demand more of their schools. The district had been quite traditional, with few organizational or pedagogical changes until recent years, when a new superintendent of schools was hired who charged herself with enacting widespread systemic change. From the beginning, she encouraged professional development efforts and has empowered teachers to explore and develop new approaches, such as student centered and activity based learning and high standards-based instruction.

With an initial focus on elementary grade achievement, the new superintendent formed liaisons with university-based faculty and projects, invited "facilitators" into the district, and encouraged teachers to participate in the range of activities available in their professional communities. She also increased parent involvement. All of her initiatives were motivated by a desire to raise the academic goals and achievements of the district's students. These efforts have

paid off, with consistent and steady growth in reading and writing scores in all standardized tests at the elementary levels. At the time we began this study, a new elementary grade language arts curriculum had been developed by teachers and districtwide personnel, scores at this level had risen, and the focus would soon turn to the middle and high schools. Because substantive change had not yet taken place at the high school level, Tawasentha serves as a point of comparison to the other schools we are studying. Other, more-typical schools will be added in future years.

Tawasentha High School was built in the 1960s and houses approximately 900 students. On one side of the campus is a large woods, on the other sides, residential housing. It is close to a state road as well as a main road leading to local malls. Two recent school bonds enabled much needed restoration as well as construction of new classrooms, a telecommunications system, a multimedia center that will permit distance learning (including college courses, virtual field trips, etc.), video-conferencing, and computers for the classrooms. Some 11% of the students receive free or reduced lunch; approximately 97% of the student population is White, 1% Hispanic, and 2% African American. Fewer than 10% of the students are designated as Limited English Proficient.

To help raise the community's involvement in its schools, and to foster higher aspirations for its youngsters, a number of projects were instituted to foster school-community ties and engage parents as partners in educational improvement. For example, during the past seven years, a Career Exploration program has offered 70 internships annually, for students to work in various businesses such as architecture and finance. Another project called EPIC (Every Person Influences Children) engages parents in "parent to parent" workshops where they learn to help their children. Through a Volunteer Service program, students have had opportunities to volunteer at such places as the local police department, medical and senior citizens facilities, and to tutor at school. And Career Pathways offers eight programs (such as pre-engineering, computer aided design, business management, and early childhood) as areas of specialization within the high school curriculum. Through a U.S. Department of Education Goals 2000 grant, local business people, parents, and teachers meet monthly to focus on raising educational standards and improving achievement. The school is famous for its marching band; for many years it has been among the best in the state, as attested to by the many trophies in the lobby. Approximately 81% of the 1997 graduating class went on to two- and four-year colleges in

comparison to 73% in 1993. The percent for demographically similar schools in New York was 78% and for all public schools in New York, 80%.

Along with a new school principal, instructional programs have also been changing. For example, interdisciplinary teams have been instituted in English and social studies. The teachers meet twice weekly for team meetings, where the focus is primarily on students. In addition, teachers have one planning period per day to collaborate on instructional units and reflect on ways to improve student performance. English department meetings, which had taken place infrequently, are now held monthly, and at present a local university colleague has been meeting with the teachers to read recent books and articles and discuss ideas in the profession, to focus on instructional strategies, and to facilitate the development of new curriculum goals. In interdisciplinary teams (social studies and English), some teachers have begun to develop common themes (e.g., heroes) around which to organize their year's work. Most often they work separately, but in parallel, and occasionally team teach.

District workshops, with particular emphasis on raising expectations and increasing student performance, have focused on cooperative learning and standards-based instruction. Teachers are encouraged to attend conferences and workshops, and the principal has set aside professional development grant money for teachers to use. The teaching staff is highly experienced, and had developed set patterns of interacting with their colleagues and teaching their students that we saw beginning to change over the two-year period of our study. Student attendance and post high school goals began to change as well.

Table 1 provides a quick summary of the schools and teachers in the project. It will be helpful in reading the next section, where cross-site features of the teachers' professional lives will be discussed.

**TABLE 1. PROJECT SCHOOLS AND KEY TEACHERS**

| | School | Teacher |
|---|---|---|
| Florida | Ruben Dario Middle School* | Karis MacDonnell<br>Gail Slatko |
| | Highland Oaks Middle School* | Rita Gold<br>Susan Gropper |
| | Miami Edison High School* | Shawn DeNight<br>Kathy Humphrey |
| | Wm. H. Turner Technical Arts High School* | Chris Kirchner<br>Janas Masztal |
| New York | | |
| | Henry O. Hudson Middle School | Cathy Starr<br>Gloria Rosso |
| | Abraham S. King Middle School | Pedro Mendez<br>Donald Silvers |
| | International High School* | Marsha Slater<br>Aaron Listhaus |
| | Tawasentha High School | Margaret Weiss<br>Nicole Scott |

* An asterisk denotes participants' preference to use real names. In such cases, the actual names of schools, project teachers, and their colleagues are used. For the schools not marked with an asterisk, pseudonyms are used throughout this paper.

## FEATURES OF EXCELLENCE

In all of the diversity among these schools and classrooms, are there any common characteristics in the teachers' professional lives that contribute to their ability to deliver exemplary practice that pays off in student achievement? Analyzing patterns across cases, six features emerged in the professional lives of the teachers we studied that contribute to students' success. The schools and districts they teach in nurtured a climate that:

- orchestrated coordinated efforts to improve student achievement
- fostered teacher participation in a variety of professional communities
- created structured improvement activities in ways that offered teachers a strong sense of agency
- valued commitment to the profession of teaching

- engendered a caring attitude that extended to colleagues and students
- fostered a deep respect for lifelong learning

These characteristics were pervasive across levels, in the ways central administrators as well as classroom teachers live their lives and in the features they consider evidence of professional excellence. Essential characteristics of teachers' professional lives that accompanied student learning and achievement in English will be discussed in the sections that follow. A future paper will discuss features of excellent practice.

***1. Coordinating Efforts to Improve Achievement.*** Each of the English programs where students were beating the odds was marked by a highly organized, connected, and overt effort to increase student performance. Although the organizational hierarchies differed from locality to locality, there was always a coordinated effort by teachers and administrators to identify needs, investigate and then develop strategies for improvement, and set into motion a variety of ways to help teachers gain the knowledge to effectively incorporate the new practices into their daily routines. Resources for professional development were made available to teachers in a number of ways, including the hiring of consultants and speakers to discuss and interact about the specific issues of concern, sharing pertinent professional material, and encouraging teachers to attend professional events and identify ideas that seemed promising for the district's or school's concerns. The ideas were shared and debated, leading to a targeted local plan for instruction that would be orchestrated across grades and over time. Thus, during our two years of observation, it was quite clear that the teachers in Miami-Dade County were working on particular targeted reading and writing competencies, and that these foci reverberated across classrooms and grades. Their consistent focus was on student achievement. Their coordinated efforts ensured the coherence between policy and instruction that Cohen (1995) calls for. For example, in all classes we visited, the first five to ten minutes of each class day were devoted to activities that focused on key areas of concern including the structure and uses of English (e.g., grammar, metaphor, affixes). Writing activities, for a wide range of purposes, were interwoven into the ongoing activities of every classroom, and reciprocal teaching as well as critical thinking activities were common. Each of the skills and strategies being taught and practiced had been carefully developed by the teachers and central office staff. This occurred in response to statewide

achievement test results. Whenever test results arrive both teachers and central staff review the results and use these to reflect on their own practices. As will be discussed in a later section, they also stay abreast of issues and ideas in the field, and are aware of the latest as well as tried and true teaching approaches that are highly regarded for getting particular results. When deciding upon new instructional foci, they seek out the experts to learn from so that they can start shaping change in ways they believe will be most appropriate for the Miami-Dade County students. Each year they expect to make some changes — sometimes adjustments, other times more major shifts in curricular goals and instructional approaches.

Even as performance increases they set higher goals. The Dade County Comprehensive Reading Plan is a good example. After a multiyear focus on writing with an aim of improving performance on the Florida Writes! exam (including a plethora of workshops, discussion groups, and the development of model "practice books" for teachers full of test goals, sample items, teaching models, ideas, frameworks, and hints), and a concomitant rise in scores on that exam, the district began to see the need for a comparable re-focusing on reading. Hence a professional effort was undertaken to learn about recent ideas for improving achievement in reading, followed by careful development of the curriculum by a partnership of teachers and supervisors, and the eventual hiring of 18 reading specialists (key teachers from district schools) to help implement the new plan. An effort was made to augment and improve the English curriculum while maintaining consistency with its constructivist and literature-rich orientations. As Norma Bossard, the district's director of English language arts, said, "A good teacher knows that all the teaching you do has to be wrapped up in a whole cloth, so that it is a whole child, the whole day" (Confer transcript, 12/16/96). Among the newer teaching components was a focus on reciprocal teaching, CRISS (Creating Independence Through Student-owned Strategies), and the America Reads tutorial program. After the district staff's own training period, when they were immersed in the plan and its new instructional components, the state and district standards, benchmarks, and assessment tools, the reading specialists began to support teachers in incorporating these foci into their classrooms through workshops, model teaching, and other face-to-face interactions.

Focal skills, knowledge, and activities reverberated within and across classrooms, desired outcomes were made overt, and teachers as well as students received the support they needed to succeed. The comprehensive plan includes some specifically planned opportunities to learn. Here

are some that Bossard described in an address at a Miami Literary Celebration.

> What's in it for the students for whom this plan was designed? . . . In the days of your parents and my parents, when one dropped out of school for whatever reason, it was an economy that could absorb them. They could earn a living by the sweat of their brow, with their hands, and with the strength of their backs. Now the muscle one must use is located between the two ears. So we must educate children from the neck up. . . . And so we have written a plan we hope will take into account all of the opportunities to learn to read that our students deserve. . . . The opportunity to have the time it takes to learn to read well. . . . (Confer transcript, 3/13/98)

Opportunities afforded by the plan include:

- two hours of reading instruction daily, 30 minutes of free reading at school, and a recommended 30 minutes of free reading at home;
- a content area focus (and training) on reading, including feedback through benchmarks and assessment; and
- extended staff development.

The plan is inclusive, reaching into the community. One section of the Comprehensive Reading Plan Document is titled "Roles and Responsibilities." Here, the roles and responsibilities of parents/guardians and technical and administrative staff (including the 18 newly created language arts/reading specialist positions) are described. Also included are collaborative efforts with "universities and community agencies, including tutoring programs to train parents in the use of reading strategies with their children and tutoring services in before- and after-school care programs offered in the schools or by various organizations." The effort is coordinated, consistent, and connected across the living day.

We found that the successful programs in Hudson and King Middle Schools and International High School followed similarly well-coordinated efforts. For instance at Hudson, Hope Anderson, assistant superintendent for curriculum, said,

> We have worked very hard to develop a set of goals. . . . It's not my goals so much as what we can develop and agree to as a team. That doesn't mean I don't have any. What it means is that my ideas become stronger as I hear others think. So we really begin to say what we mean as we question one another . . . . (Rougle interview, 5/13/97).

However, during our first year at Tawasentha, we didn't see this kind of strong, coordinated effort. Instead, individual teachers were instituting changes on their own, as Margaret Weiss did when incorporating rich writing and thinking activities into her classroom that she had learned from the summer workshops she had taken. However, these changes, although extremely well intended and executed, were not in response to a larger programwide perceived need, and so stopped at her classroom door. The instructional foci and the skills and knowledge the students were expected to learn differed dramatically in the two English classes we studied at Tawasentha.

***2. Fostering Teacher Participation in Professional Communities.*** Another important characteristic of the successful English programs we studied was the extent to which participants were members of a number of communities that sustained them in their efforts. Louis, Marks, and Kruse's (1996) study of within-school communities and McLaughlin and Talbert's (1993) study of math collaboratives emphasize the importance of professional community not only on the personal and intellectual lives of teachers but on students. Our study, focusing on the range of professional communities teachers experience, permitted us to follow the variety of professional communities that nourished teachers across our two-year study. We saw administrative and teaching colleagues invite each other into a range of communities at the school, district, and state levels. Participating in these communities is part of the social milieu.

All the teachers we studied in the successful programs are members of several ongoing professional communities (e.g., teams and support groups, curriculum development groups, local reading groups, English and reading affiliates, university-school collaborations) that give them ideas and nourish them in their daily efforts as well as in their grand plans. They also have personal networks that feed into their professional knowledge and interests and provide feedback from a range of perspectives. These networks exist in many different arenas, including national, professional, state, university, local, district, and school (departments and/or teams) and are collegial as well as social. Individual teachers participated in different communities, but whichever they chose, these communities gave them people with whom they could plan and work through problems. The teachers in the excellent programs do not feel they are alone; there is always someone nearby to dream with and commiserate with, and they pass on this sense of community to their students.

Community is the common thread, but what those communities are and how the teachers

interact within them differs. There is no one predominant set of networks that seems to pervade these excellent situations; rather it is the teachers' opportunity to select among a variety of networks to find the ones that work best for them that seems to make the difference. For example, in some cases, cross-disciplinary teams have taken the lead as the major on-site collegial networks, but where they have, disciplinary networks are almost always also sought out to offer grounding in curriculum and achievement.

At Hudson Middle School, cross-disciplinary teams meet daily. They focus in depth on students' well-being and academic progress and also sometimes develop collaborative efforts across subject areas. In addition, all language arts teachers at each grade level meet on a scheduled weekly basis. However, the English teachers sometimes also meet before school, "to plan and to connect." "It's a gift," says Cathy Starr (Rougle field notes, 10/6/96). It is obvious that team planning time was built into Hudson's school schedule, as it was in all the more successful schools. However, the frequency of these scheduled times differed from school to school from once a week to daily.

At Edison, after seeing a particularly interesting lesson in a colleague's class and asking her about the idea, Kathy Humphrey explained, "I combined what I learned in a pilot program with what a colleague taught me about reading strategies. I've had a positive experience with my colleagues. And I get lots of support from [administration]. I need a group of English teachers to work with."

At International, the faculty work in "big idea" interdisciplinary teams that create curriculum, arrange schedules for students and teachers, and develop projects for assessing student performance. Thus the teachers interact on a daily basis, with many opportunities to reflect on their own practice, students' progress, and new ideas. Aaron Listhaus says that the many student teachers and interns who work with them are one of the important ways in which new ideas become points of conversation for the entire team. Overall, an "incredible amount of professional community . . . is . . . built into the schoolwide system. . . ." (Kahr field notes, 5/7/97). When Slater became concerned that the team needed to focus more heavily on the students' literacy development, she brought it to the group. Although it took many months of discussion, a plan was worked out. In addition to their self-selected teaching teams, all the teachers at International belong to peer evaluation teams where, periodically in their career, they review and are reviewed

by each other. The teachers themselves maintain portfolios with self- and peer- evaluations, reflections, goals, and progress.

The teachers we studied also belong to professional organizations and read professional journals. Each is active in one or more of the organizations to which they belong, attending conferences, and also presenting. They usually go to the conferences with colleagues they know, and they meet others there. An integral part of their conference life involves discussing concerns facing the field, new ideas, and approaches in curriculum, instruction, or assessment. For instance, Gloria Rosso and Cathy Starr of Hudson Middle School attended a recent conference of the National Council of Teachers of English, as did their department chair and the just-retired high school department chair. They not only met with us about the project, but also attended many sessions, some alone and some together. Both at the conference and after they returned home, they discussed the ideas they found interesting and relevant to their own situations. Each of these people is also active at the state and local levels, where once again they not only organize and present, but use the time to gather ideas to carry back for professional exchange within their districts and schools.

In addition to these more formal networks, there are also a variety of informal ones. Every one of the teachers we studied has at least one colleague at school, or someone who taught elsewhere, or an interested significant other with whom to share joys, agonies, and ideas that affect instructional plans, decisions, and actions. Each has contact with individuals who make a difference in the ways they think about their subject, their students, and themselves as professionals. Through these interactions they confront philosophical as well as more superficial differences, learn from and challenge each other, and develop their own voices. Take Rita Gold and Susan Gropper at Highland Oaks Middle School, for example; each says the other is her most important colleague. Not only are they members of the same faculty, but they hold theoretical views in common. Louis, Marks and Krause (1996) suggest that shared norms and values are important elements of a schoolwide professional community. Gold and Gropper have grown together as professionals, with each other as well as with the Miami-Dade County English language arts faculty. They collaborate on projects and plan and develop materials for lessons they teach separately. About their relationship, Gold said,

> I knew Susan before I transferred [to Highland Oaks]. . . . I think we're both on the

> same wavelength. There's time for creativity, but the basics must be included. When we work on a unit together, like the literature circles, we bounce off one another. . . . We work better together than on our own. . . . When I moved to ninth grade, Susan shared everything she had with me. . . . We're friends outside of school and have been for many years. She's on my list of top ten teachers I'd love my nephews to have as a teacher. . . . I feel the same way about her as about the people uptown [countywide English language arts staff]" (Ostrowski case report, 5/97)

Gropper says, "[Rita's] creativity and outgoing personality are a perfect match to my more left-brained approach. Together we created units that still prompt a smile. . . . Just talking to each other always generates ideas or concerns that delight and surprise us." (Ostrowski case report, 5/97)

The administrators, too, feel the necessity for participating in communities and see their importance in ongoing professional growth. Marina Garcia was the principal of King Middle School during the first year and a half of our study; she was later promoted to districtwide assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. While at King, she had been a highly collaborative principal, having organized a variety of formal and informal teams, committees, and lunchtime working groups. She and Vera Coleman, the superintendent of schools, had cowritten the proposal for state funds to create the dual language program. To do this they brought groups of colleagues together to read, research, and conceptualize ways in which such a program could work most effectively. The program itself follows the team collaborative structure instituted in the school, and adds the additional programmatic community as well. From its inception, the program was to be not merely collaborative, but communal, with in-group goals, sharing, and articulation. After its inception, Garcia remained a member of this community, along with her many others. Thus, when she arrived in her new office in the central administration building, she was dismayed to see that there was no room for people to meet. She said, "How can I get things going and make change without at least a round table where people can discuss and work ideas, and become a community?" (Langer field notes, 7/31/98). She then led us into a nearby room to show us where her new office, with ample "people space," was being installed.

Another example is the principal of Highland Oaks Middle School, who had been the assistant principal until our study began. His teachers had begun to organize into critical friends

groups with their colleagues, with the support of the previous principal. He had supported their efforts because he felt it his job to do so, "but I was thinking, this isn't really going to do anything. But we're going to do it. The boss [the previous principal] wants to do it. . . . But I slowly felt changes." As his involvement increased, he voiced a growing appreciation for professional communities of his own:

> I'm more of a nuts and bolts person. . . . I'm not much into the feelings of education experience. We went to a thing this summer for national school reform faculty, and we went to a week-long session. I learned what a critical friends group is all about. My critical friends group is a high school principal in Seattle, a high school principal in California, and a middle school principal in Texas. She and I talk all the time (email) — the guy in Seattle all the time too. . . . What we do as administrators, we bounce [ideas] off each other. . . . I came back really rejuvenated. . . . I had the best time . . . and really learned a lot about protocols, and being able to work through problems with colleagues, and understanding how to give hot and cold criticism, and all that good stuff. (Langer interview, 9/26/96)

About his teachers' experiences with critical friends groups, he says, "What it's done for this faculty, is just given them more of a feeling of being on the cutting edge of a new reform that's going on nationwide. That they're a part of it. And now the critical friends group is an avenue for them to talk about it." (Langer interview, 9/26/96).

In turn, students in these schools become part of a community of learners, with people to turn to for knowledge and support. They have a sense of themselves as learners, responsible for their own choices and progress. Again the principal:

> [They're] just opening their classrooms a lot more. Not just to other teachers, but also letting the kids feel much more a part of classes, as opposed to the way I was going through this school: you're sitting there and hearing the teacher. Now it's group work, projects. You know . . . put it in the lap of the kids. (9/26/96)

Kathy Humphrey spends a great deal of time at the beginning of each school year helping her high school students learn to listen to each other, work together, appreciate the various perspectives and knowledge others bring, and become a community of learners. Throughout the year, she reorganizes her room so that students can sit at group tables for the frequent small group work or put their chairs into a semi-circle to enable maximum interaction during whole-class discussion groups. This procedure is echoed in all of the classrooms in our more successful schools, even when, as in Janas Masztal's class, space is in short supply.

When asked about why she thought there was such an unusual degree of agreement in theoretical views across the teachers with whom we are working in Miami-Dade County, English Language Arts Director Bossard said, "Everyone within the [county supervisory] team works together. We create and brainstorm together. From the beginning, we relied on each other" (Langer field notes, 9/97). And Sallie Snyder, the secondary school English language arts supervisor in Miami-Dade County, said, "It isn't one person's vision. We work together. We know what good teaching looks like. We've melded our philosophies into one workable paradigm [and grown together over time]. There is a high level of trust and respect; each person knows that someone else knows or can do something better than themselves. In general all of us consider that sort of collaborative effort crucial in reaching our desired goals." (Confer interview, 10/2/96). Both administrators see themselves as part of a much larger community effort, one that started before them and will carry on after they leave. Layers of history past and present continue, as with family.

And it is too easy to assume that these communities once in place, simply sustain themselves. Here is an email from Karis MacDonnell, in mid January 1998, soon after her winter break.

> I have been discontented with things in general lately and have been wondering why. I realized that I wasn't teaching [at the college] first semester and I wasn't doing as much reading or exchanging as many ideas with others as usual. I think I have neglected to reflect!
>
> Over the holidays I had to plan and write a new (for me) course in curriculum for elementary teachers — that got my brain going! Then I had some conversations with my mentor. My course started, student teacher arrived full time, and Tanya [Manning, field researcher] arrived, and all of a sudden I'm having professional conversations with myself and others again.
>
> I feel much better about myself & my teaching now! Isn't that weird? Just a couple of months of "isolation" and I could tell the difference. . . . But it also made me think about colleagues who NEVER do the things I neglected to do that got me off track. They must feel terrible about themselves and their profession. But, they don't realize what they're missing. . . .

Louis, Marks, and Kruse (1996) describe professional communities in part as places where not only collaboration, but what they call "deprivatized practice" occurs. While these elements typify the more successful programs, teachers' experiences are vastly different at Tawasentha, where a sense of professional community was marked by its absence. During the first year of our

study, we learned that the teachers rarely interacted around professional issues. Lunch talk, even for those teachers who ate together, rarely focused on discussion of ideas or activities in the field. The newly instituted social studies and English cross-disciplinary efforts stimulated little collaborative planning and discourse, with parallel rather than coordinated curriculum and instruction (see Adler & Flihan, 1997) more the norm. Further, the English teachers rarely met as a department, and then twice a year "only for business that must get done." We saw no coordination or sharing of ideas. Margaret Weiss, who wanted to keep up with knowledge in the field and support her students' writing and high literacy development, had spent some summers taking intensive workshops. She said she loved them, but complained that although she used many ideas in her own classes, she had no professional sustenance during the year; she shared her ideas with no one, within the school or elsewhere. She did not develop new friendships with her summer colleagues; she had no sense of community within or outside the school despite the fact that district and school money was available for professional visits and ventures, and Jane Hatfield, the superintendent was supportive of change.

Nicole Scott, on the other hand, showed little interest in changing her preferred practices, and seemed unaware her old stand-bys were not working. She said she had attended conferences and workshops, some by choice and some mandated. "They sort of rejuvenate you and give you some new ideas . . . an opportunity to interact with colleagues. . . . I came away with a couple of good writing assignments [from Nancie Atwell] that I still use" (Rougle interview, 2/24/97). However, for a planned observation, for instance, she had her students engage in a vocabulary lesson, listening to a commercially prepared reel-to-reel tape recording of words being read in succession both in and out of sentences. They were to mark the correct definitions in their accompanying workbooks. No discussions of the meanings nor of etymological clues to look for were offered. During this work time, Scott helped students make selection decisions when they seemed to need help. She did not offer instruction into ways to understand what the words meant or how they could be used. After the lesson, she remarked that the vocabulary program has been one of her favorite activities for many years. She did not reflect on her students' compliant — but lack of cognitive — engagement with the task. When asked about interaction with colleagues, she said, "There's not a lot of time in the school day for interaction. . . ." (Rougle interview, 2/24/97).

All this began to shift during the second year, when a consultant was brought into the English department as a change agent, with the goal of raising expectations as well as achievement. She was a local university professor charged with stimulating the teachers to read, critique, and contemplate ways to improve students' performance. Department meetings were re-instituted for these purposes, and after several months the quality of professional interaction rose substantially during these meetings. Professional ideas the teachers had read or heard about during the past ten years began to surface, and inquiry into effective practice was beginning.

***3. Creating Activities That Provide Teachers with Agency.*** A third characteristic of the successful programs was that the participants have an ongoing sense of agency; they can effect change. The teachers we studied all feel they can shape the kind of work they do — they develop curriculum; solve problems; make decisions and set directions in curriculum and instruction in their department, school, or district; help choose new colleagues; and pass this sense of purposeful action on to their students. Each of the schools has adopted at least some components of school-based management and shared decision-making. In fact, Miami-Dade County was one of the first school systems in the nation to decentralize (Fiske, 1991). They decided the key to better schools was the professionalization of teachers, providing them with a sense of ownership and responsibility for what goes on in their schools. We saw the teachers in Dade County initiate their own proposals with administration support, and collaborate on those initiated by other teachers and administrators, with full confidence that if granted they would be enacted in ways that were compatible with the teachers' goals. Agency was given and accepted. For example, in October of our first year, Rita Gold wrote the following email,

> I just came from a DCCTE [Dade County Council of Teachers of English] meeting. Susan and I spent all day in the conference room writing for the Blue Ribbon School of Excellence application. We'll be out of class on Wednesday too. Since Friday is a teacher workday, that pretty much messes up the week.

Rita Gold and Susan Gropper and their principal felt their contribution to the application was important and that their efforts could help the school earn an award they all considered important. That same October, Kathy Humphrey wrote,

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> I have something for you to look over. I wrote a proposal to support the testing results for both the Florida Writes! exam and HSCT [High School Competency Test]. The state, I guess, mandated that an allocation of $10 per student be given to the Education Excellence Committee to spend in support of the school improvement plan. That means a nice chunk that could allow us to do something differently. So here we go! The following is my vision of what it could be . . . .

Similarly, International High School was founded on an ethic of professional cooperation. The entire staff shares major administrative responsibilities through a committee structure. The Staff Development Committee plans and oversees the in-service staff development program. The Faculty Planning Personnel Committee interviews and selects new staff members, and administers the peer evaluation program. The Curriculum Committee coordinates the ongoing curriculum development of the school.

The teachers in these schools are also involved in curriculum development. In many cases this is a continuing activity, involving selecting cross-cutting themes and relevant instructional material and activities. This is especially true in schools with extensive cross-disciplinary programs, such as in King Middle School, Turner Tech, and International High School. Whether they are involved in developing lessons for cross-disciplinary efforts or planning ways to offer the high-level instruction that is most appropriate for their students, the teachers' decisions shape important aspects of their curriculum and instructional offerings.

Not only were the teachers *given* agency, but they *assumed* it in response to their own desire to change. For example, Chris Kirchner co-wrote and received an Annenberg Foundation two-year grant to start critical friends groups at Turner Tech. The money was earmarked for paying substitutes so that the groups of teachers could meet no less than once a month. Kirchner was fully encouraged by her principal. The critical friends groups, once in place, were further contributors to the entire faculty's sense of agency. Beyond this, Kirchner wrote proposals and received a number of small grants to develop instructional approaches. These were well received by the district and she was invited to share her work at district workshops. She also, along with Rita Gold, Susan Gropper, and Janas Mazstal, was given a sense of agency by the district when she was invited to help write competencies for the newly developing competency-based curriculum. Their input had a real impact on not only what their own students studied, but what all the students in the district were exposed to. In fact, Kirchner said the competencies were

written specifically enough yet broadly enough to provide a common set of instructional goals, without denying teachers agency or creativity to achieve the goals in ways that worked for themselves and their students.

This sense of agency extends to all levels within the school community. Bossard said, "When I began, Zelda [Glazer, the previous English language arts director, now retired, who they credit with creating an excellent department] said, 'You are the expert,' so I went out and talked to everyone and learned everything" (Langer field notes, 10/97). It is this ethic — that one's effort will be useful, will lead to some end — that permeates the teachers' lives and gives them purpose. The sense of agency is transmitted to the students as well. At International they believe:

> Committee membership [of the faculty] is crucial to our teaching approach. It enables teachers to experience the collaborative process that they expect of their students. They can more readily serve as role models. (PROPEL handbook, p.3)

Collaborative work and inquiry learning are at the center of classroom approaches. In literature, for example, the students in the classrooms we studied are given ownership for developing, explaining, and defending their interpretations, while they are supported by needed instruction from the teacher. Karis MacDonnell, at Ruben Dario Middle School, gave the following assignment on *The Yearling* by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings:

> Sometimes a particular person has a strong influence on other people. There are several such characters in *The Yearling*. Think about some of the characters you are meeting in *The Yearling*. Think about the ways one person affects others in the story. Choose one of the strong characters from this book and explain how that person's influence affects others in the story. (MacDonnell email, 5/8/97)

This sense of agency pervades MacDonnell's middle school journalism class as well. Here, the students are the editors and assistant editors of the school newspaper. For example, one day when we entered, a student editor was using the overhead to make an outline of the deadlines that needed to be met. The information was being provided to her by the various editorial departments. They had a newspaper to get out and would make sure it was not merely on time, but also interesting and well-written. MacDonnell's role was minimal at this time, although her efforts to help the students become good writers were both helpful and instructive. She feels their agency motivates and sharpens their learning. What is even more surprising about the students' agency is that the editor at the time was from Nicaragua, and it was only her third year in the

United States. The newspaper has won awards, and Ruben Dario has itself won many awards recognizing the school as a whole. When asked why Ruben Dario gets these awards against all odds, MacDonnell said, "Because they can." It is this sense that permeates the atmosphere, and leverages achievement: the sense of giving and having agency because the participants are capable. They will do what they can and learn what they must.

Gail Slatko, also at Ruben Dario, begins most lessons by developing the knowledge, skills, and understandings the students will need to carry out the new activity. Because the activity always involves problem solving and learning, she says she then becomes "an orchestrator. I let the kids take over and work on their own" (Manning field notes, 10/97). To encourage the students to take ownership for their learning, the teachers we studied use aspects of personal reflection as well as peer response. They have the students react to, check, and make suggestions in response to their classmates' writing, both in terms of content and organization and in terms of surface features such as spelling and grammar.

At Turner Tech, students in the Academy of Finance develop their own stock portfolios and track them over time. Students write their reasons for each purchase and chronicle what they are learning. They write predictions about how their stocks will do and then record how things actually develop. One day local stock brokers came to meet with Kirchner's class, but beforehand the students, in small groups, had planned for the event by preparing questions, predicting what they might learn, and deciding how best to use the brokers' time to their advantage. The sense of agency developed in these schools helps students take responsibility for their own learning, motivating them as they learn how to analyze situations and then organize, plan, and take action in appropriate ways.

This differs significantly from Tawasentha where, despite Superintendent Hatfield's support for teachers' involvement and ownership for change, a sense of agency has not permeated the professional environment. For example, when discussing support for instructional change, Margaret Weiss spoke of the social studies and English team-teaching effort that had been instituted the prior year. She had participated:

> Last year, my social studies teacher and I were able to block. We blocked four days a week, and on Fridays we did normal time. The administration supported us, and it was wonderful. We decided to move up as tenth grade teachers to pilot the tenth grade team to see if students would do better on the Global Studies Regents having

> the same teacher. Because I worked with Laura, I moved up with her. What was very disappointing is we get the mouth talk that yes, we support you and we support blocking, but the way they scheduled us, we can't block this year. And that's a disappointment to us and to the students. It's really easy to lose heart . . . ." (Transcript, 2/11/98).

***4. Valuing Commitment to Professionalism.*** The fourth characteristic of successful programs is the pervading sense of professional identity each participant displays. The teachers we studied are proud to be educators; they think of themselves as professionals, and carry their professional selves with them wherever they go. They are in touch with the larger world and with the concerns of others in regard to education. They consider themselves spokespersons for the profession. Norma Bossard, English language arts director in Miami-Dade County, said:

> A characteristic of us [the language arts department] is that any of us would go back to the classroom tomorrow morning and do a good job and be happy there. We're not out because we don't want to be teachers. That's one of the things I really attribute to Zelda [Glazer] is defining the role of the department that way. I always thought they picked us because they knew we could do good staff development and remain teachers. They knew we could go back to the classroom. (Confer interview, 12/16/97)

It is this sense of being a teacher as well as speaking for teachers that identifies all the professionals we studied. In an interview, Glazer recalled,

> When I first got the job as supervisor, the whole set-up downtown [in the central office] was different. One of the people I worked with was very smart, very knowledgeable, very current in her information. There was nothing ossified about her. But at the time everyone accepted the bureaucratic paradigm which was you didn't go into a school unless you were invited. . . . They don't want you. . . . So downtown, they were not connected to the body of the patient. And so it was a big jump when we decided that was no way to function. But getting into classrooms, being close to teachers was my ideal. . . . The other thing that helped was the Bay Area Writing Project, the National Writing Project [which was used as a model for their annual writing institute, now renamed the Zelda Glazer Writing Institute]. In our view it has become a learning, not just writing, institute, for everyone. (Confer interview, 12/16/97)

The teachers similarly maintain a professional stance, keep up with their fields, and continually hone their own skills. Norma Bossard and all of the English language arts supervisors subscribe to a number of journals and magazines. They also expect the teachers to do the same.

"We make it real important to them to join one of the organizations. . . . We let them know that's the standard — to be part of the group we've got, that you're a professional and a professional joins the professional organizations and reads the literature" (Confer case report, 2/3/98). They also share their knowledge with each other. For example, Susan Gropper at Highland Oaks had adapted reciprocal teaching strategies (initially introduced into the ongoing professional discussion within the English language arts program) to improve her students' reading comprehension before these strategies were incorporated into the new Comprehensive Reading Plan, but she also shared this expertise with other teachers in the district via workshops.

The teachers we studied mentor pre-service teachers and new teachers. Take Cathy Starr and Gloria Rosso at Hudson Middle School as an example. Both are excellent and experienced teachers: Starr has been teaching at Hudson for 26 years while Rosso has been there for six years, after having taught in New York City for 17 years. From the moment Rosso arrived, Starr assumed a professional responsibility to help her make a comfortable transition. She invited Rosso into her classroom and to presentations and workshops she was giving, both at school and at local, state, and national conferences. Rosso, on the other hand, has student teachers in her classroom and with care and guidance, she helps them gain a sense not only of the curriculum, classroom organization, and instructional approaches and interactions, but also of the many complex roles an English teacher plays. Rosso serves as a role model not only for her students but also for the many student teachers she cares for and helps grow as professionals.

The teachers feel that they are experts in their profession and take pleasure in sharing what they know with others. Most of the teachers with whom we are working are involved in some aspect of professional development. Some teach at local colleges (Karis MacDonnell, Marsha Slater, Pedro Mendez, Margaret Weiss). Others are frequent speakers at conferences and workshops (Gail Slatko, Karis MacDonnell, Chris Kirchner, Cathy Starr, Marsha Slater, Susan Gropper, Rita Gold, Shawn DeNight, Gloria Rosso, Margaret Weiss, Kathy Humphrey). Some have won teacher of the year and other excellence awards (Marsha Slater, Cathy Starr, Shawn DeNight, Gail Slatko, Chris Kirchner, Janas Masztal, Karis McDonnell, Rita Gold). And others are or have been officers of professional organizations (Cathy Starr, Gail Slatko, Karis McDonnell, Rita Gold, Susan Gropper), or have published in professional journals (Cathy Starr, Gloria Rosso, Kathy Humphrey, Gail Slatko, Chris Kirchner, Marsha Slater, Rita Gold). They

think of education as a worthy and important profession, and place their professional obligations extremely high on their list of priorities. For example, Cathy Starr had accepted an invitation and long been listed as a speaker at a Teacher Center conference. By chance, this turned out to be the long-awaited day her daughter-in-law gave birth to the first child of her only son. Cathy Starr, without hesitation, arrived at the conference, gave an excellent talk, and only then rushed to the hospital to see her first grandchild. When asked about it later, she said simply that she felt it was her professional obligation to keep her commitment.

The school administrators also treat their teachers as professionals, not only providing time for team and planning meetings, but also released time with pay for professional meetings, conferences, and other professional invitations their teachers may receive, such as working on state standards or test development committees. They do this because they know that by treating their teachers as professionals, the district will ultimately benefit. As Eija Rougle suggests, "teachers put some ideas [from these meetings and conferences] in their minds as a seed bed for possible future use" (Rougle case report, 9/14/97). Or as Rita Gold put it, they are "interested in reviewing ideas, and learning about how the field is going" (Ostrowski interview, 1/8/97). They use their experiences to create and recreate a professional knowledge base, and they use this to help them enact what they believe their students need. As first rate professionals, the teachers are also inventive. As Shawn DeNight wrote:

> Many times in teaching we have disruptions in our long range instructional plans (field trips, testing, pep rallies, etc.). If it is possible to bend the disruption so it fits in some way with my instructional plans, then I feel I have triumphed. I have wanted to teach my kids how to write a character analysis based on something we read in class. The theme of our field trip (Inter-Generational Issues Forum: Senior Citizens and Teens Discuss What It Means to Be a Liberal or Conservative) lent itself to interviewing. This would force my students to interact with seniors. But what to do with the interviews? How about a character sketch? The writing follows a similar format to the persuasive essay, something my kids worked on a couple of months ago. It will also be a nice segue into the character analysis in the sense that both types of writing establish a thesis that a person has a certain character trait, and then goes on to provide support for the thesis. For the character sketch, the evidence that a person was liberal, conservative, or moderate came from the interviews the students conducted. With the character analysis, which we will begin in a couple of weeks when we finish *Romeo and Juliet*, the evidence

> comes from the things the character has said or done in the play. (DeNight email, 4/27/97)

While DeNight is clearly inventive, the kind of inventiveness he exhibits is shaped by his overall professionalism, his belief that education can and should work despite asides and intrusions. He considers it his role to make sure it does so. There is a pride in being teachers that is exuded in the successful programs. While the teachers we studied at Tawasentha were professional, they seemed to be less activist in participating in broader changes within their department and school than the others. For example, Superintendent Hatfield told us that when she began her job, she began a process that engaged multiple constituencies in identifying their goals for Tawasentha.

> With Goals 2000, I was able to design a focus for the district . . . a systemic reform effort that was going to begin to think about the students, first of all a student focus — looking at the fact that the students go through a system, and that the system has to be one that provides some continuity, consistency, and a focus for what you want the students to be able to do and understand when they graduate. So given these broad based committees aligning their thinking, we were able to then set up building planning teams, shared decision-making teams, and when we designed the blueprint for how they would operate, the focus would be on student results. . . . The goal of those committees was to improve students results by looking at data that existed and beginning to suggest ways to improve them. They could decide anything they wanted that related to that, as long as they had gotten the data and information to make the decisions. To support the buildings I also felt we needed three support teams: curriculum, instruction, and assessment. So we began with curriculum committees. We started mostly at the elementary level because it appeared that I was going to have to be more persuasive in terms of a new vision at the secondary level. . . . Every year I sit down with the principals to see if there's evidence the project leaders truly change theory to practice. . . . There has to be demonstration of change in the classroom. . . . Because it seemed that at the high school our own could not make the change, I've begun to bring in outside consultants. (Rougle interview, 12/16/97)

Margaret Weiss, who had been a member of some of these change-agent committees, including a summer committee to develop integrated social studies and English curriculum, had also invited some writing process specialists to meet with the teachers in her school. She describes the superintendent as "a visionary leader" who is "aiming toward more collaborative

teaching and more discovery and collaborative learning for the students" (Rougle interview, 1/29/97). Because these were views she shared, she continued to foster a sense of agency within her own classroom. For example, after showing her class a movie of *Henry the Fifth*, she asked them to work in groups to write collaborative essays discussing the kind of play they considered it to be (an idea generated by her professional exposure to process writing). The students worked in groups of four, and were particularly collaborative conceptualizing and writing their papers. She felt the ownership the students took for the finished piece strongly contributed to the quality of the essays. By the second year, Nicole Scott began to change as well. We saw more writing process activities in her classroom, and increased agency for her students. She said, "When I've tried collaborative writing, they seem more intent on revising the piece to meet their standards than when they're working on a piece themselves. . . . I think one thing, I don't want to say responsibility, but taking command of their own writing and coming up with generating their own topics to write about. I have to admit I haven't done a great deal with that. But I'm trying to do more this year." (group discussion, 2/11/98)

***5. Engendering Caring Attitudes.*** The fifth cross-cutting characteristic of these exemplary programs is that they share an ethos of caring (Noddings, 1984). The teachers we studied care about their students, and about the people with whom they work. In some schools, they hug each other a lot, in others they show affection with each other more subtly. They ask each other how things are going, and go beyond small talk at the coffee machine. Sallie Snyder's welcome back to school letter in Miami-Dade County at the end of the summer began like this:

> Dear Exalted Ones,
>
> The warmest and most sincere welcome to all of you as the 1997-1998 school year begins. I need not tell you that we are also beginning year two of the "Langer Project" and with it the joys and stresses I know that brings.
>
> The letter ends with: "My best regards and greatest admiration to all." (Snyder letter, 8/29/97)

Despite her jocular language, the teachers know Snyder cares about them, appreciates them, and knows that they are involved in a professional commitment that costs them — in time and comfort. The letter is one small act of caring among countless others in these schools.

The teachers appreciate expressions of caring and extend this ethos to their interactions with students. For example, Pedro Mendez, from King Middle School, said about his Spanish proficient students in the dual language program,

> Kids need to be comfortable. They need to see me as a resource and I hope that's what's happening. Not only that they see me as an authoritative figure, that they see me as a mentor, as a role model. When I walk out in the hall they can say, 'Well, that's Mr. Mendez. He's my teacher. He's what I would like to be when I grow up.' (Cruz case report, 3/98)

When he teaches, Mendez maintains a very caring attitude toward his students in the way he looks at them, tries to draw them out, and guides them to engage with the topics being taught. Once, at the end of the day, he found that something had been taken from his office. He didn't need the item, and he could easily have ignored the incident. Instead, he questioned others about who had been in his office, and when he thought he knew who the culprit was, he got into his car and drove to the main street, where he found the culprit. He drove the boy back to school, spoke with him, and then took him to the principal's office, explaining in a parental manner, "It isn't only important for what you did now, but you must never do something like this again."

Each school holds team meetings where they discuss students who are absent, who may be in trouble academically, socially, or in other ways, and they try to work out ways to help, before problems escalate. They bring students in, and families too. They go the extra mile to try to make things work, and students and parents know it. To create a "family" feel, most of the schools adorn their entrance ways and hallways with photographs of past students, field trips, and family and community members engaged in projects. Parents are encouraged to visit classrooms to become familiar with the programs and to volunteer to help. And all the schools have a range of community, parent, and teacher committees, advisory groups, and common welfare and social interest groups that create a sense of belonging.

The teachers we studied in these schools care about the curriculum as well as their students' learning, constantly monitor their students' grades, and are responsive to signals from their students that changes in instructional approaches or activities are needed. One of Turner Tech's standards is to help their students develop more relationships with adults, especially those in

business and industry. We observed one meeting when 11 industry guests (financial planners and brokers) spent a morning with the students in the Academy of Finance. The agreement was that they would return, soon. The guests felt valued, not overwhelmed, and so did the students. Many of the brokers invited interested students to contact them if they could be of help. As part of the process, the students used reflection sheets to evaluate the visitors' helpfulness to them personally.

While the human interaction at Tawasentha was respectful, among and between both teachers and students, the school had a different feel from the others. The entrance ways and hallways were bare and quiet. The friendly interactions, evidence of class projects and activities, and a sense of the school's inhabitants were absent. This was not the case in Weiss' classroom, where questions about how students were feeling and warm interactions were the norm. Scott, however, remained a more distant teacher, holding herself more apart. The constant student-case discussions and team efforts that prevailed at the other schools also seemed absent, although problems seemed to be dealt with in other ways. During the second year, Scott told us about the faculty room,

> We decided to personalize it, and we all brought in artificial flowers just to make it look less sterile. . . . At the end of the year we do a camping day, just the female members. And we do sometimes talk about work, but we just have a good time too. Over winter break there's a group going to the culinary institute in my car for the day. (Langer field notes, 2/98)

***6. Fostering Respect for Learning.*** Lastly, the teachers we studied in the successful schools are learners themselves, in their personal as well as professional lives. They are truly the lifelong learners they want their students to become. For instance, Donald Silvers, a teacher in King's dual language program, says, "Well, growing up, some of my family members were teachers. I've always respected teaching as a profession. I always liked school. I had a positive, very positive school career. I love going to classes. I love learning" (Cruz interview, 4/24/98).

The teachers are exposed to a plethora of opportunities to keep in touch with the latest thinking in their field. However, it seems that what typifies this feature for excellence is the *range* of opportunities and the manner in which teachers are invited to intellectually engage with

and respond to the ideas more than any one kind of learning activity. Each district invites guest speakers and consultants to interact with the teachers. Someone, be it a curriculum supervisor, department chair, principal, or fellow teacher duplicates and shares pertinent journal articles. In class, talk about learning pervades their days. Their students join in the conversation, talk about their own learning, share it with each other; they consider themselves learners too.

The teachers have learned to be computer literate, and almost all have computers in their classrooms or in a media center. The two least computer-rich schools (King and Tawasentha) are presently increasing their capacity. While the teachers know about a range of ways to use the Internet as a resource, they make use of it in their classes only after they have had time to see its use as an enhancement to their students' learning. Gloria Rosso, for instance, was teaching a research unit on names. The students were learning to use a variety of materials to search the history of their first and last names. In addition to the many books on surnames and first names she had brought into her classroom, she also taught her students how to use the Internet to research genealogies. The students each developed their own genealogies, but shared knowledge about how to get the information, use the technology, and gain research skills. In another instance, Shawn DeNight was selected as one of a few teachers in the United States to visit the Ukraine as part of an educators team. He brought letters from his students to the students he would meet and planned to encourage a letter exchange across the countries. As excellent teachers, they understand that technology is important for students to learn to use, both as a developing skill and also for its plethora of offerings. A group of Miami-Dade County teachers participated in a district sponsored hands-on workshop on using the World Wide Web. The teachers were:

> . . . enthusiastically cautious about the possibilities for Internet applications in their classrooms, concerned about how they will teach their students to discriminate among the sources available to them, how the students will learn to extract and categorize the available information, how they will learn to weave their information into a coherent whole, how to teach proper citations from electronic databases, and the need for appropriate higher literacy skills. (Confer field notes, 5/97)

Even as they air their concerns and hold its use on the back burner, they are constructive.

Beyond in-service and other professional development offered to them, they go to conferences and meetings, take courses, and belong to groups. The topics not only deal with education, but a range of issues and ideas that help them grow as individuals. In Miami-Dade County, for example, teachers are given in-service credit for participating in adult readers' groups. Here, they meet in people's homes on a rotating basis, and talk about books that have been selected by the participants. Norma Bossard believes that love of reading is infectious, and that "some of it will rub off on the children." Describing one such group, Susan Gropper said,

> Last Friday our reading group met to discuss *The Color of Water*. What fun it was to share our interpretations, complaints, praise, and personal experiences. I enjoyed telling my students about it in the hope that they might be inspired to discover the pleasure of reading and sharing themselves. (Gropper email, 10/20/96)

Not only does this activity offer an opportunity for teachers across the disciplines to get to know each other, it sometimes also engages them in discussing content and strategies they might share with their students. Using this model, Rita Gold has developed a very popular and well-attended Borders Book Club for Highland Oaks middle grade students.

In their professional learning, the teachers place themselves in the stream of new knowledge in their field, and weigh and rework ideas in ways that make sense for their students. Shawn DeNight, for example, attended the summer Writing Institute, an intensive and highly empowering two week informal mixture of speakers, workshops, and sharing.

> The Writing Institute, for me, is like a banquet where I just feast. . . . You always hear new people, and it's just time to sit and reflect, and talk about the way you teach. I mean, I remember just two years ago, we thought about creating our own little mini writing institute here at Edison for teachers in other departments. We called it the Edison Model Institute, and we had some of the various presenters from the Writing Institute come, and then our teachers taught other teachers, just to promote reading and writing in the classroom. So I do think they have that influence. You know I've benefitted from them. (Manning interview, 1/8/97)

DeNight often uses models in his classroom. "What better way to make things concrete than to use models?" Thus, when he saw some poems used as models in a summer writing institute workshop, he knew they would work for his own class. Using some poems from the workshop,

and additional ones of his selection, he developed a unit that introduced poems and some of the literary elements such as imagery, simile, alliteration, and personification that made the poems work. Using the poems they studied as models, the students wrote their own poetry, and served as peer editors. After much feedback to several drafts, they proudly keyed their poems into the computer and printed them out. As with the other teachers we studied, DeNight chose ideas that he felt could help him reach his own goals for student achievement, that fit into his curriculum, and that could be shaped to fit his teaching approach.

The teachers also let their students know when they are using what they have learned in their professional development. For example, Gail Slatko said to her class as she began a writing activity, "You remember the writing course I told you about that I took this summer. This is something I learned." (Manning field notes, 10/97)

As students, the teachers also reflect on themselves in the role of learner and gain new ideas for their own teaching. DeNight told us that for several years he has been taking a carpentry course, "you know, fancy carpentry." And he tells his students about the course and his progress with what he is building at the time. He said,

> One day it hit me, that as a student in that class I was learning about activity theory. You know, what it's like to be a learner in a real activity setting and what it does for how you understand things. And so I told my class about it and how we needed to work with activities too, and they'd see the difference." (Langer field notes, 9/23/96)

By year two, Tawasentha had most of the parts in place, but was still far from the cohesive learning community Jane Hatfield wanted so much to achieve. But this too was beginning to change. When she began as superintendent, professional development had not been a focus at Tawasentha — neither professional days for conferences nor invited speakers. Occasionally articles were distributed. By the end of our two years, the teachers were reading a variety of books and articles and interacting about the ideas. A consultant was meeting with the teachers on a monthly basis, engaging in book talks about professional books and articles and discussing instructional approaches and activities. The teachers were beginning to act as learners, to overtly seek professional knowledge, and share their own ideas.

Overall, Hatfield was doing a great deal to change the sociocognitive context of the school district, affecting ideas and images of change by developing overlapping communities of professionals and parents to look beyond the usual — to read, research, discuss and also set new goals and processes. Her leadership encompassed the characteristics we have seen at work in the more successful schools. And by the end of our project, changes in goals as well as performance had begun. She assured us she plans to keep "plugging and pushing. . . . Matter of fact, in the next five years we'll see a tremendous change in the high school" (Rougle interview, 1/18/98).

## DISCUSSION

From our studies thus far, we have seen evidence that it is the six characteristics working in concert that seem to make the difference; every school we studied that was performing better than comparable ones exhibited all six characteristics: 1) coordinating efforts to improve achievement, 2) fostering teacher participation in professional communities, 3) creating activities that provide teachers with agency, 4) valuing commitment to professionalism, 5) engendering caring attitudes, and 6) fostering respect for learning.

Overall, the teachers we studied in schools that are beating the odds are in touch with their students, their profession, their colleagues, and society at large. And they use these differing contexts to gain knowledge and sensitivity to shape their curriculum, instruction, and assessment efforts in disciplinary and societally responsive ways that work for their students. The knowledge and experiences gained in their wide professional arena affect the classroom context and their students' learning and achievement in at least three ways:

a) transported ideas: Ideas and activities with which they come into contact "fit" what an individual teacher has already been doing or searching for and is being used in a manner and classroom setting that is not too dissimilar from the teacher's own. Although the activity may change over time, the initial "match" permitted an easier try-on.

b) seed-bedded ideas: Ideas and activities interest teachers as potentially useful and are, as Cathy Starr says, "put on the back burner" to be used in a variety of ways at some later time. These ideas are rarely used as initially presented, but become part of an integrated teacher-constructed approach, theory, activity, or framework that becomes part of the teacher's knowledge or action repertoire over time.

c) rejected: Ideas and activities are rejected and viewed as falling outside the theoretical and pedagogical realm of what the teacher thinks is either useful or appropriate.

In all three cases, the teachers never work in a vacuum, either in gaining the ideas, discussing them, gathering feedback in understanding or reconstruing them, or even in rejecting them. It is through constant exposure to and filtering through both the broad and distant as well as closer-to-home professional contexts that teachers maintain the professional knowledge, skill, and techniques they use to help their students learn and achieve in English. However, it is because they constantly air their concerns and reactions to ideas in the professional arena in the ways described above that they are able to work through the centripetal tensions and maintain common vision.

Much call for educational reform has focused on changing the teacher, but this research suggests a need to change the setting, what Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia (in press) call the "activity setting." This setting, from a sociocognitive perspective (Langer, 1987; 1995), includes the larger educational system within which decisions are made and goals are set that affect how teachers behave and grow as professionals, and thus create the educational cultures within which students learn. It was adherence to a sociocognitive framework throughout the study (questions, design, procedures, and analyses) that permitted us to demonstrate ways in which an understanding of teachers' professional environments can enhance our understanding of ways to improve student learning and achievement.

The findings from this study, identifying and describing characteristics of teachers' professional lives that seem to make a difference in student learning, provide models of implementation within the embedded contexts McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) consider as a strategic site for systemic reform, simultaneously addressing their three components: content, students, and teacher. The findings also provide further models of ways in which teachers can

learn the new practices Peterson, McCarthy, and Elmore (1996) and Elmore, Peterson, and McCarthy (1996) say are critical in order for school restructuring to work. As they, and Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) conclude, redesign efforts need to be understood and embraced by teachers and carried into the daily activities of the classroom through a conceptually integrated reculturing rather than superficial change actions (Cuban, 1984; Rosenholz, 1989), the "whole cloth" and "whole student" Norma Bossard speaks of. The characteristics described in our findings relate to the features Little and McLaughlin (1991) found in their study of math collaboratives, and explain the social contexts within which teachers can successfully feed their professional identities, ideas, and commitments, and also develop and continue to build upon effective strategies for improving student achievement. They also provide evidence of ways in which professional development can effectively replace more restricted notions of in-service (McLaughlin & Marsh 1979; Hall & Loucks, 1979) toward what Lieberman and Miller (1990) call a culture of support for teacher inquiry. In fact, we have seen that in broad-based networks, administrators and teachers become colleagues who examine, inquire, learn, and share. They develop the collegiality and experimentation that Little (1986) indicates is responsible for successful implementation of new programs.

For policy implications that may be derived from this study, it is important to remember that the schools, teachers, and students were quite different; no "cookie-cutter" set of enterprises can be mandated. In these places there was certainly not a mandate to attend professional meetings, no pronouncements regarding curriculum change or shared decision-making. These elements were all present, but grew from contexts that invited such behaviors. What they did have that can be emulated, was a culture that values these features of the educational workplace; it was shared by administrators, teachers, and students, and lived by actions rather than pronouncements.

This culture was manifested in a number of ways:

1. A past history of cumulative reform efforts that built upon others in the field and created a school and district history of positive change (e.g., the Zelda Glazer Writing Project that built upon the Bay Area and National Writing Project; International High School and Turner Tech that built upon the Coalition for Essential Schools as well as other reform movements; and the two-way bilingual program at King Middle School that built upon dual language education efforts)

2. A thorough and long lived process of reculturing (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991) that defined the interpersonal and professional environments of all the schools, including Tawasentha in its nascent stages toward changing the context
3. Resources for professional change and development that were understood to require a reallocation of both monetary and time resources, although both were at times gained through external funding
4. Resources for a professional community that were understood to involve collegiality, common goals, and joint activity that created a synergy to make a difference.

These occurred within open rather than closed communities, open to new ideas from many places, and open to examination and discussion.

These features were not easy to come by and enact; they resulted from the hard and ongoing work of dedicated professionals — who permitted themselves to be both dreamers and doers. Neither is such a culture quick to come by. Instead, it is built up over time, sustained by the willingness to persevere. It comes from an unremitting belief in public education, a belief that all students can learn, can have successful futures, and that it is in the power of the school to make it happen.

Are these things characteristic of all teachers in the departments in each of these schools, or only of special "lead teachers" chosen for us to study? The schools I have described "feel" good, from the moment you enter the doors. They are human places — places of learning, and also places of safety. They are exceptional educational environments because the overlapping features of the contexts invite them to be so. We cannot necessarily assume that any one of the teachers in this study would have been wonderful (or at least as wonderful as presently) anywhere. Instead, it is the array of contextual features in the many contexts of their work lives that supports and feeds their excellence, and helps them sustain it. But not every teacher finds himself or herself in contexts as exceptionally rich and plentiful as the ones in which the various teachers in this study were situated. Nor does a rich context assure excellence. We all know there are teachers who burn out, who have other priorities, who resist participating in such rich contexts. But the mixture of characteristics within the kinds of educational features I have described — coordinating efforts to improve achievement, fostering teacher participation in professional

communities, creating activities that provide teachers with agency, valuing commitment to professionalism, engendering caring attitudes, and fostering respect for learning — seems to support more potentially exceptional teachers than usual, teachers who believe it is within their power to make a difference in their students' lives, and who thrive on making this a reality.

The patterns of the various contexts for excellence that have emerged from this study will be tested against the 16 sites in which we will work during the next two years. For the present, I hope this report and the case studies that accompany it (which provide descriptions and portraits of options to assist those who wish to create their own contexts for excellence) will be useful to educators in creating "principle-led" districts and schools that are supportive work environments for teachers and successful learning environments for students.



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Janet Angelis, Associate Director
Center on English Learning & Achievement
University at Albany, State University of New York
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