

Scaling Up the Big Picture

Summary of Findings

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Scaling Up the Big Picture

The title of this research project refers to a Providence-based non-profit organization called the Big Picture Company (BP), and to its efforts to replicate its small high school design in multiple communities throughout the United States (with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). It refers implicitly also to BP's ambition (and that of the Gates Foundation) to have influence beyond these schools – to change American high schooling in fundamental ways.

The researchers wanted to know what challenges BP would encounter as it took on these tasks, and to infer from its experience what other school designers might encounter. They also wanted to document the strategies that BP might employ to manage these challenges, and to assess their relative strength. They laid out the challenges and strategies in three essays, situating both with the context of other scaling-up efforts within and beyond the field of education.

Challenges

The project's first two essays named seven challenges of scaling up new school designs, as follows:

Seven Challenges

1. Balancing fidelity and adaptation
2. Teaching and learning the design
3. Instilling shared ownership of the design
4. Communicating effectively across contexts
5. Using experience in new settings to improve the design
6. Obtaining and managing the resources sufficient to scale
7. Negotiating the politics of local adoption

To address the first five of these challenges, essay 2 named and explored eight strategies, as follows:

Strategies

- **Articulation.** Laying out what the design stands for, what it consists of, and how it works.
- **Differentiation.** Helping implementers understand what's compatible with the design and its underlying vision and what is not.
- **Imagery.** Capturing the design in action for the benefit of those who need to

understand it.

- **Transparency.** Making school features and practices transparent for visitors, and using visits to educate implementers in the design. Making outcomes accessible to implementers.
- **Enculturation.** Instilling shared ownership through symbolic shared experiences involving storytelling and ritual.
- **Training.** Building expertise through explicit instructional protocols.
- **Coaching.** Managing implementation by getting close to local efforts, and conferring with local implementers about the adaptations they make and why.
- **Building and Networking Communities of Practice.** Encouraging local norms of practice and habits of critical review, and networking the locals.

To explain challenge 6 (the resource challenge), essay 3 identified four sub-challenges:

Hidden Dimensions of the Resource Challenge

- The three aspects of the challenge interrelate: financial, human, and intellectual
- The demands of the challenge vary with the phases of scaling up
- Meeting these demands puts strains on organizational culture, leadership, and theory of action
- School designers have to manage resources within an environment lacking ready indicators of effectiveness, and with few proven allocation mechanisms

For each of the hidden dimensions of the resource challenge, the essay named and explored the following strategies:

To manage interrelated resource needs

- Act “rashly” to build resources.
- Use slack to cover inevitable pockets of deficit.
- Expect local resource emergencies, and plan to deploy central resources to fill the gaps.
- Connect, connect. Every connection is a potential resource gain.

To manage varying demands

- Design for cost sharing, and help schools budget for it.
- Keep all systems nimble, and expect to change them frequently as you grow.
- Be realistic about the job demands of site-level leadership, and tailor training and support mechanisms accordingly.
- Design for the continual infusion of new ideas.

To cope with strains on culture, leadership, and theory of action

- Expect turbulence, and figure out how to talk openly about its sources and its inevitability.
- Understand that different levels of scale require different management and communication systems, and different leadership. Make appropriate adjustments.
- Seize opportunities to make the organization’s theory of action explicit and coherent.

To cope with inadequate indicators and allocation mechanisms

- Build rich indicator systems into the school design
- Invest in internal research capacity
- Network for accountability as well as communication
- Be prepared to be inventive

Essay 4 looked at the seventh challenge of scaling up a new school design: negotiating the politics of local adoption. It used case studies to examine the challenge in two phases, and identified strategies associated with each:

Phase One: Start-up

- Expect that local politics will work to distort your intentions and your design.
- Find out about this kind of distortion in other situations, and learn how people in your position managed to counteract it.
- Find a theory of change that helps you make sense of both the distortion and the success of the intervention.
- Take advantage of your initial status as an outsider on the inside to learn the local politics from people who know it.
- Map out the groups who have the power to help or hurt implementation, and determine what power resources can be marshaled to support implementation.
- Reach a political understanding – as understanding is defined in the local culture. Make this the basis of contractual negotiation.

Phase Two: Later in the Scale-up

- Expect incoherence in the policies that bear on your work. Act wherever possible to reduce the incoherence.
- Look continually for opportunities to do whatever you can to make a place for your school and its different design within the political context.
- Know how to resolve conflicts by assessing and addressing parties' basic interests. Practice the skill whenever and wherever you can.
- Keep explaining your school again and again: how it works, and what it values. Learn to do this in under thirty seconds. Say why it matters to the nation as well as the community.
- Affiliate, affiliate – but know that you must work hard to make each affiliation a source of strength and advantage.
- Remember that politics is all about who has leverage and is willing to use it. Get some, and use it.
- Understand that no design is adopted without adaptation. Go for optimal adaptation - one that protects the school and enables it to gain influence, but also maintains the design's integrity.
- Above all, stay engaged politically.

What follows are the original texts of essays 1 and 2. Readers might choose to begin with Essay 4 on p. 133. This focuses on the challenge of negotiating the politics of local adoption, but its four case studies also illustrate the larger problems all the essays explore.

Scaling Up the Big Picture

Essay 1

**from a study funded by an anonymous foundation
2002-2005**

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The Difference Difference Makes

We call our project a study of scaling up the “Big Picture.” We might have avoided the mixed metaphor by saying instead that we were studying the scaling up of the “Met.” The latter name stands for the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center. It began in 1996, as a small high school for 110 students, located in a corridor of the Rhode Island State Education Department building, offering a workplace-focused curriculum. Today, there are six Mets in Providence – four of them located on a beautiful new campus in the heart of one of the city’s poorest neighborhoods.

The other name, short for Big Picture Company, is the name of the non-profit founder and manager of the Met schools. Originally incubated by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University, BP is also the recent recipient of a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support scaling up the Met beyond Providence. Met-alike schools opened this year in Oakland and El Dorado Hills, California, and also in Federal Way, Washington. Others are scheduled to open next year in Detroit, Chicago, and Denver. Meanwhile, the Big Picture Company is currently preparing a proposal for additional Gates funding to open still other Met-alike schools.¹

We choose the “parental” term to describe our study – with its evocation of ambition and its panache - to signify that more than a new school design is involved in this scaling up. What we study is different in important ways from the scaling up of America’s Choice, Turning Points, Edison, or Success for All. Of course, there is a new school design at issue here too. However, to understand its scaling up, one must view the process at several different grain sizes. At one level, there are the schools. Further up, one notices small systems of schools – in fact, a new district design – one that includes nested learning communities of school staff, families, and workplace mentors – networked to each other. Still further up, one notices that these systems are served by a set of novel enterprises focused on training, design, toolmaking, consulting, and advocacy. The enterprises are based at what Big Picture staffers sometimes call the “mother ship.” This is BP headquarters, in architecturally beautiful, artsy, and poor downtown Providence.

Although the purposes of these enterprises go beyond serving the Met and Met-alike schools, they and the schools have a deeply symbiotic relationship. On the one hand, the practice of the schools grounds the theory that animates each of the enterprises, and it justifies the advocacy. And, on the other hand, as our analysis suggests, the enterprises make the scaling up of the practices possible.

These different grain sizes complicate our study. What exactly does *scale* mean in this case – qualitatively and quantitatively? Is it about replicating a school design? Yes – though a complicated one, and one not defined institutionally in the usual ways. How many replicas are intended? This is still somewhat an open question at the Big

¹ We use the terms “Met” and “Met-alike” to distinguish these two sets of schools, though the more common term for the latter at BP is “Big Picture schools.” For the purposes of this essay, however, we think the usage we’ve adopted improves clarity.

Picture Company, though some parameters seem clearer now than they were even a month ago. Originally, the aim was to put a Met in every medium and large city – filling a significant niche in an emerging market for secondary schooling. Today, however – for reasons we explore below – the aim is to have comparable influence with far fewer schools – perhaps, in the end, as few as 20.

Is it possible to have as much influence – in this case, on contemporary high school design, curriculum, and pedagogy – with fewer schools, rather than more? Is there an alternative logic on scaling up school designs to the one underlying, for example, New American Schools, Edison Schools, or the Obey-Porter Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Act (CSRDA)? These efforts all presume that significant and long-term impact depend on developing a robust *and* transportable design, on building a reliable implementation and support system capable of functioning nationally, and on achieving a significant “market share.”

By contrast, the Big Picture Company is one of a number of reform promoters with a somewhat different idea of scaling up. We think, for example, of the Institute for Learning, and the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative. These, like BP, aim to affect deeply the ideas and practices of a select number of contexts, but a relatively small number. However, they presume that the notice that may be taken of their work in these contexts, and the reach of the ideas and tools the work generates, will have a larger impact. Like other reform initiatives, all three of these depend on practitioner collaboration and invention, though “think tank” staff contribute their own strong input to the development task – in the form of ideas, models, designs, images, and data sets. The difference is a matter of balance: with these reforms, the ideas are the strong drivers. In fact, it seems fair to say that what the reforms especially aim to scale up are ideas rather than designs – though the designs provide crucial grounding.

Are their scaling-up efforts irrelevant then to reformers for whom designs matter more – for example, ATLAS or Co-Nect, or for whom what matters most is the creation of good small schools based on varied ideas and designs – for example, New York’s New Visions, or Ohio’s Knowledge Works? We don’t think so. Indeed, we believe that the idea-based scaling up of Big Picture and other efforts may offer fresh thinking about the problems and strategies of scaling up reform generally, and that many different kinds of reforms may thereby benefit. For reasons we explore below, “different” reforms may particularly need qualitatively different (from the prevailing) conceptions and strategies of scaling up. But it is also possible that *most* reforms do, including less “different” ones.

Consider, in this regard, the recent Rand report on the scaling-up efforts of New American Schools. In the early 1990’s, NAS engaged design teams to create “break the mold” designs for schools, but the Rand researchers report that nearly ten years later, no molds seem broken. One reason, they suggest, is that the school systems to whom the independent NAS design teams sold their services did not have ‘breaking molds’ in mind when they made the purchase (Berends, Bodilly, and Kirby, 2002). However, it is also possible that the NAS conception of scaling up as a marketing operation to districts,

focused on the adoption of well defined designs, was insufficiently “big picture” for the task it set itself.

Reform and Risk

All serious school reform work involves inviting students, parents, teachers, and policymakers to put at risk *some* ideas and habits. But the Big Picture Company asks them to put at risk a *lot* of ideas and habits – for example, about what schools do, what curriculum is, how teachers teach, how communities support their children’s learning, and more. This fact puts the BP effort at the edge of a set of current efforts – many of them funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation - that aim not just to reform the high school, but to re-think it.

Of course, the fact that the Big Picture Company has gained the support it has – from Gates, from the State of Rhode Island, from many other sources – is a sign that its radical quality has been mitigated somewhat (though hardly entirely) by three circumstances.

First is the transparency of what it offers: BP fully discloses what it has in mind, and seeks only those investors – so to speak – who understand what they would be getting. Two decades of critique and experimentation (for example, within the Coalition of Essential Schools), some policy invention and de-regulation (especially the development of chartering and contracting), and some supply-side development (notably that of New American Schools) have together created a market for new high school designs. And within this market, there is room for an offering with a radical edge. Still, the history of contemporary school reform is full of informed “purchases” that proved to be founded on misunderstanding, political exigency, miscalculation, or other sources of mismatch that affiliation votes, contracts, and other devices failed to eliminate.

Secondly, BP’s inventions and conceptions have historical roots and exemplars – ones that are well known and highly regarded. As suggested in the timeline exercise on the first afternoon of the BP summer extravaganza called the Big Bang, the roots include the ideas and work of John Dewey and also of Ted Sizer. Yet, the exemplars are not the countless twentieth-century educational innovations that claimed Dewey as their progenitor, nor the hundreds of Coalition (CES) Schools. Rather they are the rarer, more radical, and more fragile products of these reform traditions – those that invited the most risk-taking. One is Dewey’s own school, the Laboratory School that he founded at the University of Chicago in 1896. It was radical and widely influential in the years after its founding, but changed substantially when Dewey left the University in 1904 (Mayhew and Edwards, 1936; Tanner, 1997). Other exemplars are the handful of “schools without walls” of the 1970’s that attempted to apply the Deweyan focus on community and its occupations to the high school curriculum. One was the famous but short-lived Parkway School in Philadelphia (Bremer & von Moschzisker, 1971). There are also the handful of Dewey-inspired school-to-work high schools of the 1990s – for example, the celebrated but now struggling Rindge School of the Technical Arts (Steinberg, 1998). And, of course, there are the handful of CES high schools that have dared to work at the

edge of the Sizer vision – especially Central Park East Secondary School and University Heights High School in their heydays, and the Francis W. Parker School today.

Finally, the third circumstance that somewhat (though not entirely) mitigates the scale of the risk-taking BP invites is its appeal to common sense: “Doesn’t it make sense to provide a high school kid with an individualized curriculum, one grounded in his or her interests, one based on learning demands and opportunities in the real world?” To its credit and benefit, BP understands that policy debates are ultimately decided on the basis of whose vision makes the most common sense. The problem, of course, is that other reformers understand this too, and offer alternative “common sense” – for example, “Shouldn’t everybody take an algebra course? Shouldn’t all kids get ‘passing’ grades on standardized tests?” And so on. Moreover, appeals to “common sense” can themselves be risky to the extent that they underplay the learning curves involved in serious change. Evaluators of Children Achieving, David Hornbeck’s ultimately failed initiative in the late 1990’s to create systemic reform in the Philadelphia school district, say that his effort to sell as common sense a reform that was massive and politically difficult had great repercussions later. If he had sold it as ambitious and difficult but necessary, then people might have more easily recovered when it failed. Instead, many lost all hope for district reform, as if to say “Well, if even common sense fails, then what is to be done?” (Jolley Christman, personal communication).

For all the mitigation of its transparency, roots, and common-sense qualities, the Big Picture offering still entails a lot of risk. This is because the Met is considerably different – not just from the traditional or vocational high school, but also from most other reform-focused high schools. And, as we suggested above, the degree of difference makes the challenge of scaling it up different too. It is even possible that it may make scaling up unfeasible beyond a certain point. That is, the complications of difference – especially the steepness of the learning curve involved in starting, leading, teaching, and learning within a Met-like school - could make the existing Mets more like the Reggio Emilia schools than the Solomon Schechters or the Edisons. Six schools in Providence, definitely; 25+ in regional clusters, maybe; 200+ schools throughout the U.S., probably not.

Yet, as we suggest above, real influence may not depend so much on sheer numbers. Arguably, the Reggio Emilia schools may prove more broadly influential than the Solomon Schechters or the Edisons (Project Zero and the Reggio Children, 2001). And circumstances seem propitious as well with respect to the Big Picture Company’s influence. Among these circumstances, we count the following:

- The manifest need for new high school designs, particularly those that will serve urban youth well.
- The political interest in small schools (particularly in big cities), and unusual resources available to develop them (for example, those provided by the Gates Foundation).
- The possibility that the fifty-year consensus concerning the design of the American high school may be coming undone, and that twenty-first-century

American high schooling may more resemble that of the nineteenth- than of the twentieth-century. That is, it may feature multiple designs, occupying multiple market niches, with none anywhere near as dominant as the “comprehensive” high school is today (McDonald, forthcoming).

- The BP capacity to succeed against the odds, evident in its Providence success. This seems the product especially of its entrepreneurial attitude, its out-of-the-box talents, and its clever toolmaking.

Design of the Essay

We begin this first of a series of four essays with an exploration of the Met’s difference. What exactly makes it so different? What seem to be the essential components and qualities of the difference, and how much do they threaten ordinary conceptions of what Elmore (1996) calls the core of schooling? It seems appropriate that the study of scaling up a reform should begin with a serious examination of what the reform entails, and this examination comprises the next section of this essay.

Then we explore the Big Picture Company’s current efforts in scaling up. What strategies are involved? What theory of action underlies them? How well suited do they seem to the challenge of difference? In answering this last question, we also take up the embedded one: Why should “difference” in school design (at least as found in the Met) necessarily require difference in scaling up design?

Finally, we end the essay with a description of our own design – our research design. We are today little more than six months into a multi-year research task, one that will generate much data. Thus this essay is merely an exploratory outing in a much larger adventure. Indeed, that is why we use the word *essay* - because we like the connotation derived from the French. It seems appropriate to signify that such an early effort to understand a complicated and novel phenomenon of great potential importance must be considered an *attempt* or *essai*. It is like any sketch that an outsider may prepare for an insider – *Does this look at all like the thing you know so well?* – one meant to invite clarification and dialogue.

Why bother with outsiders if all they can do is prepare tentative sketches? Our answer is that first come the sketches – then later, as the product of longer research and more dialogue, comes the possibility of a constructed and illuminated theory of action, one that may benefit not only the Big Picture Company but – as we suggest - other reformers too.

1.

How Different is the Met?

Most of what we have to say in this section of the essay concerns the Met curriculum. But it is important to couch our curricular analysis with an acknowledgment of the Met's difference as entity. The Met – a tightly networked collection of six independently led schools - is at once a child of and partner to a larger organization called the Big Picture Company – a non-profit corporation incubated by the Annenberg Institute. BP designed the Met – physically and curricularly - continues to develop and promote it, runs political interference for it, and raises additional private funding to support it. The arrangement is based on an understanding with the Rhode Island State Department of Education rather than a formal contract. Thus while the individual Mets have in some respects the characteristics of charter schools, or of contracted schools, or even of independent schools, they are none of these things. As entity – quite apart from the curriculum they share – the Mets seem the products of a unique set of circumstances and visionary political work – hardly an easy formula to scale up.

Still, because of the recent development of such policy arrangements for public schooling as charter schooling, contracting, and vouchers, one can imagine numerous Met-alikes, each inhabiting its own unique but equally ambiguous political context. Indeed, there are three of them now. Still, the complications of difference are significant. Establishing a new school that is different in size and character from other schools in a district, contracting with a school designer to support the development of the school, putting a charter school together, or setting up any kind of new school on any basis - all of these involve lots more challenges than does – for example – installing a new curriculum in an existing school. For example, all the Met-alikes have had to deal with finding and leasing, or building space; finding and hiring all new personnel; setting up basic management systems; and so on. Moreover, the Met design requires the commitment of a whole community – the source of much of its curricular vitality, as well as its insurance against the charge that its difference makes it alien. Thus, in addition to the ordinary preparation work in starting any kind of new school, the Met-alikes also face complicated political and cultural preparation.

Then there is the matter of the curriculum. The Met-alikes are obligated by their contract with the Big Picture Company to adopt the Met curriculum in its entirety. To assess how different the Met curriculum is – and thus assess the challenge of adopting it - we use a framework expressly constructed to assess difference among new high school designs. It is a product of the ATLAS Seminar held at Harvard from 1993-1996, and of a series of conversations there concerning conceptions of curriculum in the context of deep high school reform (Hatch, 1999). Key participants in this conversation included Howard Gardner and Ted Sizer. They both agreed that the conception of the high school curriculum as a set of “subjects” – a twentieth-century invention derived from the work of the 1893 Committee of Ten – is today outmoded; and that the new conception must make room for project work, interdisciplinary study, independent study, exhibitions of learning, and the idea of the teacher as a coach rather than a lecturer. They disagreed,

however, on the proper role in high school studies of university-sanctioned disciplines.Sizer saw these largely as encroachments by research universities on high schools and even colleges. By contrast, Gardner viewed the disciplines as psychologically important constructs – arguing, for example, that adolescents need and enjoy experiences in delving deeply into the structures and sub-structures of knowledge – a chance they rarely get in high school.

The conception of curriculum that emerged from these ATLAS Seminar conversations is quite different from the conventional one associated with the American high school. It involves more than *what* is taught– for example, ninth-grade, college-level social studies; and *when, where, and how* it is taught– for example, during forty-five minute periods, in a classroom, using a particular textbook and a mix of lecture and cooperative learning projects. The point of the new conception is to make room in our high school designs for things less easily specified in response to What? When? Where? and How? These include the development of intellectual interests and the habits of intellectual exploration and rumination; the design of projects (and their redesign when they fall apart as real projects often do); the development of moral principles and ethical responsibility; the acquisition of responsible work habits; and the experience of multiple mentorship and of cognitive apprenticeship. The description of the framework in a special issue of the *Peabody Journal of Education* devoted to the work of the ATLAS Seminar used the following contrast to make this distinction:

The average high school student today seldom says with any evident intentionality, “I’m studying chemistry” – except when she yells downstairs to her mother who wants her to clean her room. In school, she is more apt to say things like, “I’m going to chemistry and I’m late for it” [as if chemistry were a place and time rather than an intellectual undertaking], or “I’m in chemistry now, but I’m trying to get out of it” [as if chemistry were a state of confinement] (McDonald, 1999, p. 25).

The framework calls for more *slack* in the high school curriculum - that is, more unassigned or un-pre-allotted time and space; and for a *pastoral* rather than a teacherly learning environment – that is, one characterized by student directedness, but watched over by an advisor whose principal role is to discharge the school’s responsibility “to know its students, to understand the ways they think and work, to help them take charge of their own education. to guide them toward graduation, to help them cope with all the problems they face along the way” (p. 15). Given these two environmental conditions, the framework then calls for four elements that combine to make the environment an educational one:

- a clear and evident intellectual orientation
- varied modes of learning
- resources for active learning
- opportunities to demonstrate understanding

In what follows, we use the overall framework – environmental conditions plus the four elements - to examine the Met (in its Providence incarnation), and in the process to consider its degree of difference.

Slack. From the perspective of the ordinary high school, the Met has an astounding degree of slack. Students come and go to what are called LTIs (long-term internships) all over Providence, and even well beyond the city. They study abroad, travel to Denver to be “Mexperts” (student consultants on the Met design), or to Detroit to shoot video. They design their own schedules and “super-schedules” (i.e. longer-term obligations). The motto of the school is “one student at a time” – which refers not only to schedules and programs, but to much of the school’s teaching and learning. In effect, the individual student is the chief architect of his or her own curriculum, and also controls much of the time and space devoted to it.

One consequence of this radically student-centered perspective is that the rhythms of development vary more considerably than they seem to in most schools. For example, from the perspective of the average high school principal, ninth-grade teacher, or parent of a ninth-grader, many new Met students take an extraordinary amount of time, and engage in an extraordinary amount of “off-task” behavior, in order to define the interests at the heart of their individual curriculum. On the other hand, anecdotal evidence abounds that students finish the Met with more confidence in themselves and a greater sense of direction than are generally characteristic of their peers in other schools. Moreover, the schools’ graduation and college-going rates are high.²

The Met is based on a sensible understanding of the role that looseness plays in moving forward: the clutch before the gas, the slack in the safety line before the next climb up the rockface, the need that almost everyone has to walk around or otherwise occupy oneself while engaged in serious thinking or problem solving. But for a host of reasons, slack in a high school seems an abhorrent concept to some people – including many administrators, teachers, parents, other adults in the community, and policymakers. The reasons include adult fear of adolescents (especially in cities, where the fear is often tinged with racism), heightened security concerns (in the wake of sex abuse scandals, child abductions, and school shootings), bad school designs (big enrollments, long corridors, enormous rooms and bad furniture for things like eating and working as adults do), the prevalence of theories about learning that privilege telling and listening, and the dearth of imagination or experience regarding what adolescents might do in their communities besides hang out or what they might contribute besides trouble.

These “reasons” are more prominent in the American experience today than they were in the 1970s or even the 1980’s – ironically, even as other norms about the bringing up of adolescents have become looser (for example, concerning non-school activities,

² [statistics needed here on latest graduation rates – cohort, if available – and college going as well as college-staying rates] As for the persistence of self-confidence, direction, intellectual curiosity, and other qualities prized by the Met, the Big Picture Company is currently planning a longitudinal study of Met graduates, using a matched comparison sample of graduates from other Providence high schools. The study will be led by Karen Arnold of Boston College, who has conducted similar studies.

sexual exploration, and college life). The result is that even school districts that may want to have an “alternative” kind of high school for some of its students, and that may be drawn to the Met on the basis of its success in engaging Providence youth and sending them off to college, may nonetheless balk at Met slack. Moreover, even within a Met or Met-alike school – where principals and advisors are less likely than other educational professionals to be guided by the antipathies to slack listed above, there may still be concerns: Wouldn’t it be better to do many group projects first – ones that might bring along those less secure, less sure of their own interests? Wouldn’t it be better to push first-year students to choose almost any long-term internship (LTI) at first – just to give them practice, just to have them explore? Aren’t these moves better than letting kids just hang around for weeks? How can you develop a passionate interest just hanging around?

The Met norm is to regard these kinds of questions as invitations to “backsliding” (the BP name for the tendency to shy away from committing all the way to the Met vision, or to back off at the first signs of difficulty). Avoiding such “backsliding” requires much unlearning, even among people attracted to working at a Met or Met-alike school. Nor is it sufficient, for example, to ensure that the school’s principal and advisors have unlearned their subconscious concerns about slack, since slack (and, indeed, other significant features of the Met environment) can be undone by others too – workplace mentors, secretaries, students.

Pastoral Learning Environment. Other secondary school reform efforts that advocate some degree of pastoral learning environment - for example, Turning Points – have experienced scaling-up challenges with respect to teachers’ learning the new skills required. For example, they report that teachers have difficulty in going beyond conceptions of themselves as subject-focused specialists (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, and Lipton, 2000). The challenge may be even greater in the scaling up of the Met, given the degree of its commitment to a pastoral design. This is because the Met does much more than assign some pastoral duties to classroom teachers. It abolishes the role of the classroom teacher, and substitutes the role of the advisor. It is hard to over-estimate the significance of this difference.

Advisors need personal and professional skills that classroom teachers do not necessarily need – those associated, for example, with the negotiation of learning plans; the convening of advisees, parents, and mentors to develop such plans and to review progress in meeting them; the investigation of learning opportunities within community work sites, and the capacity to imagine their connection to the school’s learning goals for students; skill in brokering and monitoring long-term internships (LTIs) in such community sites; the capacity to coach learning in domains one does not know well – the manufacture of jewelry, photography, landscape design, and so on; the coaching of extended project work, and of exhibition development; and the one-on-one counseling of students.

Meanwhile, advisors also need more ordinary teacherly skills too – ones associated with teaching’s most demanding tasks: how to convene and facilitate a group; how to entice students individually or in groups to invest their engagement with an idea,

text, or task; how to assess what Dewey called the educative potential of a particular experience; how to know when to intervene and when to withhold intervention; how to correct the most important things and overlook the rest; how to exercise unambivalently one's legitimate authority as a knowledgeable and caring adult – sometimes in the face of severe resistance; how to encourage metacognition by students – helping them to step back from an experience to consider both what they know as a result of the experience, and how they came to know it; how to help students link one experience to the next, week by week, month by month; how to connect one's own work to the larger vision of the school and to the work of one's colleagues.

It might seem that such teacherly skills would be less needed at the Met, given its abandonment of the conventional teacher role, its focus on student interest and self-direction, its emphasis on students' taking responsibility, and the slack it provides for students to find their own way and advisors to help. But advisors cannot help effectively without such skills. Moreover, the absence of conventional routines at the Met and the school's one-student-at-a-time philosophy can make the skills harder to acquire and practice. No bell signals the start of an advisory; the advisor must convene it. There is no textbook or scope and sequence to suggest (however spuriously) the lines of students' intellectual development. The advisor has to figure these out in close collaboration with the advisee and her mentors, and with the assistance of Big Picture-developed tools – drawing in the process on her own knowledge and experience. Meanwhile, the learning environments that comprise the Met – multi-hour/multi-year advisories, long-term internships (LTIs), pick-me-ups, independent projects, exhibitions, and the rest – lack the long traditions and norms of their counterparts – homerooms, classes, exams, assemblies, and so on.

In managing the new structures, advisors cannot depend on what Lortie (1975) termed their apprenticeship of observation – the fact that they experienced the structures themselves as students. For the most part, they did not – even in college. Although they may have been drawn to their Met work because of dissatisfaction with the learning structures they did experience, such dissatisfaction does not by itself supply alternative images – nor ready conceptions of the norms, routines, and social relations necessary to make alternative structures work well. These have to be imagined, invented, learned from observation, or at least trial and error. And the advisor who learns them in whatever way must, of course, immediately turn around and help students learn them.

One Big Picture staff member captured for us in a sentence the extraordinary demands on Met advisors: pedagogical, interpersonal, emotional, political. She told us about an advisor whose students are not very successful in lining up LTIs, following through on their learning plans, or making progress toward their learning goals. This advisor is content, she said, just to tell his advisees that they are responsible. “But that’s a weird cop-out of the philosophy,” she added. “Of course, you tell the kids that they are responsible, but they’re not – *you* are – you’re responsible.”

Intellectual Orientation. The ATLAS Seminar framework calls for a set of “orienting habits,” evoking Central Park East Secondary School’s (CPESS) famous Habits of Mind (Meier, 1995). Specifications are as follows:

These are the school's overarching aims, so represent its covenant with students (Glickman, 1993). They focus teaching and learning across all the dimensions of school life. They transcend particular domains of knowledge, involve metacognition, and are intellectual in their focus without also being academic. They refer to disposition and *proneness*, not just achievement -- they are habits, not outcomes (Wiggins, 1993). They are simple -- one can get one's teaching mind and one's learning mind around them. They are also in some sense compelling -- perhaps because they are political at their heart, empowering. By various means -- from scoring rubrics to bulletin boards to the everyday comments of teachers teaching and students learning -- their expression pervades the school (McDonald, p. 20).

The Met seems to meet these specifications well with its Learning Goals. Few other schools do, and there are three reasons why – each suggesting a dimension of difference at the Met crucial to consider in scaling it up. The first, and perhaps most obvious one is the pre-emptive press of state accountability demands. These typically emphasize just the things the framework specifications spurn: domain-specific, academic, apolitical, achievement outcomes.

The second reason why so few other schools – particularly high schools - meet the ATLAS Seminar specifications is organizational. Their focus on subjects and “levels” of subject, and their division into departments make most high schools organizationally incapable of generating or holding an integrated intellectual vision (Siskin and Little, 1995; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001).

And the third reason is that most high schools operate on the assumption that different students should have different goals. This sounds on the surface like the Met, but their notion of difference is far more restrictive. Derived from the mid-twentieth-century ideal of the comprehensive high school (Conant, 1959, 1967), this notion of difference refers especially to “ability” and presumed future employment; and applies to groups rather than to individuals, thus reproducing class differences (Reese, 1995).

The high school reform efforts of the 1970’s – including the school-without-walls and other alternative school reforms that helped inform the Met design – resisted the norms of the comprehensive high school not just by introducing slack and a more pastoral design, but also by insisting on a different definition of *difference* – one based on individuality rather than socio-economic or intellectual class. However, they had little advanced interest in the paradox that CES later defined and promoted: to acknowledge individual difference *and* to apply universal goals. At least in an espoused way, the Met embraces this paradox – thus bucking both traditions at once, that of the comprehensive high school and of the alternative high school. Moreover, the Met’s emphasis on

individual difference is far more pronounced than in such CES exemplars as the Parker School or Fenway Middle College or (in its heyday) Thayer High School.

Meanwhile, the Met formulation of universal goals introduces yet another difference. Given the Met's status as a neo-vocational school, one might have expected to hear in the Met Learning Goals more the echoes of the SCANS Report (1991) or of Murnane and Levy's (1996) "new basic skills." These show up in the Personal Qualities Goal, but the Goals overall seem more influenced by the CPESS Habits of Mind.³

One might have expected the Learning Goals also to take a different slant on the dilemma of intellectual orientation that Ron Berger (1996) poses (and that Dewey explored): whether to emphasize the disciplines or the occupations as sources of curricular authority. This is because most of the rest of the Met's curricular materials – and much Big Picture rhetoric – downplays the disciplines, and (followingSizer) seems even to discount their value as learning orientations.

The ATLAS Seminar framework – trying to steer a course between Sizer and Gardner – suggests using both the disciplines and the occupations as sources of curricular authority and direction. Dewey did too. For example, at his Laboratory School, teachers used an occupational rather than disciplinary focus in planning teaching and learning experiences, but they discussed with each other and reported student progress within explicit disciplinary categories (Tanner, 1997). The oddness is that the Met follows suit here in the articulation of its Learning Goals. These are initially phrased in non-disciplinary ways – for example, Empirical reasoning: How do I prove it? Quantitative Reasoning: How do I measure, compare, or represent it? Social Reasoning: What are other people's perspectives on this? However, these three (of five goals overall) are illustrated with disciplinary rather than occupational references: to think like a scientist (rather than like a journalist or veterinarian or police detective); to think like a mathematician (rather than like a designer or planner or accountant); to think like an historian or anthropologist (rather than like a storyteller or therapist or politician).

This may seem a small point, but to the extent that the Met scaling-up must come to terms with state accountability frameworks in places like California, Colorado, and Washington State (and there is evidence in these places that it must), then the orientation of the Learning Goals will matter. It is likely to matter too in terms of helping new principals and advisors understand the real differences in the work they have taken on – and what is negotiable and not with regard to contextual circumstances. Bethany Rogers (1999) warns that reform efforts can easily founder on misunderstandings of where their curricular practices come from and why they make sense. The orientation of the Learning Standards will matter too in terms of whether the Met (despite its reasonable intention to eschew both labels) is perceived beyond Rhode Island as more like a vocational high school or more like an academic one.

³ Eliot Levine (2002), in his study of the Met, discusses some dissatisfaction with the Learning Goals – at least in their current formulation – particularly on the part of Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor (pp.95- 96).

Modes of Learning. The huge Met difference with respect to this ATLAS Seminar curricular element is the school's displacement of the *course* as the pre-eminent mode of learning in the high school. This is a radical move – especially since the displacement is meant to be total. The ATLAS Seminar framework takes a less radical perspective on the *course* – arguing a place for it, but defined differently (the new definition owing much to university and other adult-education contexts):

[Courses] are best described as well bounded intellectual experiences undertaken in the company of other motivated learners, and directed by someone with relevant expertise. . . . Most secondary students spend most of their time now in what are called courses, but they are often no such thing. The most common of these courses involve little voluntary commitment, vague direction, and sketchy syllabi. In many schools, they meet so often - for example, 5 days a week from 10:15 to 11:00 a.m. for 36 weeks – that their presence overwhelms their substance. They become just a place one goes just before lunch every day (McDonald, 1999, pp. 24-25).

The framework implicitly calls for equal attention to a variety of modes – not only courses, but domain-based and interdisciplinary projects; text-based or Socratic seminars; simulated problems (as in problem-based learning) (Aspy, Aspy, & Quinby, 1993; O'Neil, 1992); and cognitive apprenticeships – another name for an LTI (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989; Collins, Hawkins, & Carver, 1991).

The ATLAS Seminar framework and the Met take on the same task - to overcome the hegemony of the course in the conventional high school design – but they employ different strategies: to put it in better balance, versus to replace it utterly with project, apprenticeship, and advisory. One can argue the political merits of each strategy, but clearly both entail enormous differences with respect to the status quo, and thus demand steep learning curves when it comes to scaling up. The difference is that the Seminar framework was just an academic exercise, whereas the Met is a real school design now in a scale-up phase.

Resources for Active Learning. Except in their corridors and cafeterias, high schools tend to be full of passivity – a condition inimical to learning, as much research on learning suggests (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, 2000). CES, the Talent Development Model, and other high school reform projects have tended to address this problem by promoting pedagogies of active engagement. The Met goes much further – in effect, challenging the prevalent idea of pedagogy, and re-conceptualizing the school's role with respect to the resources needed to support learning. At the Met, these are relatively unmediated; that is, the student is permitted and expected to access them directly, and to control their use. The ATLAS Seminar framework details the implications of such a commitment:

A curriculum that [emphasizes the learner] . . . must also develop and maintain some resources that are rare in schools today: personalized coaching, relatively

unrestrained access to production tools and space (e.g., studio and lab facilities), access to images of one's own and others' performance, and access to communication tools. In addition, both students and teachers need conceptual maps to guide their learning in progress. . . . These. . . enable learners to get their bearings, to grasp linkages among concepts under study, to get a perspective on the larger domain being explored, to monitor their own learning progress, and to practice some metacognitive skills related to habits the school hopes to instill (McDonald, 1999, p. 25).

The most recently built of the Met's six Providence schools have studios and "archive" space; space dividers that can create a private reading nook or a small-group conference area, but that also display student work (including video-based student work); computers scattered about the school – one for every two students – with high-speed internet connection; exhibition and performance space. They are full of what Elliot Washor calls "intentional space," which is to say space for active learning.

Demonstrations of Understanding. Beginning in the mid-1980's, CES encouraged high schools to "plan backwards" from a vision of what they wanted all their graduates to know and be able to do, and to embed this vision in exhibitions (McDonald, Barton, Smith, Turner, & Finney, 1993). The still current CES phrase is "graduation by exhibition," and the Met has been deeply affected by it. Many high schools tried to implement the idea, but few succeeded. Some blame the state accountability systems that began to be imposed on schools in the mid-1990's. Indeed, these have interfered. However, few schools – even CES-affiliated ones - had by then developed sufficiently rigorous internal accountability systems to offer a reasonable counterpart to their state's assertion of authority. This is because the task of redesigning the high school to be internally (as well as externally) accountable proved far more challenging than it first appeared to be. And three challenges were particularly prominent (McDonald, 1996).

The first had to do with "wiring" – the way a school distributes power and energy. Exhibitions require radically new wiring – for example, the power to say that what matters is that a student has acquired mathematical competence, not that he or she has passed a particular sequence of courses; or the provision of substantial amounts of school time and space and other resources to exhibition preparation – including student access to production tools and to learning resources beyond school walls (exactly the environmental features described above).

The second challenge had to do with the paradox of the "warm" and "cool." The first represents the appreciation of effort and investment that may empower a student to succeed, while the second represents the critical perspective on his or her performance that may make the success credible. Both impulses – on the part of the school's adults, and ultimately on the part of its students - are crucial to the idea of "graduation by exhibition." However, the ordinary mechanics of exhibitions typically favor the warm over the cool. Dennie Palmer Wolf (personal correspondence, 1992) recalls, for example, being impressed by the sweater that an exhibitor had knitted and then displayed at her senior exhibition – complete with information on the geographical origins of the

wool and the knitting technique. Only later did Wolf wonder about whether knitting a sweater constituted a good senior project. After all, she said to herself, it was in the end just a sweater.

Finally, the third challenge derives from the first two. How may a school committed to graduation by exhibition manage to devise the wiring that such a commitment demands? How might it manage to balance warm with cool? The answer requires other inventions besides exhibition mechanisms alone. As the ATLAS Seminar framework suggests, the exhibitions have to be backed up by coaching contexts; performance standards; benchmarked images of performance; storage facilities that preserve rich records of evaluated performance that students can consult as they prepare for their own performances; evaluation mechanisms that are valid, reliable, and fair; “tuning” mechanisms that connect internal judgments of quality with perspectives on quality in the larger world; and feedback mechanisms to ensure continuous improvement of all the other mechanisms – especially opportunities for staff members to reflect on student work, and to consider what its graduates make of themselves in the wider world following graduation.

The Met is in the forefront of efforts to meet this demanding vision, with its students’ journaling, project documentation, quarterly exhibitions, gateway exhibitions, senior theses, displays of student work, public performances, overall transparency, and plans for longitudinal research. Still, much of the challenge lies ahead. This in itself suggests the enormous difference that the Met represents in terms of this element of the ATLAS framework. After seven years, the Met is not quite there, though still far ahead of nearly everyone else.

Meanwhile, one should not underestimate the challenge – to the Met itself, as well as all Met-alikes, present and prospective – in redefining the term *accountability* in an era that is at once obsessed with accountability at the policy level, and jarred by it at the level of practice. Many will consider any school-based accountability efforts of the kind the Met may undertake as insufficient; all that matters to them is standardized test scores. Still others will consider the schools’ efforts to achieve accountability a kind of sleeping with the enemy, since for them even the word *accountability* is tainted by association with standardized tests. Both reactions complicate scaling up by introducing a “wince factor” with respect to this important curricular element. In a December 13, 2002 “TGIF” memo to BP staff and principals,⁴ Dennis Littky includes the following comment: “At the New England Patriots game on Sunday, I watched a man with a clipboard taking notes at the bar. After inquiring, I discovered the stadium hires four people (a company) each Sunday to walk around, look, collect data, and report to the bosses. I thought about it for us. Wouldn’t it be cool to have someone watching us and constantly giving us feedback.” The comment might function as a wince meter. Do

⁴ Each Friday, the BP staff, the group of principals about to open new schools as part of the Gates-funded scale-up (called the TYBO group – for “the Year Before Opening”), and each of the Met and Met-alike schools (in Providence, Federal Way, Oakland and El Dorado Hills) produce two- or three-page TGIF Memos that include reflections on the week, both personal and work-related. It is one of BP’s methods of gaining organizational transparency.

people wince when they hear it? If not, they may be right for Big Picture. If they do, what about it makes them wince? Is it the idea that such scrutiny could realistically happen, and that it could replace utter reliance on standardized test scores? Or is it the perception of something faintly Taylorist and Orwellian about the comment, a perception grounded in a feeling that schools should be free of such minute organizational scrutiny?

2. Scaling Up

As a reform extends its reach, it also must attend to achieving depth in new places. One way to say this is that as a reform *scales up*, it must also *scale down* - time after time, in place after place - each of the places as unique as a Met student. Getting this *up* and this *down* to happen at once is the heart of the challenge we are studying. Given the differences of the Met as a school design – ones we sketched above – the *down* is especially tricky.

To meet the challenge, the Big Picture Company is using an array of overlapping strategies within an emerging theory of action. We explore each of the strategies below, and provide as well a sketch of BP's emerging theory of action, and a rationale for it. Indeed, the rationale has guided the construction of this entire essay, since it concerns the difference that difference makes.

The strategies for scaling up the Big Picture have been born of the intuition of thoughtful and skillful BP staff members; the experimental practices of the first schools - including the Mets; and a spirit of risktaking in the overall organization – matched with watchfulness and a willingness to change course quickly as data may suggest. The fact that the BP strategies have preceded the construction of a coherent theory of action is neither surprising nor unusual. John Dewey's ideas about education emerged in the same way, as did Ted Sizer's – that is, from first doing, then watching and thinking. The same can be said for such diverse and relatively well scaled reform enterprises as the Edison Schools, Success for All, and the National Writing Project.⁵ As Chris Argyris and Donald Schon (1996) have argued persuasively, good theories of action are ones that are constructed to account for ongoing reflection on experience.

Researchers studying the earliest days of the Big Picture Company noted its tendency to “play loose” with respect to many details - including the specification of its theory of action. How *exactly* did it propose in those days to have a major impact on Rhode Island education by starting a small school? What *exactly* is the path it imagined then between starting the Met and realizing the larger ambition? The researchers concluded that an important part of the BP theory of action then involved avoiding questions with *exactly* in them – especially in the beginning, when exacting specifications are likely to be premature, and may shut out crucial opportunities. The researchers attributed this aversion to the intuitions of the BP co-leaders:

One of Dennis Littky's inclinations as a project leader is to steer away from difficult definitional discussions. He likes to defer definitional thinking so as to let definition itself emerge from the work. This way, he thinks, one can hold onto

⁵Issues related to the scaling up of these three projects – as well as numerous others – are examined in a forthcoming volume to be published by the Rand Corporation, and edited by Sue Bodilly and Tom Glennan. Joseph McDonald is a contributor to the volume, and his work on this essay about scaling up Big Picture was deeply affected in indirect ways by reading the preliminary chapter drafts by the book's other contributors.

vision longer in the face of incessant and inevitably successful demands for compromise. “I don’t see any reason not to go all out,” he says, “because that’s the only way we can do something.” Definition is for him a check on going all out. His intuition in this regard arises from his previous experiences with institution building. Eliot Washor’s similar intuition arises from his experiences as an artist. Whether in building a school or making a video, one wants to skirt the earliest exigencies, to persevere in the hope that more of the dream may materialize, though one knows all along that the whole dream cannot (Walker & McDonald, 1997).

Of course, the Met and its relationships with the State of Rhode Island and with the Providence community are now well past this point. The Met has now been defined and the definition well articulated – as we suggested above; and many of its relationships have been worked out (though new adventures always beckon). But the scaling-up work of the Big Picture Company is in a different state (figuratively as well as literally). It is still just the other side of *defined* – good strategies in place, yes; active work underway, yes; reflection on that work, yes; overall theory of action, not quite; commitment to an overall scaling-up design, no.

From its beginnings, it has been the tendency of the Big Picture Company to forge ahead, and to figure things out as it goes along. It is a tendency that has served it well thus far, as it tends to serve well all start-ups in any field. This is partly because it is a tendency that produces lots of feedback fast. For an organization willing to pay attention to this feedback – and BP is such an organization – the result is good learning fast. On the other hand, there comes a point (in scaling up) when such a tendency becomes counterproductive, when a coherent theory of action becomes crucial. In the best circumstances, this theory of action coalesces around what has been learned. It typically leads to standardization and to attempts to achieve reliable replication.

Has BP reached such a point? Organizational theorist Tom Peters recently told Dennis Littky that BP growth is still much too small even to be called scaling-up. He said that it is still “play.” Now in the process of developing a proposal for continued funding from the Gates Foundation, however, BP feels some pressure to decide at what point play may end and “real” scale begin. At the start of next year, there will be 12 schools in BP’s orbit. Is that too many for “play”? Is 18 or 20 or 24 too many? How much additional standardization do such numbers seem to require? How much effort to achieve reliability in the design, the coaching, the consulting, and so on? How much regionalization of support systems?

An innovation or reform that departs so radically from the norm as the Met does, and in such multiple dimensions, requires reach and influence to protect it from being swallowed up. And reach and influence seem to require in turn a certain definition of scale – like the one that Big Picture first tentatively adopted: a Met-alike school within nearly every urban family’s reach. Yet, such a definition of scale may make crucial features of difference impossible to maintain. In the case of the Met, these may include the advisor’s craft, the rootedness in community, the sense of daring adventure, the

feeling of working always at the edge of expectations (one's own and everyone else's). These become problematic at certain levels of scale, where the substantial hands-on coaching required to support their development becomes too expensive, on the one hand, and standardization takes too great a toll.

This is the paradox that Ben and Jerry faced when they wrestled with whether to stay a Vermont ice-cream store or sell out to a franchising operation. Still more to the point, they are like the ones that Ari Weinzweig and Paul Saginaw faced at Zingerman's Deli in Ann Arbor, Michigan. But more about that below.

Scaling-Up Strategies

Dennis Littky told us that the only scaling up strategies that BP was obliged to use under the terms of its contract with districts and other entities that build Met-alike schools were the provision of curriculum and related materials, and principals' training. In fact, though - as he acknowledged - BP has other strategies in play too. Indeed, we count seven of them.

Articulation

This strategy involves clarifying what the Met stands for, what it consists of, and how it works. Its genres include argument (for example, about why "one student at a time" is a sensible way to arrange a high school), description (for example, of the Met's curriculum, or of its outcome statistics - such as the percentage of its graduates who go on to college), and story (for example, of one student's experience in an LTI). Its forms include, print, speech, one-on-one and small-group Q &A, video, slide presentations, and the mixed media of Big Picture Online.

A principal tool in use here involves an extensive set of curriculum materials available in either a case of "Red Binders," or at an internal website called Big Picture Online. In bulk and specificity, the materials rival the Edison Project's design book - though, in other respects, they are different. For example, they include an unusual array of stories of scaling up; data concerning graduation rates and the like, samples of student work, including portfolios; weekly calendars and daily announcements (on line); videos and photos; forums and chat rooms (on line); and either pull-out or downloadable forms (for example, a learning plan cover sheet). And there are materials not just for principals and advisors, but for students, and even for parents (indeed, the original source of funding for the development of BP Online aimed to support parent involvement).

Other important BP articulation tools are the contract that developers of Met-alike schools must sign, the brochures and other glossies sent to prospective developers of Met-alike schools, the reprints of articles available about BP made available at BP events, or downloadable from the BP public website, and the recent book about the Met by Eliot Levine (2002).

Articulation is also what Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor and other Big Picture staff do when they speak publicly or privately about the school – whether at a Rotary Club event, a school board hearing, or a meeting with a foundation officer or superintendent of schools. This is also what “Mexperts” do - Met students invited to speak publicly about their experiences.

The Big Picture Company is highly expert in articulation, and its expertise has been crucial in helping a wide variety of people – from corporate chiefs to policy mavens to poor parents eager to gain opportunities for their children – to understand and appreciate the Met.

Differentiation

A dilemma at the heart of any scaling-up effort is the one between fidelity and adaptation. Without a reasonable degree of adaptation, there is little hope that the design will spread – particularly when the design involves the degree of difference that this one does. But without a reasonable degree of fidelity, the design evaporates: what is scaled up bears little resemblance to what is intended. Managing the dilemma well involves the tricky business of deciding in any given case what constitutes “reasonable” on both sides. It also involves deciding who should make the call.

Big Picture cases range across vastly different policy contexts – in six different states at this point, including three major cities, within four distinct regions (two of which are three thousand miles from Providence). How can people who spend most of their time in Providence know enough about Oakland or Detroit or Denver to discern whether a particular move is an essential concession to contextual circumstances, or “backsliding?” Meanwhile, how can new principals, immersed from the beginning of their appointments in the intense and necessarily local business of starting a uniquely different school, pay sufficient attention simultaneously to the subtleties that make the Met the Met?

Clearly, neither the Providence-based BP staff nor the principals are best positioned to settle the differentiation dilemma on their own. One alternative – a viable one now, so long as the number of Met-alikes remains relatively small – is to settle the dilemma collaboratively and provisionally. This involves visits both ways: principals spending a lot of time in Providence (in The Year Before Opening, otherwise known as TYBO), and BP staff visiting Chicago, Sacramento, and so on – during and after TYBO. But what happens when there are 12 or 24 or 200 more Met-alikes, all relatively new, and all inherently at risk in contexts where their difference stands out? Should BP develop a regionally based support infrastructure, as, for example, Edison has done or Success for All or the Coalition of Essential Schools?

In its contracting with developers of Met-alike schools, and its provision of materials and training (off-site and on-site), BP has tended to emphasize the fidelity side of the differentiation dilemma. Much of the internal communication at BP reflects this emphasis, with many concerns showing about whether the new schools are enough Met-

alike, and whether the new principals “get it.” But mixed with the concerns is a countervailing theme – one that emphasizes patience even as it urges “no backsliding.” There is, for example, the recent enthusiastic report from Elliot Washor following a visit to Truman High School in Washington State, the only “conversion” school in the current mix of schools and thus especially suspect from a fidelity perspective. Washor uses his account of the school’s success in making a conversion to suggest that each of the new Met-alikes will encounter unique development issues – ones that appear to imperil them. But the thing is “to get started,” he argues, “even if things aren’t perfect. . . . You can only plan so much, you have to start doing and by that figure things out.”

Besides ‘figuring by doing,’ BP has also recently taken to managing the differentiation dilemma through ‘figuring by talking.’ Washor initiated this effort by raising at a staff retreat a question about what he called the Met’s “distinguishability.” “Are we sure,” he asked in effect, “what makes the Met the Met?” Distinguishability talk may involve, for example, structured conversation among BP staff, school principals and others of hypothetical digressions from espoused theory. Thus in a recent TYBO meeting, staff and new principals discussed the point at which a Met-alike might become un-Met as the result of a cultural decision. For example, if a school were to institute a dress code for all students, or to issue a general ban on swear words, would it have crossed the line defined by “one student at a time”? If so, what *are* legitimately Met-alike ways of dealing with dress and language issues – particularly in the light of community norms. Some TYBO principals argued, for example, that dress and language issues are regarded differently in Detroit or Chicago than they are in Providence. How much difference of this kind seems tolerable?

To assist with such parsing of vision in practice, long-time consultant to the Big Picture Company, Charlie Mojowski, has suggested using the innovation configuration protocols and tools developed over many years at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Hord, 1986). Some work of this kind is currently being planned. However, innovation configuration tools can be used either to challenge pre-conceived limits and in the process redefine essentials, or to clarify essentials presumed as given and thus ensure greater fidelity to them. The process of scaling up reform, as ordinarily conceived, requires both these functions at different points: experimental transgression by the earliest sites, standardization later on.

Imagery

All the strategies on this list overlap to some extent. This one follows naturally from the first two. Indeed, the value of any articulation of the Met may lie especially in the appeal of the images it conveys. Nor are descriptions and stories the only way to convey images. Perhaps the most telling images of an LTI, for example, are those from a recent series of photos by Cal Wolk of the hands and faces of Met students as they interact with their mentors and others in workplaces. It is hard to imagine a Big Picture event without a slide show or video; and it is hard to imagine Big Picture headquarters without the photos that fill its walls of people learning and working.

A crucial element also in BP imaging as a scaling-up strategy is the guided tour of the Mets – especially those occupying the spectacular new Public Street campus. There the shapes and functions of the rooms, the movable walls and unusual furniture, and the openness of the buildings to the neighborhood all serve to make the different curriculum seem feasible, and its underlying ideas clearer and more compelling. In effect, they enable the prospective developer – the superintendent, the state or district official in charge of contracting vendors for new small schools, the leader of a Gates initiative, or the potential principal – to gain a new mental model about high schooling. At the same time, however, as BP staff have pointed out to us, the newness and attractiveness of these facilities – as well as of the Peace Street Met facility – may cause some prospective developers to think that a Met-alike school may cost too much to build, or may function too differently to fit available space.

Transparency

At the Public Street Met campus, the rooms have descriptive placards, as if they were exhibits in a design show. It is one of hundreds of gestures by the Big Picture Company to make transparent the functions and qualities of the Met, of the Met-alikes, and of BP itself. For example, all of these are expected to produce weekly “TGIFs,” collections of musings by voluntary contributors on their week’s work, which are then shared across the network. Sometimes these are startling in their acknowledgment of difficulty or dissidence, and sometimes they seem to substitute personal for organizational transparency. But most often they are simply reflective accounts of the week’s major events – the difficulties of finding space in Chicago, of finding money in Sacramento, or of mounting exhibitions in Providence. Whatever form they take individually, however, they provide collectively a remarkable account of the challenges and mundane realities of the enterprise overall.

The Met culture in other respects too has been designed to discourage usual educational privacy. Visitors frequently visit advisories, or stop individual students to talk about their work. Students develop their learning plans with parents as well as their advisors, and the plans are shared with workplace mentors. Their exhibitions of progress are public, and the narratives of their progress are considered texts for discussion by a range of concerned adults – including advisors from other Met campuses who may be brought in to participate in “Grab Meetings” – efforts to re-orient seniors who have fallen behind in their progress toward graduation. Student work is frequently on display – not only in exhibitions, but in each school’s daily “Pick-Me-Up” (a morning all-school ritual that often features student performance), and in videos and print materials and wall hangings intended to articulate the school’s values to its own community as well as outsiders. Advisors are expected to discuss their advisory work openly with their principals, and in turn the principals are expected to discuss their own work openly with Littky and Washor (functioning as the Mets’ co-superintendents).

The Met-alikes are expected to be transparent too. The process starts in TYBO – with frank, weekly conference calls; on-site consultations with BP staff; long visits to Providence that include the prospective principals’ own exhibitions of progress; and

TGIFs. After the schools open, they are visited frequently by Big Picture staffers – including school coaches who stay for up to a week at a time, and write long narrative reports afterward (mimicking the narrative reports that advisors write to describe the progress of their advisees). Gates evaluators visit too, as do others – most of them collecting data that is fed back in various private conversations and public reports.

Much cross-school sharing of data, open discussion of issues, and display of student work are expected to happen on line, as Big Picture Online rolls out. One premise of this sophisticated networking website developed with a substantial grant of federal funding, is that it will function not only to articulate Met ideas and functions, or serve as a repository of images of these, but also serve to make visible the ongoing business of the entire Met and Met-alike network. The plan is that TGIFs will be posted here, that student work will be displayed here, even that school data will be available here. Still under development to some extent, BP Online is intended to provide for BP enterprises the same degree of transparency that Fishman (1996) claims the internal website of the natural foods grocer Whole Foods provides its enterprises:

It collects and distributes information to an extent that would be unimaginable almost anywhere else. Sensitive figures on store sales, team sales, profit margins, even salaries, are available to every person in every location. In fact, the company shares so much information so widely that the SEC has designated all 6,500 employees “insiders” for stock-trading purposes.(p. 103)

Enculturation

The Big Picture Company launched its scaling up efforts in July 2002 with an extravaganza of enculturation that it called the Big Bang. It included songs and new games; a “living timeline” on which everyone present stood, including the real Ted Sizer, and someone impersonating John Dewey (who handed out original-issue postal stamps with his image on them); moving personal testaments about struggle and diversity – by Met advisors and Met students; workshops and serious conversations in all kinds of formats, formal and informal; a “Pick-me-up” in the form of a game show; videos and a slide show; giant puppets who mingled with diners and pretended to mistake the Big Bang for a wedding reception; a football kickoff plus hundreds of raining tiny footballs stamped “The Big Picture Company” (the Big Bang was held on the same site as the summer training for the New England Patriots). Initiates – which included not only the new Met-alike principals, but also the schools’ advisors – seemed to walk away from all of this feeling inspired and connected. They also left bearing gifts - including pictures of every other participant, and a Big Picture T-shirt.

Of course, the history of contemporary reform is replete with examples of how inspiration and connection may wear away in even the amount of time and effort it takes to fly back home. Still, the Big Bang was extraordinarily well done. Nor was its purpose merely inspiration and connection. The combination of play and serious conversation purposefully modeled the Met culture at its best – where play is meant to build community and expand imagination, and where serious conversation is the chief

curricular tool. Moreover, the often startling juxtaposition of the play and the conversation – the quick shifts of tone and turns of purpose at the Big Bang - purposefully evoked an even deeper feature of Big Picture culture. This is one that Walker and McDonald noticed as early as 1997, and that they associated with a conception of non-linear organization and change:

[The Big Picture Company] has gathered a particularly diverse group of advisors, both within [Rhode Island] and outside. Among the outsiders is Margaret Wheatley, the organizational theorist whose work is premised on metaphors drawn from quantum mechanics and chaos theory. The problem with ordinary conceptions of organization, according to Wheatley (1992), is their metaphoric dependence on Newtonian physics and its seventeenth-century preoccupation with orderliness, predictability, the analysis of wholes into parts, and the linear relation of cause and effect. The consequence, she says, is “a world based on machine images. . . a world filled with boundaries”(p. 28). In such a world, one learns to fear the randomness and uncertainty that are the real springs of creativity.

The special gift of the Big Picture Company – and correspondingly special challenge of scaling it up – is that it does not operate on linear and otherwise conventional organizational principles. It plays loose, tolerating ambiguities for the opportunities they may yield, moving fast among random opportunities to scan for the best, triaging as necessary, relying often on tacit knowledge and improvisation rather than explicit knowledge and standard procedure. In this regard, it is more like an innovative for-profit corporation than a non-profit educational one. It is also different from most other educational organizations – even among developers of small schools – inasmuch as it tends to see education from the school up rather than the system down.

A big question still hanging over its scale-up efforts is whether Met-alikes need to adopt the same organizational culture in order to be genuinely Met-alike. If so, clearly, they will need lots of enculturation – which also has to include tips on surviving culturally hostile environments. More than the Big Bang will be necessary. Indeed, it is likely that the effort will require interventions using all of Lee Bolman and Terry Deal’s (1997) four frames: not just symbolic ones, as in the Big Bang; but also structural ones, one that might enable the Met-alikes to operate on some other basis than a district school or even (in most cases) a district charter; political ones that may help them acquire the kind of governmental and local economic champions that kept the Met afloat in its earliest days, and that still remain vitally important to the Mets today; and human-resource ones, that help them get and keep entrepreneurial principals, as well as advisors up to the taks of advising.

Training and Consulting

As we noted above, under its contract with Met-alike developers, the Big Picture Company is obligated to provide training for principals – particularly during TYBO, when under the terms of the Gates grant, half the salary of the new principals comes from BP-held Gates funding.

TYBO training appropriately emphasizes fidelity. It includes several weeks of Providence-based residency spread across a full year, involving Met principal shadowing and debriefing, and other efforts of immersion in the experience as well as articulation of the Met; weekly phone conferences between BP staff and Met-alike principals working on issues like getting a lease, hiring staff, figuring out their relationship to district and state; on-site coaching by a number of BP staff members, including Littky, Washor, and school development chief Molly Schen.

Moreover, the training that continues after schools open also emphasizes fidelity. It features phone-based, on-line, and on-site coaching by two experienced Providence advisors, Joe Battaglia and Rachel Brian. Although we have not yet observed their coaching first-hand, our reading of their coaching reports suggests that it is considerably tough-minded with respect to the problem of achieving fidelity, though also empathetic and alert to all the challenges involved. They follow up their three-day or week-long on-site coaching visits with school-progress narrative reports. These model the Met's student-progress narrative reports, and include warm and cool assessments of fidelity with respect to such Met design features as advisory culture, staff culture, "authenticity" (the "real-world" character of student projects), academic vigor, assessment, use of Big Picture Online and other materials, financial operations, the principal's outreach work within the district and community, and school management. They conclude with suggestions for the principal. In one recent narrative report, these suggestions offered evidence of the breadth and complexity of the job – indicators again of the Met's difference: "Complete the 2003 budget, begin networking, gather data for grant applications, gather people for an advisory board, take students on speaking engagements. . . increase work with community organizations. . . increase consistency of communication with Big Picture. . . write reflectively at least once a month."

Beyond what we are here calling training (which especially include Met immersion and other articulation experiences, differentiation conversations, and deliberate enculturation experiences – like the Big Bang, and the principal retreats), BP also provides expert consultations to its schools. For example, when the new principal of Met West in Oakland found himself having to raise local funding, BP dispatched its own development officer to coach him on-site, and to accompany him on introductory visits to local corporations and foundations. For its next round of school development (pending additional funding from the Gates Foundation), BP expects to add additional consulting help of this kind – for example, regarding the development of facilities, the recruiting and hiring of staff, and the creation of school-business partnerships. All this is and will be in addition to another kind of expert consultation that currently Littky and Washor supply whenever they visit local sites. This is expert cultural consultation: how to short-circuit ordinary organizational wiring and in the process lay new wire; how to take liberties with ordinary conceptions of a principal's place; how to describe the Met-alike difference in ways that seem intuitively sensible and politically appealing; how to find "angels" in the environment – people with local clout who can reach anyone they need to reach in order to help the school, and, when necessary, save the school – people who can raise money for the school.

Others besides Littky and Washor can provide pieces of such cultural consultation, but it is hard to imagine anyone else handling the whole task. For this reason, the odd question arises, How far can the Big Picture Company scale up its own Co-Directors? How far can two guys reach? To twelve schools, twenty-four schools, two hundred schools?

Communities of Practice

The Big Picture Company knows that people interested in starting a Met-alike school need more than to read about what the Met is and how it works. They also have to have opportunities to think hard about what the Met is *not* – about the mental models it deliberately displaces, about the unlearning that it requires, about the apparently benign adaptations that would actually enervate it. They have to imagine these turns of fate, and construct ways to avoid them. They need images of the Met’s most intimate operations: how to “seal the deal” with an LTI mentor or advisee; how to push an advisee without displacing his or her own passions with one’s own; how to organize a pick-me-up that actually awakens kids’ interests and adds to the hopefulness and productivity of their community. They need windows into how the Met actually works, and enculturation into the values that underlie it. That is, they need to learn fundamentally different ways of teaching, learning, and schooling. They have to imagine a kind of high schooling at odds with their own experiences – both as students and teachers.

As we have suggested above, BP provides prospective Met-alike principals with training designed to offer them all these things. But others besides principals need the same things too – none more so than advisors. Nor do they seem the kind of things that a train-the-trainer model can supply – as in expecting the new principals to pass them along to the new advisors they hire. Yet our analysis of the Met difference reported in the first section of this essay highlights for us the crucial role of advisor knowledge in the running of the Met, and presumably therefore in the replication of the Met design. There is no model in the ordinary educational world of the work that Met advisors do, nor mentors readily available beyond Providence. How then are Met-alike advisors going to acquire the knowledge they need?

BP school coaches, Joe Battaglia and Rachel Brian, wisely cross the line today between principal support and advisor support. This may be partly because they have not themselves been principals and therefore lack credibility with principals (who may be more inclined to seek out mentorship by Littky and Washor). But it is clearly also because the principals (of the Met-alike schools) have not been advisors, recognize that certain dimensions of the advisor’s craft elude them, and therefore urge Battaglia and Brian to help fill the gap when they visit the schools.

Here are two examples offered by Battaglia and Brian of the special challenges facing advisors:

Right about week six of an advisory, there's a thing that happens: Kids aren't really getting it, and at the same time they are getting over the glow of being in a place where they are known, have personal freedoms unknown in their middle-school experience, etc. But they're not getting it with respect to out-of-the-box thinking, real-world learning, passion. You can only suspend disbelief for so long, however good the place feels, then a frenzy hits: "What am I learning? Nothing." That's when the advisor has to kick it up.

A kid in your advisor says he wants to build a whole new wing of the United Nations - What do you do? Put the kabbosh on it and risk dampening the passion that underlies the idea? Or, say the kid says she wants to study dolphins for her LTI. The advisor thinks - Whoa - that's not going to lead to real-world learning because we live in a land-locked place. Do you say it? No, you work to hone it down, and at the same time preserve its essential character. "You have good ideas," the advisor needs to learn to say, "now let's get the details right."

How did Battaglia and Brian themselves learn to do these things? Brian says, "From four years of screwing up," and Battaglia adds - *and* also by hanging around the Trinity Brew House on Fridays after work, swapping stories with other advisors. The Trinity Brew House is a pub near the original Met campus. "Screwing up" - which is to say experimenting continually on the job - and then telling stories with co-workers about the experiments in an informal setting: this is a reasonable definition of what is often called a *community of practice*.

The term has gained much currency recently in school reform circles as the result of several studies. Reporting on a major study of high schools, for example, Milbrey McLaughlin and Joan Talbert (2001) describe a sub-sample of the schools that proved consistently able to get and keep a diverse group of students academically engaged. A key marker of such schools was the presence in them of a "strong professional community committed to making innovations that support student and teacher learning and success" (pp. 38-39). Fred Newmann and Gary Wehlage (1995), also reporting on a national study of restructuring schools, claimed that the most successful "were the ones that used restructuring tools to help them function as professional communities of practice" (p. 3). Where such communities enjoyed the right supports, and focused on students' intellectual growth, the students did grow intellectually (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Newmann & Associates, 1996).

But the term "communities of practice" actually has workplace rather than school roots (Wenger, 1998). It is the term that John Seeley Brown and others used to describe a phenomenon they uncovered inside the Xerox Corporation in the 1980's and early 1990's: the work-focused but off-task conversations of people who work together, and who come to rely on each other to teach things that no one else can teach them - things concerning the most intimate and often the most crucial aspects of their work life. Here is how John Seeley Brown and Estee Solomon Gray describe what they call "CoPs":

At the simplest level, they are a small group of people who've worked together over a period of time. Not a team, not a task force, not necessarily an authorized or identified group. People in CoPs can perform the same job (tech reps) or collaborate on a shared task (software developers) or work together on a product (engineers, marketers, and manufacturing specialists). They are peers in the execution of "real work." What holds them together is a common sense of purpose and a real need to know what each other knows. There are many communities of practice within a single company, and most people belong to more than one of them. (Brown & Gray, web document, p. 4).

Schools are often impoverished with respect to the opportunities they provide communities of practice to develop and flourish. This is because they define time and space and work too closely, too inflexibly – provide too little slack. By contrast, the Met has room for communities of practice, and uses them deliberately to scale up practice and culture within the Mets themselves. And the communities spill out on some afternoons to the Trinity Brew House.

The question facing the Met-alikes, however – far from the Trinity Brew House – is whether their emerging communities of practice can be linked across time and space with the original ones, and thereby supply its advisors what the Red Binders cannot supply.

Brown and his colleagues studying Xerox culture noticed that repair technicians learned more about how to repair machines by swapping stories with each other informally than by consulting repair manuals. Acting on this finding, Xerox tried to add additional learning power through technology. For example, it gave its technicians two-way radios so they could consult with each other on the job in real time. Later, it also introduced one of the first web-based environments for swapping stories of practice:

. . . Eureka, an electronic "knowledge refinery" that organizes and categorizes a database of tips generated by the field staff. Technically, Eureka is a relational database of hypertext documents. In practice, it's an electronic version of war stories told around the coffee pot -- with the added benefits of an institutional memory, expert validation, and a search engine.

Eureka operates as a free-flowing knowledge democracy, much like the natural, informal collaborations among tech reps. It relies on voluntary information exchanges. Any tech rep, regardless of rank, can submit a tip, but they are neither required to nor are they explicitly rewarded. In Eureka, the coin of the realm is social capital: the incentive to be a good colleague, to contribute and receive knowledge as a member of the community (Brown & Gray, web document, pp. 1-2).

One of the Big Picture Company's aspirations for Big Picture Online is that it might serve a similar function – not just for advisors, but also for students, parents, principals, and workplace mentors. However, hopes invested in technology often fall somewhat short of the mark. Moreover, networks and communities of practice are each

distinct reform strategies. The latter has been shown to be an effective strategy in scaling up practice and culture locally; while the former spreads ideas, access to expertise, accounts of practice, and encouragement – among other needed supports for reformed practice (Lieberman and Grolnick, 1996). It seems highly desirable to experiment with the possibility of joining the strategies – that is, of using networks to scale up communities of practice. And this is, indeed, the kind of experimentation that BP Online proposes. However, there is little evidence thus far – inside or outside the BP experience - that this can be easily accomplished. The problem is that communities of practice consist of more than stories around the coffee pot or the bar – which can readily be transplanted to chat rooms and other online environments. They also consist of the storytellers themselves deeply engaged in a joint enterprise, intimately linked in an effort to get some concrete task accomplished – for which they need collective teaching and learning. This is a harder condition to achieve in a virtual environment.

An Emerging Theory of Action for Scaling Up *Differently* (or how to get good olive oil in New York)

We are reporting from New York, where there has been a recent scaling-up failure. It is not about schools, but about food markets. The lights are out on Sixth Avenue, between 9th and 10th Streets, and the grates down permanently on Balducci's. This is the store where James Beard shopped, the one that defined what it means to be the gourmet grocery (articulation/differentiation). The image frayed over the last several years. One of us visiting the store for some salmon sausage and frissee two nights before the quick closing thought the place looked terrible (imagery)

It was not just that the store was no longer a family operation – that the family had quarreled and sold it to a chain called Sutton Place Gourmet – nor even that the chain had begun to skimp on varieties of fresh pasta and imported olive oil in order to stock freshly made sandwiches for take-outs. It was also that the competition had grown remarkably: Gourmet Garage, the Garden of Eden, Fairway, Turquacino, Grand Central Market, Union Square Farmer's Market, Whole Foods. Balducci's was no longer the only place to get Serrano ham, fresh white truffles, pheasant, or Parmigiano Reggiano. But the major problem was that the people who worked there no longer seemed to “get it,” no longer had the attitude that seemed to make the art of shopping for good food transparent, that made shoppers through mere contact with the store and its culture emerge from the shopping experience more confident in their cooking (enculturation). That's what used to happen in Balducci's, but this difference had somehow evaporated in the scaling up.

So some of us now get our good olive oil fifteen blocks north at Whole Foods. *Cook's Magazine* rates Whole Foods extra virgin olive oil as good as olive oil gets – which may be an exaggeration, but is nonetheless an image that inspires confidence. Whole Foods is a supermarket chain – though notably different from other supermarket chains, particularly with respect to its organizational design, as we suggested above (transparency). It now has 142 stores throughout the U.S., and claims to be the largest

retailer of natural and organic foods in the world. Some of these stores were started from scratch, and some were conversions – of already established natural food stores, or of small natural food store chains, like the New England-based Bread and Circus Supermarkets. In handling conversions, Whole Foods – after one disastrous experience when it moved too fast to subsume the identity of a Los Angeles store with a strong customer following – practices a kind of co-habitation at first. So, for example, one can still find the Bread & Circus name in limited use in Providence many years after the take-over. Why didn't Whole Foods just keep the Bread & Circus name – as Sutton Place Gourmet kept the name Balducci's? One reason is that Whole Foods aims to gain clout in the American food industry, and thus advance the fortunes of natural and organic farmers and suppliers. Widespread brand recognition is part of its strategy in this regard. At the same time, brand-name honesty is an aspect of the company's overall dedication to organizational transparency. One of the things that gradually ran Balducci's into the ground was the slow realization that it was no longer really Balducci's, but that the fact had been kept secret.

When this different kind of chain first came to New York, we observed the Whole Foods culture grow here – slowly at first, but then pervasively. So, at first, members of the check-out “team” still chatted with each other rather than their customers – in the way of most supermarkets – as if the customers themselves were no more than the items in their baskets. But that seldom happens anymore (enculturation). And meat team members, cheese team members, grocery team members now all go out of their way to assist shoppers in a way that is absolutely unimaginable at Morton Williams or Gristede's. This is a different *difference* than at the old Balducci's – where the culture seemed meritocratic - as if every customer were important just because he or she was smart enough to be there, or because he or she was considering cooking something that could only be purchased there. At Whole Foods, by contrast, the culture seems democratic-ecological - as if every customer is important because he or she is participating (as consumer) in sustainable agriculture, keeping the planet greener as well as freer of genetically altered foods, pesticides, and MSG.

The old Balducci's culture is harder to sustain (in a scaled-up environment) partly because it depends to some extent on depth of professional experience – on the fish people really knowing fish, and the produce people having down all the varieties of mushrooms and their cooking properties. Moreover, the earthy eliteness of it may need the equivalent of the hovering presence of a matron deeply invested in the quality of her store and her employees – as suggested by the picture of Mrs. Balducci that used to hang by one of the cash registers. How does one scale up Mrs. Balducci, or even replace her in her own store once she passed away? How does one scale up the curmudgeonly deli man who worked in the store for 20+ years? By contrast, the Whole Foods culture is easier to scale up and sustain because it depends ultimately not on in-depth professional knowledge of the kind that one might be expected to acquire only after years behind the deli counter, or even on charismatic leadership, but rather on human relations training, organizational transparency, and knowledgeable team work.

The first two of these can be standardized across 142 stores (training and transparency), but the third requires something more elaborate. How did the Whole Foods culture grow in the hostile environs of New York City? The same way that sour dough bread gets made, or wine, or even – in its own way – olive oil – namely by means of a starter culture. When a new Whole Foods store is scheduled to open in – say - Santa Fe or LA, employees in New York and Los Angeles are invited to move to the new place for a few months or permanently (communities of practice). The point is to start new communities of practice with donations of practitioners from established ones.

This happens also to be how the four new Mets in Providence grew from the original two. They were started by principals who had previously been advisors, by advisors and students moving to new sites – their parents and workplace mentors in tow. Rather than open the new Met with all new – and un-enculturated people – risking that the culture they would grow might differ significantly from the original one – the Met risked breaking its original two schools apart.

Can such a strategy work across distances? Might some Providence advisors be persuaded to move to Seattle or Hartford? Perhaps. However, as Dennis Littky suggested to us, a school is not a food market in the end, nor an advisor a grocer. And certainly a kid is not olive oil – easily handled over time by a series of advisors (albeit ones coming into established communities of practice). The moral difference puts limits on the analogy.

So, how else can one replicate culture without the equivalent of starter dough? The answer to this question depends a lot on how many cultures one wants to replicate, and also on what the purpose of the replication is. Is it, for example, to recover capital investments, as the Edison School scale-up has been attempting to do? Or to achieve economies of scale, and the kind of purchasing power that can have an impact on food production, as the Whole Foods scale-up has been attempting to do? Or is it to have cultural rather than economic clout? The former can perhaps be attained with less replication. As we suggested at the beginning of this essay, the difference may be between scaling up a design, and scaling up a set of ideas – though ones well grounded in design.

Recently, one of us received a gift of olive oil. Hand-dated, and without a word of English on the label, the bottle seemed straight from Azienda Agricola I Lecci – in the Province of Brescia in northernmost Italy. But the shipping package suggested instead that it had come – oddly – from a delicatessen in Ann Arbor, Michigan - Zingerman's. A few weeks later, Dennis Littky happened to reach into the back pocket of the airline seat in front of him to discover an article about this deli in *Inc Magazine* (Burlingham, 2003). The title caught his eye: "The Coolest Small Company in America."

Zingerman's Delicatessen was founded in 1982 by Ari Weinzweig and Paul Saginaw. Over the next ten years or so, they developed it into a successful company employing more than 100 people, with sales approaching \$7 million annually, and with a considerable reputation within and beyond Ann Arbor for high-quality sandwiches,

brownies, latkes, and so on. As Leslie Brokaw (2003) suggests in yet another article about the Zingerman phenomenon, many people in the position of Weinzweig and Saginaw would have begun then to think about franchising the operation. But several factors held them back. One was that they liked being local and unique, and felt that some significant part of their success depended on staying both. "It's paradoxical," Weinzweig explained to Brokaw, "You've created something unique – that's why people want to replicate it, but if you actually replicated it, it would lose its uniqueness"(p. 36). What Weinzweig and Saginaw decided to do instead was to create a collection of unique companies, linked by the principles animating the delicatessen. Among these are several akin to the organizational values of the Big Picture Company: focus on the local community, organizational transparency, a view of learning that emphasizes reflection on what one knows and how, and the use of zany and distinctive imagery. As Brokaw explains, the new company made up of linked companies is now eight years and seven businesses into a 15-year strategic plan, that calls for the creation of as many as 15 businesses:

There's the deli, the bakehouse, the mail order unit, a catering operation, and a web site. There's also ZingTrain, a training business that runs seminars in everything from specialty foods and merchandising to staff management. The newest business is a creamery to produce fresh dairy products and get involved nationally with groups using traditional methods of making cheese. The next project in development is Zingerman's Roadhouse, an American regional restaurant (p.59).

And there is also the non-profit business, Food Gatherers, which collects leftovers from Ann Arbor-area restaurants and distributes them to food kitchens.

Back in Providence following the plane trip on which Dennis Littky discovered Zingerman's, he asked the Big Picture staff to consider a re-definition of what "big picture" means. Perhaps it might mean something more than an organization that creates and supports its own schools – many of them, too many of them to know well. Perhaps it could mean an organization that learns continually from its own small set of schools, and uses through varied other enterprises what it learns in its schools to press for a radical re-visioning of American youth education.

Thus on a cold January day, the BP staff warmed to the task of brainstorming categories of "other enterprises" that might link to the Mets and the Met-alikes, and that might collaboratively scale up the ideas animating them, that might make the Met more like Zingerman's than Balducci's or Whole Foods. They imagined a publishing house; a curriculum design laboratory in collaboration with other organizations; a design studio focused – among other things - on architecture and furniture for small schools; a new school facilities consulting firm; a speakers bureau, including kids; a network facilitator (perhaps one that had solved the thorny problem of networking communities of practice); and more.

For us watching, the energy and enthusiasm that attended the brainstorming seemed less about taking a new turn than about discovering what was all along the organization's theory of action – about consciously articulating it for the first time. Still, brainstorming is one thing, and doing another. If the Big Picture Company were actually to commit itself to dealing with the real difference in the Met by scaling up in a really different way, then it would have to face a number of obstacles, not the least of which would be skepticism from funders, policymakers, and even some other new school entrepreneurs. “But I thought Big Picture was finally getting to the point of clarity in its operations,” one of them might say. Zingerman's encountered the same initial skepticism. But Burlingham quotes one of its most skeptical employees – who left the company at the time of the transformation, then returned later as the leader of one of the new enterprises:

We've realized the value of living with ambiguity. . . . When something comes up, it's not always clear what the right answer is. You just have to go with the process and have faith. Mutual trust and respect play a big role. You have to operate in a world of integrity. There's a lot of integrity in this company at all levels – from the financial statements to the croissants (Burlingham, 2003, p. 74).

There is a lot of integrity at the Big Picture Company too, along with the kind of passion for difference that actually thrives on skepticism – takes it as a sign that it is operating at the cutting edge. This is one of the differences that difference makes.

3. Study Design

Assumptions Underlying the Study

1. In the context of the effort of the Big Picture Company to create many Mets, the term *scaling up* refers to a process that necessarily involves intuition and experimentation. This is because the Big Picture Company is unique, because the Met is unique in its time, and because the process of scaling up reforms and school designs is much under-theorized at this point.
2. For this reason, the scaling up of the Met demands documentation, clarification, and the creation of a coherent and stable theory of action. Such a theory can serve to integrate what many people with many roles in many places *mean* to do, what they *design* for, and what they *actually* do (Schon & McDonald, 1998).
3. Such a theory is best constructed through a partnership of insiders determined to build and use systems of feedback and reflection, and outsiders serving in the role of what Saul (1992) calls the “faithful witness.” This is one who uses his or her outside perspective to ask useful questions; to generate testable images of theory and practice, and to test them; and to uncover links and gaps among intention, design, and practice that may otherwise escape the notice of insiders.
4. The experience of the Big Picture Company in constructing a coherent and stable theory of action can serve other school designers too – particularly those wishing to achieve an optimal balance between replication and adaptation.
5. For this reason, it is important not only that the researchers serve as faithful witnesses to the effort, but that they also write about what they experience and discover in ways that others may find accessible.

Research Questions

The primary research questions, based on the assumptions listed above, are as follows:

1. What does this project mean to do in terms of scaling up?
2. What does the project actually do?
3. How does it manage to narrow the gap between meaning and doing?
4. What strategies, tools, theories, and practices of scaling up does the project generate, and how effective are they? In particular, how does it manage the dilemma in scaling up between fidelity and adaptation – and to what effect? Also how does it function as an intermediary agent, and to what effect?

5. How is the project's work relevant to the designs and efforts of other projects? What does it contribute to a generalizable theory of scaling up high school reform?

Research Team

The research team is under the direction of Joseph McDonald, Professor at NYU's Steinhardt School of Education. He will participate in all phases of data collection, and oversee data analysis and reporting relative to the research questions listed above.

Joining McDonald on the team are advanced NYU doctoral students Emily Klein and Megan Riordan. In addition to conducting research and participating in all analysis and reporting activities related to the questions above, Klein and Riordan will also conduct their own research on additional questions as part of their dissertation work. Klein's questions are likely to focus on networking activities, and Riordan's on experiential curriculum – e.g. LTI's. Both will relate substantially to the overall research effort.

The team also consists of BP staff member Samantha Broun, who will serve as the inside coordinator of research activities and a special source of “insider” perspective on research questions and findings. She will alert the other researchers to data-rich collection opportunities; translate BP lingo and ways of thinking; serve as the connector among the schools, BP, and the researchers; and “filter out” from a huge mass of documentary data – including internal memos and meeting notes – those data that seem relevant to the research foci and questions. Broun will also help link this research project to a longitudinal study of graduates of the Met, directed by Karen Arnold, Associate Professor at Boston College's Lynch School of Education.

Data Sources

The following data sources are divided into direct and indirect. Direct sources are those that NYU takes responsibility for generating. Indirect are those that BP generates for its own management purposes, and to which it grants the NYU team access.

Direct

1. School site visits. See attached tentative calendar.

Interviews of principals, teachers, and other adults at Met, TYBO1, TYBO2, and TYBO3 sites.

Observations of planning activities, development activities, and ordinary operations.

Document collection.

2. Providence-based training and networking activities.

Observation of trainings and annual network gatherings.

Interviews of participants and staff.

Document collection.

3. Providence leadership activities.

Interviews twice yearly of key staff.

Document collection.

Occasional observation of staff meetings and other Providence-based leadership activities.

Indirect

4. Web-based documents

Training materials

Student portfolios

Other student work

Learning Plans

Calendars

5. Other documents

Coaches' meeting notes

TGIFs (TYBO 1, TYBO2, each school, BP)

Other relevant BP and school documents, "filtered out" by internal research team member.

Data Analysis and Reporting

The NYU Team will engage in an ongoing and recursive analysis of data, aimed at sharing and testing emerging understandings, clarifying methods and assumptions, identifying findings related to the research questions, arranging for the further testing of these findings, revising questions and foci as needed, and preparing various levels of research reports. The Team will use the following tools and venues:

The Research Team will conduct an ongoing review of the literature bearing on the research questions, with a special focus on various ideas of "scaling up" and of approaches to it in education and other fields.

Many interviews will be transcribed, and all interview notes and transcripts, as well as field notes will be entered into electronic format. These plus all electronic documents will be uploaded regularly into a program for qualitative research data storage and analysis (ATLAS Ti).

The Research Team (including the "inside" member) will review on a monthly basis all documents collected during the preceding month, and prepare research memos (called IAMs).

The Research Team will exchange and review all field notes and IAMs and conference twice monthly. Twice monthly, it will also conference with the BP-based member of the research team. The purposes of this conference are to clarify emerging understandings by gaining the benefits of an inside perspective, to support the “filtering out” of documentary and other data, and to prepare a brief monthly research report to be published in a newsletter or TGIF.

Longer research reports – called essays - will be prepared twice yearly during the first two years of the project. The first of these (January 2003) will be largely descriptive and analytical, and based on documentary data and Providence-based fieldwork (for example, at BP training sessions, and Met campuses). The other three essays will be based as well on fieldwork at other scaling-up sites, and will employ the coding function of the storage and analysis software. The format of these will likely combine several “snapshots” chosen to illustrate one or more issues relevant to the research questions, together with analysis of these issues. The reports will be presented in draft format to BP as a check on fact finding and interpretation, though the Research Team reserves the right to make its own interpretations in the end. If requested by BP, one or more members of the Research Team will also attend a BP staff meeting focused on the draft. The research reports are likely to form the basis of a book. This will be decided in the project’s third year, when these reports will be synthesized and combined with other data and analysis as appropriate.

The Research Team may also produce additional reports for outside publication based on this research. These may include articles for journals, papers for presentation at professional conferences, and doctoral dissertations. As with the semi-annual research reports, the Team will submit all such materials to BP for its review prior to publication – as a check on fact-finding and interpretation -- but the NYU part of the Team reserves the right to publish what its individual members see fit.

Tentative Calendar

Spring/Summer 2002:

- Participation in planning conference, including Big Picture leaders, Director of anonymous funding foundation, ad hoc advisory group.
- Development of research design.
- Filing with the NYU Institutional Review Board for permission to conduct research using human subjects.
- Visit by McDonald to Big Picture for background.
- Attendance by McDonald, Riordan, and Klein at Big Bang/TYBO2 training (8/9-8/11) – for background.
- Reading in the literature on scaling up.

Fall/Winter 2002-3:

(Data collection pending IRB approval)

- Two two-day visits to the new Providence schools (McDonald, Riordan)
- Interviews of BP staff members
- Observation of TYBO 2 training
- Observation of Principals Resource Network meeting (NYC)
- Weekly monitoring of Big Picture On Line.
- Document collection and analysis.
- Continuation of the reading in the literature on scaling up.
- Team conferences, IAMs, contributions to TGIFs.
- Development of research report 1.
- Visit to Providence to present draft of essay 1
- Revision of essay, and presentation to anonymous funding foundation

Spring/Summer 2003:

- Observation of TYBO 2 training and Met Principals' Retreat (McDonald, Klein, Riordan)
- Two-day visits to sites in El Dorado, Oakland, and Federal Way (Klein and Riordan).
- Additional BP staff interviews (McDonald).
- Continuation of literature review.
- Weekly monitoring of Big Picture On Line.
- Document collection and analysis.
- Team conferences, IAMs, contributions to TGIFs.
- Development of dissertation proposals (Klein, Riordan).
- Development of research report 2.
- Visit to Providence to review draft of research report 2.

Summer 2003

- Observation of training meetings
- Interviews
- Observation of annual conference

Fall/Winter 2003-4

- Two-day visits to two TYBO 2 sites.
- Dissertation data collection begins (in TYBO 2 sites or Providence).
- Providence visit(s) to interview key staff, collect additional documents.
- Weekly monitoring of Big Picture On Line.
- Document collection and analysis.
- Team conferences, IAMs, contributions to TGIFs.
- Development of research report 3.
- Visit to Providence to review draft of research report 3.

- Revision of report, and presentation to anonymous funding foundation

Spring/Summer 2004

- One-day visits to a selection of TYBO1, TYBO2, and TYBO3 sites (McDonald).
- Two-day visits to a selection of TYBO1, TYBO2, and TYBO3 sites (Klein, Riordan).
- Dissertation data collection continues.
- Providence visit(s) to interview key staff, collect additional documents.
- Weekly monitoring of Big Picture On Line.
- Document collection and analysis.
- Team conferences, IAMs, contributions to TGIFs.
- Development of research report 4.
- Visit to Providence to review draft of research report 4.

Summer 2004

- Observation of training meetings
- Observation of annual conference

Fall/Winter 2004-5

- Final one-day visits to a selection of TYBO1, TYBO2, and TYBO3 sites.
- Providence visit(s) to conduct final interviews of key staff, collect additional documents.
- Weekly monitoring of Big Picture On Line.
- Team conferences, IAMs, contributions to TGIFs.
- Dissertation preparation.

Spring/Summer 2005

- Preparation of manuscript(s) based on reports 1-4, plus additional material.

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Scaling Up the Big Picture

Essay 2

**from a study funded by an anonymous foundation
2002-2005**

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Challenges and Strategies

Introduction

We call our project a study of scaling up the “Big Picture.” The term refers to a Providence-based non-profit organization called the Big Picture Company, to the schools it is helping to develop in various parts of the United States with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and also to its ambition to have influence beyond these schools. Originally incubated by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University, the Big Picture Company (hereafter referred to as BP) is dedicated to making American education learner-focused and community-based. Its seminal project was the design of a small state-funded high school in Providence, Rhode Island - the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center. The first “Met” site opened in 1996 in a corridor of the State Education Department building, and offered 110 students a personally tailored and workplace-focused curriculum. Today, there are six Met sites in Providence – four of them sharing a campus in the heart of one of the city’s poorest neighborhoods. BP inspired and oversaw the design and construction of this campus – down to the contours and detail of its furniture. Now it is overseeing and collaborating in the development of other Big Picture Schools in seven different communities across the United States. Four schools have just concluded their first year, while six more will open in September. Meanwhile, BP recently received a new grant from the Gates Foundation to open 44 new schools over the course of the next five years. Clearly, BP is still near the start of its scaling up, though it is at a crucial point in terms of defining the task and of organizing for it.

This is the second of four planned essays to track the course of the scaling up of Big Picture Schools. By means of this tracking, we hope to illuminate issues related to scaling up new innovative schools generally, as well as other educational innovations. Essay 1, entitled “The Difference Difference Makes” (February 2003) explored the characteristics and qualities of the Big Picture School design, noting its contrast with conventional American high school design. The essay also raised some strategic questions. How can a vision of high schooling as different from the norm as BP’s vision achieve scale as well as depth in each site? How much standardization does scale demand? How much adaptation to local context? How much is depth dependent on fidelity, and how much on local invention?

We think these questions are relevant beyond the Big Picture Company, and even beyond the dozens of enterprises now scaling up other small high school designs. They are among the most important questions facing any enterprise scaling up a substantially innovative design. BP provides a good context in which to study the questions, but other contexts would do as well – including contexts beyond education, as we will frequently point out in this essay. Even jazz comes to mind, as one BP staff member recently claimed. He drew an analogy between a key challenge in the history of this art form, and a challenge facing BP today:

How do you keep jazz *jazz* and allow for growth? How do you honor forms, instrumentation, style virtuosity, and deep down funk of the past yet not inhibit or constrain the perspective of newer artists? . . . We have the same challenge here at Big Picture. Educating one student at a time requires great creativity and great improvisation, but we can't start from scratch in each of the new schools. . . . Deciding what should be common, and what should be individual – these are the big challenges in the next two years.

This is, indeed, one of the big challenges facing BP. We call it the challenge of managing the dilemma of fidelity and adaptation. And BP faces other big challenges too. One is the challenge of finding, growing, and honing a local expertise capable of smart improvisation. Not everyone can play jazz – and no one can without experiencing some form of mentorship. There is also the related but different challenge of instilling a sense of shared ownership – that each local developer might care as much about the overall BP vision as about the fate of his or her own school. The Modern Jazz Quartet played in concert halls rather than smoky clubs, but they still played jazz. Then there are the three infrastructure challenges. They arise when sites multiply – when scale is approached. The first has to do with communicating across a diversifying and increasingly complex environment. What happens when there are multiple styles of jazz in play, multiple environments for playing it, multiple artists, multiple record labels, multiple promoters? The second has to do with exploiting communication as a source of overall organizational improvement: the challenge of learning from experience, of the feedback loop. How do jazz players learn from jazz players? How does the whole ecology of jazz evolve? And the third is the challenge of finding the resources to build and sustain whatever infrastructure makes sense. How do people make money in jazz such that jazz grows rather than fixates and dies?

In this essay, we examine five challenges of scaling up BP's innovative high school design – saving the resource challenge for a later essay. We also explore a set of strategies that BP is currently using to deal with these challenges.

Five Challenges

- managing the dilemma of fidelity and adaptation
- finding, growing, and honing local expertise
- instilling shared ownership
- communicating in a diversifying, complex environment
- learning from experience

The essay foregrounds the strategies. This is to acknowledge that in the fast-paced world of scaling up new school designs, action takes precedence. Indeed, perceptually, the challenges emerge from the action. In mucking around in the swamp of practice, as Donald Schon (1983) put it, one gets clearer about the issues. Or at least one does if one reflects on the mucking around. It helps too, as Schon later put it, if one is willing to ask outsiders to come into the swamp, to observe and report on the mucking around (Schon and McDonald, 1998). This is our function as researchers and essayists.

Even if the challenges of scaling up only become clear later, the strategies emerge quickly. They have to, because the work of scaling up suddenly rushes in. Thus the eight scaling-up strategies that BP has devised and is using now are not the product of pilot research. There are no resources to support pilot research, nor is it clear that pilot research would prove worthwhile even if there were resources to support it.⁶ The BP scaling-up strategies are the product of just-in-time planning and invention, of intuition honed by staff members' diverse experience in other settings, and of the habitual practice in BP of drawing analogies to organizational domains other than education. Yet they constitute an impressive toolkit.

Of course, the strategies will be only as good in the end as their power to deal successfully with the real challenges. Indeed, the theme of this essay concerns the efforts of BP to alter the strategies – often in dramatic ways – to fit emerging perceptions of the challenges.

Ultimately, the aim of the essay is to use the BP context to further understanding of the nature and predictability of the challenges, as of issues that arise in dealing with them. This is in keeping with our intention to use BP scaling up as a lens on the scaling-up phenomenon in education generally.⁷

Eight Strategies

- Articulation
- Differentiation
- Imagery
- Transparency
- Enculturation
- Training
- Coaching
- Building and Networking Communities of Practice

In the first part of the essay, co-authored by the research team at New York University, we examine the eight strategies in use.⁸ That is, we consider how BP is using them to deal with the five challenges, as these challenges present themselves in the development of BP's three TYBO 1 schools (which opened in the fall of 2002), and its TYBO 2 schools (planned to open in the fall of 2003). "TYBO" stands for "the year before opening," and the prominence of the phrase in the BP lexicon signifies the emphasis that BP has tended to place on preparation.⁹ It is an emphasis that may be yielding, however, as BP learns from its first experiences.

We explore each of the strategies in turn – as well as issues arising from their use – drawing upon data from observations, interviews, and document reviews. We define each strategy, sometimes borrowing language from Essay 1, and we frequently refer also

⁶ Consider in this regard the story of New American Schools, whose various design groups did enjoy a period of pilot research. See Berends, Bodilly & Kirby (2002).

⁷ For a list of our research questions, and details on our research methods, see Essay 1 (February 2003).

⁸ The list of strategies in this essay is slightly revised from the list discussed in Essay 1. The difference, however, is semantic rather than substantive.

⁹ Our sample is both tiny (as a percentage of the schools that BP aims eventually to create and support), and also universal (in terms of Big Picture Schools in actual operation outside Providence during the 2002-2003 academic year). Both features are important for readers to note. On the one hand, the sample is too small – and likely unrepresentative eventually (for example in being predominantly non-urban, and in including two 'conversion' schools) – to serve well as a sample for evaluating BP's scaling up efforts. Luckily, this is not the purpose of our study. However, as a sample for exploring BP's early experiences and inventions – with an eye to their possible relevance to others' plans and efforts, the sample seems sufficient for now – and, indeed, the only one available.

to the use of the strategy in domains other than education. In drawing attention to these other domains – often ones dramatically different from education in moral, political, and economic terms – we do not mean to discount the significance of these differences. We mean merely to encourage educational organizations to look beyond the familiar for ideas about how to scale up effectively. This seems especially important where what is being scaled up is different from the norm. One of the Big Picture Company’s greatest assets, we think, is its capacity to do this. The reference to jazz we quoted above is hardly anomalous. In any conversation at BP about BP, some analogies will surface - to the arts, to manufacturing, to service industries, and so on. In particular, the Co-Directors of BP – Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor – are avid collectors and suppliers of such analogies. Here we merely follow their lead.

Although we think the distinctions we draw among the strategies are useful, it is important to note that in practice they cannot always be easily distinguished. For example, there is often a fine line at best between enculturation and training, as between training and coaching. Moreover, though the purpose of the strategies is to manage the challenges, any particular use of a strategy may aim to manage more than one challenge simultaneously.

In the second part of the essay, authored principally by Samantha Broun of the Big Picture Company, we revisit a number of the strategies (and implicitly the challenges they address), but through a very different lens. This time we see how BP’s youth consultants think about them and use them. The youth consultants are Met students serving in the role of “Mexperts,” learning a variety of life skills while sharing with others their intimate knowledge of a Big Picture School. We feature their work here not only because it offers a valuable perspective on the strategies and the challenges, but also because it illuminates a central element of the BP vision – the power of trusting in what youth know and can do.

1.

Strategies in Use

To begin this section of the essay, we offer a thumbnail sketch of the contexts in which we studied the eight strategies in use. In the process, we mention some crucial features of the Big Picture School design:

- Advisories in lieu of classes
- Individualized, and student-directed learning plans, guided by Big Picture Learning Goals, and a student’s “passion”
- Individualized, project-based learning
- In-school Community-building activities such as “Pick-Me-Ups”
- Mentored, community-based learning experiences (called Learning Through Internships – or LTIs), constituting a substantial portion of the student’s overall program

- Public exhibitions of learning
- Family engagement in the development of learning plans and the evaluation of progress¹⁰

The Middleton Schools. Middleton is located in a suburb of a large city in the Northwest. It is situated along a stretch of outdoor malls filled with stores like Target and Pier 1 Imports, and with chain restaurants and movie theatres. Across the street from the school is an REI store, a Kinko's printer, a Christian bookstore, and an all-natural food store. The Middleton building is new, and striking in its modern, open design. It houses two schools: Hope and Lakeside. They form two sides of a *V* with shared space at the point that holds a school store, a kitchen, the offices of the principal and other staff, an entrance and a waiting area. The ceilings are high, barn-like, with beams and large stainless steel pipes exposed. Each school has a "Great Room" where "Pick Me Ups" are held, and lunches served. The schools also have small learning team areas divided from each other by short cubicle walls that fail to contain noise. Students have the opportunity for physical privacy in small offices next to the learning areas.

The school is populated by mostly lower middle-class students: a mix of whites, Latinos, Asians, and African Americans. Before its conversion to a Big Picture School, Middleton had a "terrible" reputation, as one staff member put it. A student told us, however, that Middleton students have been involved in more and more speaking events since the conversion, and that people are hearing about a "new" Middleton. Nonetheless, she added, some people still assume that "you're having a baby" if you've chosen to attend this school.

Middleton is unusual in the BP scale-up family because it is a conversion school. Before conversion, the principal and two staff members spent part of a year traveling around the country looking at different school models and ultimately opted to implement the BP design. Three of the staff members from the previous school chose to stay on and others transferred out. Many advisors spoke to us of the "difficulties" in the conversion process, said that buy-in has been slow to build and that the first year was "disastrous." Most, however, believe that this past year - the second using the BP design, but first as an official BP school - has marked a vast improvement.

Clemente. Driving the winding roads to Clemente High School, one passes California farmland, dotted with the thick figures of cows chewing grass, and with lithe images of horses. Over several speed bumps and past a large public high school, one reaches the front of Clemente. Outside stand some copper-red rocks and a group of blue picnic tables set beneath a canopy. The new red brick building sits beside a 'portable' (trailer) that will house the school's offices next year.

Just inside the building are the secretary's desk and a large carpeted room, filled with round tables and plastic blue chairs. From here, one can see into the advisories, and

¹⁰ For fuller descriptions of these and other features of the Big Picture School design, see Essay 1, or consult the Big Picture Company website at www.bigpicture.org. Another helpful resource is the book about the Met, the Big Picture school in Providence (See Levine, 2002).

both the principal's office and the LTI Coordinator's office through a wall of windows. The building resembles the Peace Street Campus of the Met School in Providence. This is because the Clemente principal began the design process of her new school with an image of the Peace Street campus in mind.

The main room has bookshelves filled with games: Twister, Connect Four, Chess, and Checkers. There are books filling the shelves, too: *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Practice*, *Nineteen Eighty-four*, and *A Wrinkle in Time*. The walls are posted with pictures of students at their LTIs, a list of the Learning Goals, and colorful decorations. Similarly, both advisors' offices (with windows to their classrooms) are filled with posters; there is little free wall space available. The posters are varied, featuring movies, political figures, musicians, and music groups. On each office wall hangs a medal from the BP "Big Bang," summer of 2002.

The student population is primarily white and middle class. There are approximately an equal number of girls and boys, and most of them live within 40 minutes of this rural school. The principal's interest in beginning the school originated with her reading about the Met. She related well to BP's "one kid at a time" philosophy. She contacted BP Co-Director Dennis Littky, who was reticent because of the distance from Providence. However, he told her that he would soon be traveling to her part of the West Coast, and that if she were willing to meet him at the airport, he would speak to her about the Met, the BP philosophy, and the possibility of her opening a BP school. She showed up at the airport with the district superintendent - a move that made it clear to Littky that she had local support and a strong intention.

Washburn. Located in a medium-sized West Coast city, the Washburn School is situated on a local community college campus, set back upon a sprawling lawn. Ducks skim the surface of a nearby lake, yellow cat tail reeds stretch into the air. Students walk past tennis courts and sit on stairs, talking. There are concrete benches and flower gardens outside Washburn, but inside there are only two classrooms and an office. This tiny new school shares a courtyard with other classrooms used primarily by the college's ESL students.

The office has a large wooden desk, a six-sided table, a vintage library card catalogue holding various items, a table with fax machine, and a copy machine. The walls have pictures of students, as well as a colorful canvas 'Day of the Dead' skeleton painting done by Washburn students. Calendars are everywhere in the office, filled with scrawled planning notes and deadlines. The advisory classrooms have windows that fill one entire wall of the room, facing the courtyard. The other walls are decorated: a world map, Learning Goals, musicians, more calendars with schedules for exhibitions and advisor meetings.

The school has fewer than 30 students now, most of whom are African-American and Latino. There are several non-native English speakers, including students of Asian and African descent. There are two advisories at the school, with the principal serving also as an advisor. The principal and the other advisor knew each other prior to

beginning their work at Washburn. The latter believes that their close relationship and trust enabled them to overcome initial struggles associated with beginning such a different school. “At the beginning, we didn’t know what we were doing,” he told us. “It was day-by-day, and fly-by-the-seat-of-our-pants. Each day we would meet after school and say, ‘What are we doing tomorrow?’”

TYBO 2. Several Big Picture Schools are scheduled to open in the fall of 2003. These include one school located in a mid-sized West-Coast city – not far from two existing Big Picture Schools; one located in a mountain-states city; two located in a large Midwestern city; and two located within different neighborhoods of yet another large Midwestern city.

Strategy 1: Articulation:

In Essay 1, we wrote that *articulation* involves clarifying what a Big Picture School stands for, what it consists of, and how it works. The genres of articulation include argument (for example, about why “one student at a time” - BP’s emblematic phrase - is a sensible way to arrange a high school); description (for example, of the Met’s curriculum, or of its outcome statistics – such as the percentage of its graduates who go on to college); and story (for example, of one student’s experience in an LTI). Its forms include print, speech, one-on-one and small-group Q&A, video, slide presentations, and the mixed media of BP Online – a web-based curriculum and communications vehicle.

In a very different context, articulation is what Blue Man Group decided to do when – after 1000 off-off-Broadway performances by the same three performance artists - one of these “Blue Men” cut his hand too severely to perform, necessitating the sudden insertion of an understudy. What is Blue Man Group? Three performers, painted “smurf” blue, ‘create art’ by drumming on pipes, throwing marshmallows, or spitting a splatter of paint on a canvas. They never speak or smile, yet their art is engaging and has developed a considerable following, fifteen years after three friends first started “tinkering.” According to a recent article in *Fortune Small Business* – one that Dennis Littky called our attention to - “Blue Man is a powerful case study in how to grow a brand without losing focus. We’ve all heard stories about companies that start off like a rocket – then crash and burn because they didn’t stay in control of their original vision” (Walker, 2003, 18 D). Blue Man Group got a piece of advice from Penn Jillette (half of the Penn & Teller team) early in their act – advice that didn’t resonate until the incident of the cut hand. Jillette said, “Oh, my God! You guys can do what Teller and I can never do! You can clone yourselves!”(18 D). The reason, of course, is because they paint themselves blue. All that any “Blue Man” needs now is his (or her) local talent plus blue face paint, and a 132-page operating manual that was written “when the three founders locked themselves in an apartment with one of their creative directors...and a tape recorder.” The manual is the “story of the show, step by step, but from the point of view of the Blue Men . . . Writing it forced the founders to articulate ideas that had always

simply been understood among them”(18 F). No better definition exists of the articulation strategy.

One BP staff member puts it in BP terms:

When the Met first started, the staff was more entrepreneurial. We were basically making it up as we went along and we each had different forms and ideas. Dennis and Elliot [the BP Co-Directors and co-founders] would just say “This is good,” and “This is bad.” “Do this,” and “Don't do that.” The idea behind the materials was that people were unnecessarily reinventing the wheel.

“The materials” are the extensive set of curriculum tools available in either a case of “red binders,” or at an internal website called BP Online. In bulk and specificity, the materials rival the Edison Project’s design book – though, in other respects, they are different. For example, they include an unusual array of stories of scaling up; data concerning graduation rates and the like, samples of student work, including portfolios; weekly calendars and daily announcements (on line); videos and photos; forums and chat rooms (on line); and either pull-out or downloadable forms (for example, a learning plan cover sheet). And there are materials not just for principals and advisors, but for students, and even for mentors and parents (indeed, the original source of funding for the development of BP Online aimed to support parent involvement).

The materials seem to deal well with two challenges at once. First, they structure fidelity. Using them, one comes to take as givens the features of the BP design: advisories, learning plans, parent engagement, and so on. Within these givens, one then searches for useable ideas, and finds them readily. As one BP staff member put it, “People are using the materials because they cut to the chase.” At the same time, however, they invite improvisation within the compass of the given features of design. Consider in this regard the substance as well as the tone of this small excerpt of advice for advisors – and its mix of generality and specificity:

- How you run your advisory is your own decision. Your advisory may need extra help in team building, while another advisor's group immediately bonds. Or, your group may be really excited about outside activities, while another advisory prefers more at-school projects. As you get to know your students, you will have a better idea of how to plan the advisory time.
- Talk with other advisors about their advisory schedules and what activities are working well for them. You may want to combine advisories on occasion and do some getting-to-know-you activities.
- Before students are involved in LTI projects, you will need to do more planning to help structure the days. Having some ongoing group projects and concrete activities for the first few months will help your students feel productive while they look for LTIs.
- Go to Big Picture Online and chat with advisors who have been doing this for awhile. They will have some great ideas for involving students, problem solving, and activities.

- Involve the students in the decision making and planning. The more investment they have in advisory, the more active and enthusiastic they will be.
- Have the students make a mission statement for your advisory
- Build a large monthly/weekly calendar together to schedule work and activities.
- Be on the lookout for students who need encouragement, and try to get them involved with other students on an individual basis. Teaming them with buddies who are accepting and outgoing may help the excluded student be more involved and comfortable.

The “materials” derive principally from eight years of design sketching by BP staff, and seven years of practice by Met advisors and principals. In a recent interview, Dennis Littky recalled his efforts to coax the Met staff to document this practice. In the process, he distinguished articulation as a strategy from the more informal and localized habits of a community of practice. “When we were small,” he said, “we might be sitting at the bar, and I might say, ‘I used this great story yesterday,’ and so you’ll grab it from me. That just happened. But now we have such a bigger variety of teacher skills.” In preparation for scaling up, he continued, “I knew we had to develop materials, but I couldn’t get people [at the Met] to think about it at all.” So, he explained, “I started this thing one year. People fought me like crazy on this. I collected everything they did. First I tried boxes by the xerox machine – every time you do a ditto, save it – but that didn’t work. You need someone on the floor standing there, saying, C’mon, put it in – until habits develop.”

Littky put what he got from such coaxing into “a giant book called ‘The Uncurriculum’.” This was the precursor of the materials, as he describes their development. “Most of the people [at the Met] didn’t use it,” he told us, “but some did. Some used it every day. I mean, why would you not use it? But I had all these smart people who wanted to do their own stuff.”

Today, by most accounts, the BP curriculum materials are still underused at the Met, but we found considerable use of them in Middleton, Clemente, and Washburn. And we found considerable familiarity with them among the principals of the TYBO 2 schools. Among the latter too, we found considerable familiarity with another set of BP articulation materials – what we might call collectively the Big Picture talking points: rationales for “one student at a time,” statistics from the Met’s experience, justifications for community-focused learning, and so on. The training of new Big Picture principals has involved explicit instruction in how to talk about the Big Picture enterprise, its values, and its high school design. For example, in a session at the 2002 Big Bang – the annual training and enculturation event in Rhode Island for all Big Picture principals and staff – the new principals got advice from a public relations expert. She told them that stories work well to convey messages, then modeled this kind of storytelling, and had the principals practice telling stories from the Met and from their own experience. “Be proactive,” she stressed, “not defensive.”

The principals have also been encouraged continually as part of their training and on-site coaching to practice articulation in real contexts. We observed one new principal – fresh from a community meeting - notice the nearby office of the Latino Health Research Training and Policy Center. Sensing an opportunity, he entered the office and asked to speak with the director. He introduced himself and explained that he was starting a new high school in the neighborhood – one meant to serve in a personalized way the neighborhood’s currently under-served youth. He emphasized the school’s reliance on community-based internships, and he cited statistics from the Met - graduation rates and college retention rates. The director seemed receptive, responding that the staff had just been thinking about how they’d like to get high school student interns involved in their work.

In less than ten minutes, he managed to create a relationship with the director of this neighborhood organization, and to recruit a possible internship site for one or more of his students – all this many months before the students themselves were recruited. Had he followed a conscious script in the exchange? “When you only have a few minutes,” he explained, Dennis Littky had told him to emphasize community-based learning – the “LTIs” – and to point to the success of the Providence schools. Littky had also told him and all the new principals at one of their training sessions in Providence “to talk to one or two people every day about LTIs.”

The principals of prospective Big Picture Schools did not lack for opportunities to practice articulation in their “year before opening.” One, recruiting students and their parents, found himself fielding difficult questions. A parent asked, “How will students be prepared for college?” The principal explained the “rigorous” learning plan central to the Big Picture design, and the “hands-on experiences” that students would have. He stressed that “with the small size, students will get individual attention from people who care about equipping them to learn.” The parent seemed skeptical and asked, “OK, compare one kid at your school and one kid at another. The kid at the other school will have had four years of Math, four years of English, four years of Science. Why would a college choose your kid over the other?” The principal countered quickly with an example from the Met – of a student accepted into Brown, an Ivy League (and Providence-based) school, on the basis of the student’s portfolio documenting rich learning experiences. He added that one of his high priorities as principal would be to develop relationships with local colleges and universities. The parent pressed on – this time with questions about the Board of Education: “They have rules about the amount of credit hours and classes. Are you going to change the rules?” The principal responded, “Well, yes,” whereupon the parent called the school an “experiment,” and parted unconvinced of its value. Reflecting on the exchange later, the principal acknowledged, “I didn’t have a good response for that man. I’ll need to work on that, because I know that lots of other parents will say the same thing.”

It is in the year before opening - when principals are most likely to be building allies in the community, and working to find parents and staff who are willing to take risks - that the need for eloquent articulation is at its highest. But it may also be – for

want of concrete experience – when the principals’ articulation powers are still weak. How may an organization scaling up cope with this aspect of the challenge of growing and honing local expertise? BP smartly relies to some extent on materials that do their own articulation: explanatory videos of high quality, an attractive website and attractive brochures, an engaging book about the Met by Eliot Levine (2002). Thus new principals – and eventually new staff, parents, and students - “borrow” articulation skills even as they themselves are learning about their new school and its design.

Still, principals and others have to do their own talking too. For this reason, such training and coaching as mentioned above seems crucial. Evidently important too is providing good “talking point” material – good not only in terms of its selling qualities, but in terms of its accuracy and relevance to common concerns. For example, the statistics the principals cite have to be up to date and otherwise trustworthy, and available in some medium (like a website) that parents and others – including education officials and local journalists – can check out on their own. Thus the success of articulation as a strategy depends ultimately on meeting the challenge of communicating well across a complex and rapidly diversifying context – on getting accurate and timely information about the experiences and concerns of many sites, and on returning this information to the sites in forms they can use to improve the experiences and assuage the concerns. This is a considerable challenge – one that necessarily draws precious resources away from efforts that seem more pressing.

Strategy 2: Differentiation (aka “Distinguishability”)

In Essay 1, we called this second strategy *differentiation*, but within BP circles it is better known as “distinguishability.” This is Co-Director Elliot Washor’s phrase, and he is the strategy’s special champion. In what follows, we use both terms – differentiation to signify the generic strategy, and distinguishability to signify an application of the strategy in use at BP. To understand how the strategy by any name works, it helps to keep the first challenge of scaling up in mind – the one about managing the dilemma of fidelity and adaptation. The reason this challenge is a *dilemma* rather than, for example, an obstacle to be overcome, is because there is no overcoming it. One must learn to live with imperfect resolution, and also with variable resolution (that is, that a workable resolution today may not be workable tomorrow, and one that is workable here may not be workable there).

How then does an organization plan? How does it know – and articulate – which of its principles and practices are inviolable and which not? Or if nothing is to be inviolable in any permanent sense, how does the organization know at any point how to call an innovation good – to give it in BP parlance a “nod of cool” – or to call it unacceptable? The answer, Washor suggests, comes from talking it through continually – in various configurations of people, and with a dedication to what he calls the principle of “and/both.” For Washor, this principle guides BP’s development at multiple levels. He says that it presses BP to attend to *both* its systems’ development *and* its people’s development; its breadth *and* its depth; its scale *and* its intimacy; and its policy *and* its

practice. It is the latter duality that especially comes into play during differentiation, as we explain below.

Like all the other scaling-up strategies we discuss in this essay, differentiation is widely practiced beyond BP. For example, Dennis Littky became interested in Blue Man Group not just because it articulated its previously tacit knowledge – committing it to a manual; but also because the Group thereby found a means of regularly distinguishing itself from “not-itself.” It was the last lines of the *Small Business Fortune* article about Blue Man Group that especially caught Littky’s attention:

With each new project. . . they confront the same decisions they’ve faced since the beginning. As Wink [one of the three original Blue Men] says, “We’re gonna have to go through each idea and say, ‘Okay, that’s all good and well, that’s a nice thought – but is it Blue Man?’” (Walker, 2003, 18H).

It is this “going through” that constitutes differentiation: the systematic process of comparing particular practices to an enduring, though also paradoxically evolving vision.

Starbucks, with its green and white siren smiling from storefronts across the world, uses differentiation to cope with the continually challenging dilemma of fidelity and adaptation. CEO Howard Schultz tells the story in his book, *Pour Your Heart Into It: How Starbucks Built a Company One Cup at a Time* (Schultz and Yang, 1997). On some points, Starbucks stood firm during its great expansion beginning in the 1980’s. It would not entrust its quality to franchises. It would not use artificially flavored beans. It would not sell in supermarkets where beans are poured into clear plastic bins and then go stale. Schultz says he began with a long list of things Starbucks would “never do,” but gradually realized that some prevailing practices could be altered – and, indeed, should be altered. What needed to remain unaltered were the core values. It was partially by means of differentiation analysis that these core values became clearer. Adaptation for Starbucks came in several forms. Outlets began offering nonfat milk in 1989; customers can have syrups mixed into their espresso drinks; and Starbucks has used its coffee to flavor ice creams and beer and icy blended drinks (such as the Frappuccino, which is now sold in grocery stores). Starbucks has also collaborated with Capitol Records to create Blue Note Blend, a jazz music CD sold in Starbucks outlets. Schultz says, “We discovered along the way that sustainability is directly linked to self-renewal. Even when life seems perfect, you have to take risks and jump to the next level” (215).

In contrast to Starbucks, the Great Harvest Bread Company gives the opening advantage to adaptation rather than fidelity. In *Bread and Butter: What a Bunch of Bakers Taught me about Business and Happiness*, Tom McMakin explains:

The culture of Great Harvest comes out of a dynamic tension between two antagonistic ideals. On the one hand, we love quality. We are stubbornly opinionated about the best way to run a bread company. Taken by itself, this idea would lead to an autocratic operation committed to strict quality standards uniformly enforced on all franchisees. We have a second ideal, equally strong,

however. We believe that no person, society, or institution can be great without liberty. In our hierarchy of values, freedom is at the top (51).

The result is what the company calls the “freedom franchise.” Although every owner must display the Great Harvest sign, purchase premium wheat from approved suppliers, and fresh-mill the flour, there are no rules regarding recipes or store design or product selection. In fact, the contract for the company states, “Anything not expressly prohibited by the language of this agreement is allowed” (McMakin, 2001, 52). But the freedom doesn’t mean that owners manage their businesses in isolation. There is, McMakin claims, shared ownership: “They run their bakeries within a community of like-minded owners each struggling with the same challenges and each bringing different challenges to the job”(51).

BP fits somewhere between Starbucks and Great Harvest in terms of its management of the dilemma of fidelity and adaptation, but predictably (given that BP is still a novice at scaling up), the fit is unstable. That is because it is complicated by intuition. One BP staff member’s analysis helped us understand this:

In the Big Picture jazz ensemble, Littky and Washor (and a few other trusted souls) are the master teachers. As master teachers, they look for raw talent - those who “get it” in their gut, and those who show promise. As master teachers, they serve as models and guides. They suggest what their students need to exercise, and they provide critical feedback on how the students sound. It is the master teachers who make the call as to whether or not the musicians have the BP sound, and they give the accolades and/or evaluate them on how they play. Peace Street and Shepard [two of the Met sites], for example, are different versions of the same jazz standard. The same can be said of each advisory. Some improvisations (i.e. doing home visits before the school year starts as they did at Washburn) get a nod of “cooooooool.” Other improvisations raise concerns about how well the players have the basics in their gut.

But founders’ intuition stretches only so far. Other people at BP now are in the daily business of supplying – or withholding – the “nod of cool.” Their intuitions will take time as well as deliberate mentorship to develop – one involving continuous tuning up. Meanwhile, they naturally rely on more or less explicit rules. Here we use the word *rule* to associate it with a favorite BP term, *backsliding*. People associated with BP regularly invoke the phrase “No backsliding” to capture the organization’s determination to stay at the edge of innovation. But sometimes BP staff members apply the term in too rule-bound a way, according to the BP Co-Directors. Littky told us about asking one staff member to visit the Met every time he visits a newer school, so that he can temper his concern about the new school’s development with fresh perspectives on the realities of the more established school. Washor told the staff one day: “We’re still playing with our own fidelity. We’re still not sure about what the *it* is that makes it right. If people out there do things differently, and it works, what does this mean?”

In this first year of Big Picture scale up, some local improvisations got the “nod of cool,” while others did not. Among those getting the nod were Washburn’s home visits before the beginning of the school year. The principal and advisor conducted initial learning plan meetings with students and family members in familiar surroundings, hoping to gain insight into the incoming 9th graders’ family life. We heard TYBO 2 principals pick up on the idea: “Home visits before school, like they do at Washburn.”

Other initiatives failed the test. At Washburn too, all students are required to take a community college math course, and they do so in groups depending on the course level each has tested into. Students attend class, prepare homework assignments, and take tests – all of these activities out of the Big Picture norm. “Totally unacceptable,” one BP staff member declared. Elliot Washor is not so sure, however, and wants what he calls “distinguishability talk” to decide the matter. Such talk is clearly needed since even within the relatively prescriptive environment of BP scaling up, variations of practice abound. At Clemente, the students spend time each week working with computer-based math and science learning modules. Students then complete on-line fill-in-the-ovals tests and are required (by the school) to receive 80% on each test before moving on to the next module. One advisor recommends that future scale-up schools incorporate math and science classes or focused work into their “curriculum design.” An advisor at another school says, “Sure, there’s some evidence of backsliding in the math and science, and the tutoring in language arts, but that’s what’s going to help the school survive [referring to good test results]. You have to feed the beast!” Middleton chose to create largely mixed-age advisories, a practice at variance with that of the Met, but now under consideration at other Big Picture Schools also. TYBO 2 principals also note adaptations in the works. One will have a bilingual program. When asked by a BP staff member what he will do if students are not interested in studying Spanish, he responded, “Oh, they will be!” Another TYBO 2 principal plans to have “reading software that focuses on individual reading areas” because “it’s great to say that kids are reading books on their passions, but what if they can’t even read yet?”

How can distinguishability talk mediate these differences? The purpose of distinguishability talk, Ron Wolk says (he is the Chair of the Big Picture Company Board, and founding editor of *Education Week*) “is not to gain control, but to raise questions about direction. If we keep doing this, where will it lead?” And how does where it will lead square with Big Picture ideas? Nor is the purpose to fix the point between fidelity and adaptation for all instances and circumstances – an effort that would likely threaten the disturbances or perturbations that Margaret Wheatley (1992) argues are the sources of continuing innovation. Thus an effort to handle one challenge too tightly – attempting to resolve rather than manage the dilemma of fidelity and adaptation – would risk intensifying another challenge – learning from experience.

This is where the principle of “and/both” comes in, according to Elliot Washor. Distinguishability, he says, involves conversation over time that clarifies *core practices* by thinking hard about them in the light of the apparent contradictions that arise in *actual practices*. As core practices, he especially counts advisory, LTI, learning plans, exhibitions, and family engagement. Among the apparent contradictions arising in actual

practice, he and other BP staff participating in a recent conversation about distinguishability mentioned “learning and unlearning,” college classes and individualized projects, work and play, taking the school out into the community and bringing the community into the school, being a student’s friend and “cracking the whip,” running things tight and running things loose. In distinguishability talk, he says, one tries to get clearer about LTI, for example – about its essence, about the boundaries of permissible adaptation – by talking about how it can be considered *both* work *and* play. Or one tries to get clearer about what is essential in an advisory by thinking about the ways that an advisor must *both* be her advisee’s friend *and* “crack the whip.”

BP is currently at the very beginning of its effort to design an overall differentiation strategy. The effort coincides deliberately with the overhaul underway of its coaching design. The two BP-based coaches who traveled to the new western schools this year (both former Met advisors) will be replaced there by local coaches with BP experience but no Met ties. This will enable the BP staff to stay closer to home (important to them for family reasons), and will enable them also to resume their work as design overseers respectively of the curriculum materials and of BP Online. Good as the materials are, they will need tending in BP’s view – particularly as new practices gaining the “nod of cool” continually emerge. And BP Online is widely acknowledged within BP to be not yet up to speed technically, while remaining very promising. These two staff members are likely also to continue to serve as “tech support” coaches – people whose depth of experience with the materials and commitment to faithful practice – make them crucial sources of just-in-time support. Meanwhile, the new Midwestern schools opening in September 2003, as well as the new mountains-region school, will be coached by a person with no previous Met or BP ties, but with considerable school coaching experience. Thus all the coaches next year will have less, rather than more experience to rely on in judging whether the schools are optimally faithful and optimally adaptive.

Into the breach will jump the Co-Directors – attempting in effect to grapple with a couple of questions we raised in Essay 1: How far can the Big Picture Company scale up its own Co-Directors? How far can two guys reach? Elliot Washor will hit the road. Indeed, he plans to make his base of operations in San Diego rather than Providence, moving there with his family this summer. But he will spend much of his time visiting Big Picture Schools, as well as encouraging the development of new ones. In this role, he will superintend on-site distinguishability talk, and search for and spread inventive practices. Meanwhile, Dennis Littky will spend more time in Providence, working particularly on the Met’s “lab school” function. “How can I stay home and still be a major player in the work out there?” he told us that he asked himself. He concluded that he could train TYBO principals more thoroughly during their time in Providence; be more involved with visits to the Met from prospecting sites; and deepen the Met’s experience as a system of small schools, and thus as a proving ground for a different conception of school *district*.

Strategy 3: Imagery

An organization deeply skilled in the use of *imagery* as a scaling-up strategy is the Disney Corporation. The orientation seminars of new employees there, who are known as “cast members,” take place in “specially designed training rooms plastered with pictures of founder Walt Disney and his most famous characters. . . . They aim, in the words of a Tom Peters Group video, to ‘create the illusion that Walt himself is present in the room, welcoming the new hires to his personal domain. The object is to make these new employees feel like partners with the Park’s founder’”(Collins & Porras, 1994, 120).

The Body Shop recognizes the power of imagery not only to instill shared ownership, but to grow local expertise and communicate across a complex enterprise. Anita Roddick (2000) writes, “One of our most successful communication tools was in-house video. Most of our staff are under 30 and were raised on sound and vision bites. They expect to be communicated to in this way. . . . Video is good at motivating people, unlike print, which is fine for information but not much else. Video helps get messages and attitudes across to staff around the world; everyone understands a crowd marching behind a banner and demanding change”(83-4). Roddick also works hard, she says, on creating “visually stimulating” work space by hanging art, photographs, and quoted words throughout. She points out that style has the power to become culture, particularly if it signals difference. “Whatever we do,” she adds, “we have to preserve that sense of being different and of doing something that hasn’t been done before”(84).

Like Disney, BP cultivates close relations between its principals and the company’s co-founders. The former regard the latter affectionately and admiringly. For their part, Littky and Washor use their status to push vision, and they also cultivate their status for the leverage it gives them locally to help principals solve political problems. When one of them receives an award or is otherwise acknowledged, BP makes sure that the fact is publicized. Like The Body Shop, BP favors video over print as a medium of communication. Littky likes to say that only a few thousand people read the book about his work as an innovative principal in New Hampshire, but millions watched the TV movie made from it.¹¹

As with the Body Shop too, the BP work environment is stunning in its visual evocation of the organization’s work and mission. Resident photographer and videographer, Cal Wolk, has done much to create this imagery with his photos of students working and learning. In their early trips this year to the new Big Picture Schools, the BP coaches helped the schools create imagery for their walls. It would perhaps not be one of the first things for most school coaches of struggling new schools to think to do, but it was a quintessentially Big Picture move, and it seems to have worked – not only to brighten these new environments, but to enhance shared ownership of the Big Picture vision.

¹¹ The book was called *Doc: The Story of Dennis Littky and His Fight for a Better School* (Kammraad-Campbell, 1989), while the NBC movie was entitled more ominously *A Town Torn Apart*.

All of the scale-up schools now make use of wall space for the display of students' photos and other artwork, of the Learning Goals, of schedules, and of cultural icons. Walking into an advisory at Middleton, one immediately notices the posters, slogans, and pictures on the walls. One advisor there had all her advisees write their names in a distinct font which they felt embodied their personality. At another new school, we observed a Pick-Me-Up based on a power point presentation complete with music and streaming video of students' trip to a conference on alternative education. Lots of clapping greeted the student credits listed at the end. The simultaneous focus on students' own work, on the power of technology as a tool for learning in the community, on the enhancement of community feeling within the school, and on the value of "alternatives" to ordinary high schooling was thoroughly Big Picture.

One TYBO 2 principal, creating a budget wish-list, told us, "I'd like to get a video person like Cal for the whole year to make a film about our school, students, and neighborhood." His wish is doubtlessly forlorn, given the strain on resources faced by his and most other developing Big Picture Schools. But as a gesture of shared ownership, and a sign of the direction his own leadership may take, it seems promising for BP scaling up. Meanwhile, plans emerging for video networking among the schools may make it possible to share the talents of Cal Wolk, and in a larger sense make the generation of imagery a collective responsibility of the Big Picture Schools.

But imagery as a BP strategy is about more than videos and what goes on walls. It is also about the construction of the walls themselves, and about enticing people to unlearn prevalent ideas of high school design. Its chief tool in this regard is the visit to a physically different high school, namely the Met's remarkable Public Street campus, and its equally startling Peace Street site. The visitors include prospective leaders and advisors of Big Picture Schools; potential developers or funders of such schools, including school district superintendents, board members, and state education officials; or leaders of the small schools movement in general. For them, the imagery of the visit works together with other things: a talk they heard by Elliot Washor, or by Met students functioning as "Mexperts" (See below); a reading of Elliot Levine's (2002) book about the Met; or knowledge of the endorsement of the Big Picture design implicit in the funding by the Gates Foundation.

Key to BP architectural design, according to Elliot Washor, is that it is "design for redesign." He means two things by the remark: first, that the walls can move – not as flimsy partitions do, but with a weekend's worth of refitting; and second that the design is exportable. One of the Midwestern cities with two TYBO 2 schools is now building for still other Big Picture Schools a campus modeled on the Providence Public Street one - although one BP staff member told us that the city "has already learned from us here and is designing [for even] fewer constraints" on student experiences. The architecture of Clemente's new building was inspired by the Met's designs. When the school's principal first spoke with the architect commissioned for the project, she felt that he "didn't get it." So her husband, also an architect, assisted her in helping him understand. Having been to Providence, she knew what she wanted.

The potential downside to the use of Met architectural imagery as a scaling-up strategy for BP is that a visiting official – say, the superintendent of a small district in Maine or West Virginia – may come to think that resources needed to create a Big Picture School are out of reach. Indeed, most of the TYBO 2 leaders have faced serious difficulties in locating even rented facilities, never mind in persuading local officials or funders to build them new ones like those of the Met. But so far, the power of the Met architectural image within BP scaling up seems to have had far more positive than negative consequences. Visitors – however poorly or well resourced their planning and school development efforts may be – seem appreciative of the chance to match words with image – to be within a new and differently designed small high school. In this sense, BP’s investment in the Met facilities seems to have been well placed. We refer not to dollars themselves (which the state raised), but to the eight years of effort by BP to ensure the commitment and flow of these dollars, to ensure that the designs matched the ideas, and to keep a close watch over the entire process of design and construction.

On the other hand, it is useful to remember that previous generations of school reformers have used space and other physical arrangements – particularly open space, and moveable walls and furniture - to evoke interest in their reform designs, and to provoke people to try them. Sometimes also, those moved to try the designs – for example, architects, these reformers have gone so far as to (Cuban, 1993; Tyack and Cuban, 1995). But actually learning to work in new ways within new space requires more than the space itself as the teacher. It also requires most of the other strategies we are concerned with: articulation, differentiation, training, coaching, and building and networking communities of practice.

Strategy 4: Transparency

The BP use of *transparency* as a scaling-up strategy takes four distinct forms. The first is about making Big Picture practices transparent for the sake of those who want to learn about the Big Picture design. The second is about making Big Picture practices transparent so that those who actually use them can learn from each other’s use. The third is about making internal BP operations transparent so that those most involved in scaling up can do their work efficiently and well. And the fourth has to do with making Big Picture Schools’ outcome data accessible to those who may be interested in adopting the design or evaluating it. Each of these varieties grapples with different challenges of scaling up, as we explain below. And each has counterparts in the scaling-up experiences of organizations outside the world of schooling.

1. *Transparency for learning about Big Picture.* Here transparency serves the purpose of teaching the Big Picture School design to those who need to learn it. Thus it tackles the challenge of growing local expertise. As we pointed out in Essay 1, and also suggested above, Met facilities are a good place to experience this particular BP use of transparency. The new Public Street campus of the Met, for example, is not just a different kind of school open by arrangement to visitors interested in developing their own Big Picture School, but it has been designed – physically and in other respects also – to serve the learning purposes of the visitors. In this respect, it is the equivalent for BP of

what Hamburger University is for McDonald's. Thus the rooms have placards identifying their use – somewhat as if they were exhibits rather than functioning spaces in a real school. But they *are* functioning spaces in a real school, or rather four real schools sharing the same campus.

James Nehring (2002) points out how hard such visits can be on a much visited new school (he having been the Principal of one): “All those curious, eager-to-talk-to-you onlookers can get in the way of teachers and kids engaged in the school's central work, and at a time when the school is quite tender and fragile”(21-22). Still, he regards inviting visitors as a public obligation that innovative schools incur – the price they pay for whatever has permitted them to innovate, and in the process to have become so interesting.

2. *Transparency for the improvement of Big Picture practice.* Here transparency aims to serve the learning purposes of people already using the Big Picture design. Thus it takes on the challenge of honing local expertise, and also the challenge of learning from experience. It also takes Nehring's argument a step further. Transparency does not just fulfill obligation, but brings advantage to the visited as well as the visitor. At the Met, students have been encouraged to regard visits by strangers to their school as opportunities to practice going public with their learning. This makes a lot of sense in a school that pushes its students to interact confidently with adults outside the walls of the school, and that promotes and graduates students on the basis of exhibitions of their learning. The Met's principals and advisors are also encouraged – indeed, required - to go public with their work – for example, to engage in frank discussions about their work with TYBO principals in training who spend weeks of residency at the Met campuses. Dennis Littky puts the obligation plainly in recruiting new Met advisors:

If you're coming here, baby, you're coming to a national school. Don't tell me that you don't want people visiting your classroom. That's not what this is about. If you want to be quiet in a school somewhere, go somewhere else. This is the mother school for a movement going on.

Littky wants to put pressure on the visitors too: “How do we get pay-back from the visitors? So, here's an easy one – everyone who comes to visit has to spend a half hour with a senior telling them about the college they went to.” His perspective suggests a good definition of transparency – that one can gain learning from either side of the glass.

A good example of two-way learning from transparency comes from a 1990s intervention study of the effects of a continuous quality improvement model in regional health care. The research question had to do with whether such a model could cut morbidity in heart by-pass surgery. The intervention involved all 23 practicing heart surgeons in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont – plus other physicians and health professionals associated with all the region's heart by-pass operations. For nine months, these medical professionals visited each other's medical centers, observed surgical techniques, wrote lengthy reports to each other comparing what they saw with their own standard practices, and collaborated in making adjustments to these practices. The result,

reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, was a statistically significant 24% reduction in the mortality rate, as compared with the rate expected given no intervention (O'Connor, et al., 1996).

Reporting on the study, a writer for the *New York Times* asked an outside researcher on heart bypass death rates to comment on the likelihood that this adventure in regional transparency might continue beyond the terms of the intervention study, or spread to other regions. "Will human beings actually do this?" the researcher responded rhetorically. "Not until they're forced" (Cooperating, 1996, 13).

The reason for resistance is not just that transparency of this kind disturbs everyday routines, but also that it threatens customary practices and organizational norms. Indeed, this is the point of it. As Argyris and Schon (1978) would put it, such transparency involves "double-loop" as well as "single-loop learning" – and the former constitutes the real challenge of learning from experience. Here is their classic distinction:

[In single-loop learning,] members of the organization respond to changes in the internal and external environments of the organization by detecting errors that they then correct in order to maintain the central features of organizational theory-in-use (18).

We give the name double-loop learning to those sorts of organizational inquiry which resolve incompatible organizational norms by setting new priorities and weightings of norms, or by restructuring the norms themselves together with associated strategies and assumptions (24).

One Met advisor captured the Argyris-Schon difference for us in Big Picture terms, and in the process, illuminated the deep difficulty involved in double-loop learning. He does not "criticize questioning," this advisor told us, particularly around how to "improve" the "quality of our work." But he cautioned against questioning the "viability" of the Big Picture School design. He called, instead, for "faith" in it.

Taking a very different viewpoint, one BP staff member told us, "We should be able to talk about anything and not have people worry about being called a 'backslider.'" We found in the TYBO and Met TGIFs (weekly reflections published internally, and posted on BP Online) a tendency to substitute a kind of personal transparency for a professional one – that is, to go public with one's personal life, rather than with one's practice. A different staff member told us that he thought this TGIF tendency was the consequence of people having been "called on it" when they wrote something divergent.

The tensions expressed here relate to two challenges of scaling up that are difficult to manage simultaneously. On the one hand, BP wants to grow and hone local expertise suitable to develop a new Big Picture School faithful to the BP vision. To help

meet this first challenge, BP tries to persuade locals to immerse themselves in the genuine thing as designed, to suspend any disbelief that may occur to them in the process, and to struggle to “unlearn” as well as learn. This is a reasonable thing to ask. Indeed, it seems crucial behavior for learning something as complex and different as Big Picture practice. Paradoxically, however, suspension of disbelief can also interfere with efforts to meet a second challenge, namely the challenge of learning from experience. This happens when the suspension of disbelief becomes long-term rather than temporary, and if it becomes a tenet of the larger organizational culture rather than merely a feature of the training environment. This is because learning from experience typically depends on systems for reporting misgivings and attending to them.

In a recent conversation at BP, one staff member suggested that BP might do well to work on these two challenges in a consciously separate way: to announce to newcomers, for example, that they will be expected first to try the Big Picture practices as designed, then later to reflect on them critically. BP could do the same with TGIFs: to encourage both warm perspectives, and cool ones.¹²

3. *Transparency to make scaling-up operations visible.* Here transparency tackles the challenge of communicating in a diversifying, complex environment. What is made visible in this case are the inner workings of the organization. Who does what? How do things get decided? Who needs to know what? Who is empowered to take which action? And so on. Because an organization scaling up is by definition an organization undergoing frequent and often dramatic shifts in the answers to such questions, it especially needs transparency of this kind. It is hard enough to experience such shifts, but much harder to experience them without being able to delineate precisely what they are.

In its first years, the Big Picture Company was a highly fluid organization – one in which lines of responsibility often blurred. “People were hired then,” as one staff member told us, “because they were enthusiastic and passionate about the cause, and because they were smart.” Part of being smart was being able to do lots of different things well, because lots of different things needed to get done. And in those days, given the limited resources, specialization seemed wasteful. It is different now, however, as this staff member put it:

Given the scale of our scale-up in the next few years, we have to become a very, very well oiled machine – with each person being very clear about what his or her focus is, and with constant, fruitful, communication across areas. Specialization without siloization.

¹² McDonald (1993, 1996) calls warm perspectives appreciative - often arising from an effort to get very close to the phenomenon described, trying to believe in it; and cool perspectives critical - often achieved by “stepping back” and other distancing techniques, and by the deliberate cultivation of doubt.

Her direct reference here is to the Providence-based BP staff, but she means indirectly the entire Big Picture operation – including the entities that BP contracts with to develop Big Picture Schools, the coaches and consultants it hires to help on site, and the principals who lead the schools. In response to the challenge she identifies – the one we termed above the challenge of communicating in a diversifying, complex environment – BP has recently introduced much greater clarity with respect to job responsibilities and accountability. It has also developed a more elaborate contract and contracting process.

Still the communications challenge is likely to remain considerable at BP for the foreseeable future. Again, the role that intuition plays in the workings of the organization may add an impediment - even while it adds power in other respects. One staff member put it this way: “Washor – Littky: they talk all the time with each other, but they are not the only ones who need to be in the loop - particularly as the scale grows larger.” Meanwhile, though the organization has plans to avert problems associated with this, the fact that Littky next year plans to immerse himself in the Met, while Washor will spend much time away from Providence, may create even more communications problems.

4. Transparency to provide reliable information. Here transparency serves the purpose of accountability - both internally (for example, to assess productivity), and externally (to back up an organization’s claims of effectiveness). Accountability is crucial to managing a number of the challenges of scaling up. It provides a rational basis for managing the dilemma of fidelity and adaptation. It builds the credibility that is crucial for shared ownership. And it provides the data necessary for learning from experience.

The kind of transparency we highlight here is rare in schools - this despite the accountability pressures of recent years. These focus almost exclusively on bottom-line results - typically test scores - and may actually distract schools from assessing the productivity of their internal workings. Meanwhile, there is an old tradition of school reform that gives precedence to doing over studying the effects of the doing. It is the consequence not only of practitioner bias, but also of funder bias. The result is that institutional research - the internal, systematic effort to trace actions and determine effects - is rarely supported with either internal or external funds.

Our observations of the new and TYBO schools, as well as our review of BP documents, suggests that BP depends a great deal on institutional indicators: college-going rates, attendance rates, rates of client satisfaction, and also accounts of student experiences and samples of student work. As we pointed out in Essay 1, BP also understands the power of making these indicators widely and readily available. We wrote there that BP Online is planned not only as an articulation tool, but as a transparency tool - one that can make these indicators readily available. Indeed, quoting Fishman (1996), we drew an analogy to the internal website of the natural foods grocer Whole Foods:

[Whole Foods] collects and distributes information to an extent that would be unimaginable almost anywhere else. Sensitive figures on store sales, team sales, profit margins, even salaries, are available to every person in every location. In

fact, the company shares so much information so widely that the SEC has designated all 6,500 employees “insiders” for stock-trading purposes (103).

Five months later, BP Online is far from this kind of website. This is partly because the website remains still partially under construction. Technology always takes longer to get up and running than its enthusiasts acknowledge - especially so when the technology is custom-fit to an unusual purpose, as this is.¹³ But the problem also is that BP lacks the internal research capacity necessary to fulfill the Whole Foods analogy, even if the website were fully functional. What is needed is more than an assiduous effort to collect the usual indicators on all the Big Picture Schools - hard as this alone will be. What is also needed is a smart effort to create new measures, ones that might help re-define accountability. Such an effort would be true to the BP spirit - which is why one staff member who spoke to us about this seemed pained by the present gap: “I would say the part of transparency that we really worry about is our data collection, our statistics.” Shortly after she made this comment, BP announced that it would be hiring a new staff member to build and head an institutional research effort.

Strategy 5: Enculturation

Collins and Porras (1994) observe that visionary companies frequently have “cult-like” elements, such as a “fervently held ideology, indoctrination, tightness of fit, and elitism”(122). This is because visionary companies mean to be different, and require “stronger indoctrination into a core ideology,” a “buy in or get out approach,” and “a sense of belonging to something special and superior”(123). Visionary companies scaling up have to work harder than others at the challenge of shared ownership because what is being shared *is* different.

We use the term *enculturation* to describe a common strategy for gaining such shared ownership. It is associated with what Bolman and Deal (1997) call the symbolic frame. This is the frame within which organizations become “tribes, theaters, or carnivals,” where learning is “propelled more by rituals, ceremonies, stories, heroes, and myths than by rules, policies, and managerial authority” (14). As McMakin (2001) of the Great Harvest Bread Company suggests, “A community’s values can be easily described, but often don’t make sense until those values are experienced”(14).

In Essay 1, we especially connected enculturation at BP with the summer extravaganza called the Big Bang. The first Big Bang was held in August 2002, and included songs and new games; a “living timeline” on which everyone present stood, including the real Ted Sizer, and someone impersonating John Dewey (who handed out original-issue postal stamps with his image on them); moving personal testaments about struggle and diversity – by Met advisors and Met students; a Pick-me-up in the form of a

¹³ BP recently announced that it was severing its ties with the original developer of BP Online, and would contract with a new developer.

game show; giant puppets who mingled with diners and pretended to mistake the Big Bang for a wedding reception; and a football kickoff plus hundreds of raining tiny footballs stamped “The Big Picture Company.” Participants – who included principals and staff from all the new schools - left the event bearing gifts that included pictures of every other participant, and a Big Picture T-shirt and medal. An advisor in one of the new schools we visited this spring recalled the Big Bang fondly. “I don’t think I could have bought the philosophy without being around the people.” But he added, “It almost felt like a cult.”

The *almost* in his sentence is doubtlessly the result of the fact that the Big Bang also included serious workshops and conversations. As with many of the strategies we are discussing in this essay, enculturation requires a deft touch. It begins with a dynamic of enfolded newcomers into a culture as if the culture were already theirs. This is an especially effective move at the point just past first commitment, in the early stages of community building when, as Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth (2001) put it, “individuals have a natural tendency to *play community* – to act as if they are already a community that shares values and common beliefs...to ‘behave *as if* we all agree’”(955). This “play” scaffolds learning of the new culture’s tenets and attitudes. But one must remember that at this point the culture is still play, that the community is as Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth put it, a pseudo-community. To become a real community, the newcomers must gain a voice, must find a way to bring their own work on its own terms into the cultural circle.

The second Big Bang is planned for August 2003. One of the staff members responsible for its development told us that its focus will shift - though only slightly - toward the serious workshop and conversation side. This seems appropriate since the number of Big Picture Schools with actual experience (counting the new Met sites) has more than doubled since last August.

Strategy 6: Training

Training as a scaling-up strategy focuses especially on the challenge of growing local expertise. However, because there is no clear line between enculturation and training, it tends also to target the challenge of instilling shared ownership. Collins and Porras (1994) in *Built to Last* extol training programs “that have ideology as well as practical content” among their learning aims, and these both require enculturating experiences as well as instruction in principles and techniques” (138). Such training is common in visionary companies, they say: “Newly hired IBMers always learned the ‘three basic beliefs’ and experienced training classes that emphasized company philosophy as well as skills, . . . [and] learned language unique to the culture” (125). Similarly, Proctor and Gamble “inducts new employees into the company with training and orientation sessions, *and* expects them to read its official biography *Eyes on Tomorrow* (also known to insiders as ‘The Book’)” (Collins, 1996, 132, our emphasis). Howard Schultz of Starbucks says that every new barista entering the organization “has to take courses in Coffee Knowledge, Brewing the Perfect Cup, and Customer Service, as well as basic orientation and retail skills” (Schultz and Yang, 1997, 250).

Perhaps especially because it mixes what we would call enculturation and training, the Collins and Porras (1994) inventory of training devices in successful companies is useful in describing BP's work with these strategies. First, they say, there are the efforts to teach such things as values, norms, history, and tradition. In the BP context, this includes not only the Big Bang - with its theatrics, conversation, and direct instruction (for example, concerning BP Online); but it also includes the BP curriculum materials, and other articulation materials that often serve not just to entice clients, but also to orient their training once enticed. The category also includes the TYBO principal residencies at the Met; the effort in the principal training to instill a Big Picture instinct with respect to hiring, politics, public engagement, and leaderly presence; and the effort to make everyone involved with Big Picture Schools feel part of a movement, rather than merely design clients. As a second category, Collins and Porras name internal "universities" and training centers. In the BP context, this category includes the effort in the TYBO principal training to foster particular skills: for example, assessing project depth, fundraising, building community relationships, and analyzing data. It also includes the principal certification program that BP developed with external funding; the "rookie camp" that the Met uses to train its new advisors - now with its West Coast and Midwest clones; and the planned video conferencing series. Third, Collins and Porras list on-the-job socialization by peers and immediate supervisors. In the BP context, this category refers to what we describe below as efforts to network communities of practice. Fourth, Collins and Porras mention plant and office layouts that reinforce norms and ideals, as well as "constant verbal and written emphasis on corporate values, heritage, and the sense of being part of something special" (136). In the BP context, this category refers to the transparency of the Met, and also to the Big Bang, to BP Online, and to the omnipresence of BP's co-founders and Co-Directors with their links to the vision and their particular kind of coaching.

There are layers of training necessary to any scale-up effort, and those directing the scale up have to figure out which layers they will provide directly and which indirectly and how. BP deals directly with principal training, and uses a mix of direct and indirect methods in the training of school advisors, LTI Coordinators, and other locals.

Thus by contract with Big Picture School developers, BP assumes direct responsibility for principal preparation in the TYBO year, and for follow-up training and coaching of principals during the first two years of a new school's development. It discharges this responsibility through The Big Bang; the Met residencies (up to six weeks, combined with BP-based conversations); on-site coaching; on-site consulting (for example, on the scouting of local funding sources, or on facilities location and development); a mid-year principals' retreat (a networking opportunity for all Big Picture School principals); and distance-learning opportunities (high-priority access to BP staff and Co-Directors by phone, and to the materials and forums at BP Online). As the result of an analysis that turned up some gaps in this year's TYBO training for principals, BP next year plans to introduce a set of "key experiences" that a new principal must have - for example, visiting an actual LTI, and interviewing the student and LTI mentor. In an inventive touch, the key experiences can be gained by various means - for example, in a

Big Picture School other than the Met - but must be debriefed by a BP trainer in order to count as a key experience for TYBO training purposes.

BP deals with the training of school advisors, LTI Coordinators, and other people needing Big Picture training through a mix of methods that include focused materials and dedicated forums on BP Online, the regional rookie camps (co-designed by local principals and BP staff), the Big Bang (to which all Big Picture School staff are invited), and, of course, turn-key training by the principals. In general, turn-key training has severe limitations as a strategy for scaling up something as complex and different as the Big Picture School design. This is because new principals are unlikely, even after a year of preparation, to have learned the design comprehensively enough, or in sufficient depth to begin training others. Originally, the BP training scheme relied substantially on turn-key training, but BP recognized the fault early and has acted to correct it. And now even turn-key training may involve some direct training at the source. Thus the TYBO 2 principals recently brought their newly hired advisors and other staff to Providence to see firsthand what the BP design and philosophy look like and feel like at the Met. As their principals had earlier in the TYBO process, TYBO 2 advisors shadowed a Met advisor, experienced a Pick-Me-Up, talked with students, visited an LTI, and received instruction in the use of BP Online.

One TYBO principal told us that the experience was more about unlearning than learning: “letting go of the structures we’ve come to know as school and seeing the depth and meaning of Met-like learning.” The heart of it, he claimed, was the “great conversation” that the trip to Providence started among the staff, and between its members and their only slightly more experienced principal.

The above paragraphs provide a skeletal sketch of BP’s training activities, both direct and indirect. However, the sketch fails to capture important dimensions we should acknowledge. One of these dimensions concerns the evolving nature of the training scheme. Things change fast at BP, as the consequence of its learning from experience; its habit of taking quick advantage of serendipity - for example, an unexpected funding source; and its nimbleness in using apparent obstacles to advantage - a staff pregnancy, one Co-Director’s wife being offered an important job in San Diego, another Co-Director’s need to get re-connected with the Met. Thus arise the new regionally based coaching design beginning next year; Elliot Washor’s new role as traveling connector and consultant; Dennis Littky’s new role as impresario of the Met residency; the plans for frequent video conferencing beginning next year; talk about shifting some of the burden now falling on TYBO principals for political work and facilities development to some “advance” people.

Another important dimension of the actual BP training work not captured by the skeletal sketch is that it really starts with the hiring process. By contract, BP shares with local school developers the responsibility for hiring principals of Big Picture Schools (and re-hiring them as needed - Clemente’s principal has announced that she will be stepping down at the end of this year for personal reasons). This is a politically complicated task. While many school districts today are gaining experience with

contractors as school designers or even school operators (Edison Schools, Victory Schools, New American Schools, Big Picture Schools, and so on), most find shared governance difficult in the details. And with a notable exception among the TYBO schools, all of the current Big Picture School developers are school districts. The political complications are enhanced in this case because BP puts great emphasis on hiring well. Thus it guards closely its hiring prerogative, and indeed walked away from one local site during the early TYBO process there when it became apparent that the Superintendent of Schools intended to exercise sole discretion in hiring the new school's principal. Meanwhile, BP's emphasis on hiring well is in typical BP fashion laced with intuition - with a you-know-it-when-you-meet-it search for passion and gut instinct. This can make negotiation over hiring all the more difficult.

And, of course, hiring does not stop with principals. There are other people needed to staff a new Big Picture School, and they must be people able and ready to fill such unconventional roles (in the context of ordinary American schooling) as an advisor or an LTI Coordinator. Originally, BP intended to rely on a turn-key approach here too, or as Dennis Littky put it, "You hire the best principal, and then you have to stop." But he believes now that BP has to go further, finding a way to scaffold the process for staff hiring in the same way that the curriculum materials scaffold the development of advisories or of LTIs. How, for example, can a principal hire for diversity? What hiring methods work best for such a purpose? How can the principal hire for passion? How can he or she ensure "out of the box thinkers"? In raising such questions, BP is beginning to address in yet another arena a deeper and crucial question - one that derives from its particular character, but that seems hardly unique within the larger arena of American school reform: How do you scale up intuition?

Finally, an important dimension of BP's training scheme not captured in the skeletal sketch is what Dennis Littky terms the "magic" of it, using the term ironically. Indeed, in his view, "magic" envelops the application of all BP's scaling-up strategies. Here is how he put it in an interview with us:

You should probably do a section on all the things that went wrong. Because people don't know. People think, Ah, it looks so smooth. That's why I call this stuff magic - what makes something magic is that you don't see the stuff in between - you know, sleight of hand [does a coin trick]. So, it's like this building [pointing out the Public Street campus] - people think it's amazing - but it took eight years to build it. Or you say, "Oh, yeah, they got x schools - sounds so easy, but people don't know that three of our principals have left already, we turned down three schools, there were all these kinds of things. Somehow, people have to understand that, because one of the reasons people have trouble scaling up is that people don't talk about their flaws.

Since it is not really magic, what is it? He uses the term *working it*, and also the term *being there*.

So, two years, and the principal you trained is gone. So you have to work that. . . . If you don't work that right, if you're not in at the right time, all of a sudden you get the Assistant Principal from the High School who moves in, and your school is gone. It's about knowing that, being there enough, and then staying there and doing it. . . . There are all these things that no one sees. . . . So somehow people have to know all that, and that that's OK, that it's about going through a lot, and still going out there.

Strategy 7: Coaching

“Working it,” “being there,” “going out there”: the phrases that Dennis Littky uses to unmask “magic” are good terms to describe the essential functions of *coaching*. This strategy addresses at least four of the challenges of scaling up. It is at the heart of *managing* - as in *managing* the dilemma of fidelity and adaptation - because it involves getting close to local effort, and conferring with local people about the adaptations they make and why. Because it assesses the value of adaptation at its source, it also affords an invaluable source of feedback, and thus an opportunity to learn from experience. To the extent that the assessment is collaborative - as it often is, given the intimacy of many coaching relationships with their reliance on close observation and conversation - then coaching helps build shared ownership of the design. This effect is intensified if the learning from experience is double-loop - that is, if it uses what has been learned locally to re-consider elements of the central design. Finally, with respect to the challenge of finding, growing, and honing local expertise, coaching targets the *honing* part.

During the past school year - the first with schools up and running outside Providence - the term *coaching* in the BP context has referred especially to the work of two BP staff members, both formerly advisors at the Met, and both heavily involved in the preparation of the BP curriculum materials. From their base in Providence, they commuted regularly to the West Coast schools, where they coached both principals and advisors on the Big Picture design in use: Learning Goals, Learning Plans, project development, LTI development, enculturation activities, strategies for working with families, and more. Following each visit, they wrote long “narratives” back to the principals, mirroring a process that Big Picture School advisors use to evaluate students; and they wrote notes to their colleagues based on their judgment of the schools’ developmental trajectories - about how well they seemed to be doing, and what they seemed to need. Available to the schools from Providence also, via phone and on line, they functioned as “go-to guys” or “tech support coaches” for immediate problem solving. One advisor told us, “I’ve called the coach and been on the phone for three hours, saying, ‘Tell me your best tricks.’”

The job of coach as defined this year required (1) great interpersonal skillfulness - for example, the capacity to build relationships with a diversity of people playing a variety of roles in a diversity of contexts - and under circumstances that both aroused some degree of anxiety in the people, and also sharply constrained time available for building the relationships; (2) depth of knowledge and expertise - about the Big Picture

design and its materials in particular, but also about teaching and learning in more general terms; and (3) a deft capacity for playing what Peter Elbow (1986) calls the believing and doubting game - that is, for continually shifting between warm and cool perspectives, using both to foster school and professional growth.

This is a formidable set of demands. Indeed, when this year's coaches needed to limit their travel for family reasons, BP chose to re-define the job (in the process, lessening the demands, and accepting trade-offs). Thus the three coaches next year will have more knowledge of the local contexts, because they themselves are either from the contexts, or will spend more time there. This will lessen some of the interpersonal stretch, but at the cost also of attenuating their relationship with Providence-based BP staff. Because none of next year's coaches have Met experience, the Providence-based BP staff may regard their judgments as suspect on the fidelity side with respect to the challenge of managing the dilemma of fidelity and adaptation. On the other hand, with their deep Met roots and the very significant roles they played in the authorship of the curriculum materials, this year's coaches were viewed by some BP staff as sometimes overemphasizing the fidelity side. Moreover, two of the new coaches bring experience of school coaching in other contexts - quite extensive experience in the case of the new Midwest and Mountain-states coach.

It is important to note also that BP has not so much eased up on a job description, but broken one demanding job description into several more doable and fillable ones. So last year's coaches will still be "go-to guys" and "tech support coaches" available from Providence by phone or on line - while they also do materials research (especially on the question of helping Big Picture School students gain quantitative reasoning skills), update existing materials (completing the feedback loop), and continue the technical development of BP Online. They will also serve as coaches of the coaches - presumably with respect to the latter's need to gain a richer knowledge of the Big Picture design and materials. Meanwhile, the new on-site coaches will stay more closely on site and provide more generic (as distinct from BP technical) developmental advice to local schools. And Elliot Washor will play a kind of super-coaching role - one that crosses the first kind of BP coaching described above, with another kind.

This other kind of BP coaching is not generally called coaching by BP. As we said above, Dennis Littky calls it "magic," or "working it," or "being there." He might also have called it massaging the political context. By any name, however, it tackles the four challenges that we ascribed above to coaching in general. First, it fosters both faithful implementation and smart adaptation - for example, by building relationships with district superintendents, advising principals in crisis, and providing back-up in the form of consulting or other resources. Second, it gives BP a crucial feedback loop for learning from experience - straight to the organization's Co-Directors. For example, the feedback it generated in this crucial first year of scaling up allowed BP to take a more balanced view of the process than it otherwise might have. With their long experience as school developers - not only at the Met, but well before it, Littky and Washor tended to apply a warm or appreciative perspective to the efforts of the new schools, in contrast to the cooler or critical perspective that the school coaches and others on the BP staff tended

to apply. Both perspectives are crucial to successful coaching, and achieving an overall balance is crucial too.

Third, this other kind of coaching hones local expertise through modeling the expertise on site: negotiating with a superintendent, scouting for useful community connections, interacting well with parents or students or business leaders – all of these in plain view of the one being coached, usually a new principal. And, fourth, it promotes shared ownership in at least two ways. One way - especially characteristic of Littky's coaching - features a distinctive and infectious charisma. Here is an example, in his own words:

I was waiting for __ [Washburn principal] to pick me up at the hotel, and there was a limousine outside the hotel, so I asked the guy, "Who's here – some famous guy?" He said, "No, the hotel uses it." So I said, "How much will it cost me to give some kids rides for an hour?" He said, "Sixty bucks." I said, "Meet me at 9:30." And after Pick Me Up, I said [to the Washburn students], "C'mon, I have a surprise for you," and we went outside and there was this big limo. It took eight kids at a time. They were dancing, blasting music. Just a ten-minute ride. Then we did another eight kids. There was something about that spirit that made it Big Picture spirit.

Another way this other kind of coaching promotes shared ownership is by clarifying the vision - the thing "owned." This is Washor's specialty. When we asked him recently in an interview whether he would describe the new role he is taking up next year as that of a coach, he demurred. More like a Johnny Appleseed, he said at first, or a "school designer," a term he attributed to Expeditionary Learning, one of the New American Schools developers. But then he settled on a metaphorical job title that he attributed to Horace Mann "or one of these people in the 19th century who went around to a thousand schools, and *glued* the network together." He added, "You can glue it by using the curriculum materials, but there's something about the face-to-face, relational meetings that is important."

But, we pressed, what is the aim of these meetings? What makes them *glue*? And he began talking about Frederick Law Olmstead and his vision of the "park experience." Olmstead said that a park has to offer four things, Washor explained: prospect, refuge, legibility, and mystery. And this is also, he continued, what a Big Picture School has to offer physically. Using Olmstead in this way is classic Washor vision-coaching - helping people understand why, for example, the Public Street Met campus is designed as it is by translating it into textually different terms. "It's like Prospect Park," he might say on one occasion, to one group of people. Or on another occasion, when speaking about student learning, he might speak of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's (1991) theory of flow.

Both Washor and Littky acknowledge the limits of the kind of coaching they can do personally. Washor says that BP is going to have to design "systems" to replace himself and his partner:

I was sitting on the plane yesterday, and I was thinking 44 schools in another three to five years, and it takes another three to five years for them to reach capacity -- so we're really talking five to 10 years for these 44 schools - I said to myself, Well, I can get around to a dozen, but I don't know how good I'm going to be at getting around to 44. So then what does it mean? I think a bunch of people are going to have to do that to keep the glue going.

Littky is more apt to imagine putting limits on scale:

So what I'm trying to describe is all these little things that we do that no one sees. This is the part that I think makes us different. But I'm not sure we can keep doing this if we get too big. I think we're really at that cusp now. I'm not sure we're ready to take on -- you know -- I don't want to be those stupid people that I've always said -- the people who failed because they went beyond what they could do. And this fifty school stuff scares me.

Strategy 8: Networking Communities of Practice

In Essay 1, we folded all the challenges of scaling up that we highlight here into an overarching one. Here is how we put it:

As a reform extends its reach, it also must attend to achieving depth in new places. One way to say this is that as a reform *scales up*, it must also *scale down* - time after time, in place after place - each of the places as unique as a Met student. Getting this *up* and this *down* to happen at once is the heart of the challenge we are studying. Given the differences of the Big Picture School design the *down* is especially tricky.

A crucial strategy in scaling *down* in a particular place - that is, in attaining the right blend of fidelity and adaptation there, getting the right skills in place as well as some shared ownership of the design and of its animating vision - is what John Seeley Brown and others have called a *community of practice* (Brown and Gray, 1995; Wenger, 1998; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001). It involves the work-focused but *off-task* conversations of people who work together, and who come to rely on each other to teach things that no one else can teach them -- things concerning the most intimate and often the most crucial aspects of their work life. One might think of a community of practice as a second-order strategy - a strategy that extends the others, that keeps on articulating, training, coaching, and enculturating. Of course, it cannot do these things well on a continual basis, without benefit of occasional tuning - that is, without the benefit of collectively measuring its best ideas of the design against the best ideas of other communities of practice (McDonald, 1996). A good way to achieve tuning is through networking.

Communities of practice are rare in American schooling. Stigler and Hiebert (1999) write, "U.S. teachers work alone, for the most part, and when they retire, all that

they have learned is lost to the profession. Each new generation of teachers must start from scratch, finding its own way.” They call instead for “a system with a memory. . . one that provides a means of accumulating the experiences and insights of teachers. Without this, there is no way of getting better over time” (136-7). The equivalent of such a system is what John Seeley Brown and a group of organizational anthropologists discovered inside the Xerox Corporation in the mid-1980’s. They noticed that repair technicians learned more about how to repair machines by swapping stories with each other informally than by consulting repair manuals. Here is how Brown and Gray (1995) describe what they came to call “CoPs”:

At the simplest level, they are a small group of people who've worked together over a period of time. Not a team, not a task force, not necessarily an authorized or identified group. People in CoPs can perform the same job (tech reps) or collaborate on a shared task (software developers) or work together on a product (engineers, marketers, and manufacturing specialists). They are peers in the execution of "real work." What holds them together is a common sense of purpose and a real need to know what each other knows. There are many communities of practice within a single company, and most people belong to more than one of them (4).

Having discovered the phenomenon of communities of practice lurking within it, Xerox set out to systematize the phenomenon. For example, they tried to add additional learning power through technology, giving technicians two-way radios so they could consult with each other on the job in real time. Later, Xerox also introduced one of the first web-based environments for swapping stories of practice. Today, many organizations in many fields - including at least the sub-field of schooling devoted to the development of small, innovative schools - regard workplace teams and the relationships they form both on-task and off-task, in real time and virtual time, as crucial sub-structures of the organizations overall. This is where these organizations expect much learning from experience to occur, and where they expect to originate the smartest adaptations of design.

Communities of practice formed early at the Met. One BP staff member, formerly a Met advisor, told us that much of his professional knowledge in his Met days came from hanging around the Trinity Brew House on Fridays after work, swapping stories with other advisors. But systematization of the phenomenon has been slower to develop. Met staff “still do not share their work in the kind of way I would like them to do,” Dennis Littky told us. Indeed, his plans for building a more genuine lab school at the Met starting next year are founded not just on the Met becoming more transparent for outsiders, but for insiders too.

Meanwhile, this year’s new Big Picture Schools are building their own communities of practice. For Washburn, with only two staff members and some Americorps volunteers, the task has been easy. Dennis Littky calls it “the brilliance of starting small.” But the Washburn community of practice is clearly still of the Trinity Brew House variety. One of its members told us of going to a bar and talking about

work until four in the morning. At Middleton, where two schools share a building and a principal, one has a community of practice, the other not. The principal put the difference in these terms: At Lakeside, they “share more, work together more. They’re like dogs. They travel in a pack and even though there’s a leader, they work together. Hope is like a herd of cats: they’re six individuals.”

We will adapt her metaphor to distinguish between the two purposes of *networking communities of practice*, and thus to signal how hard these purposes are to achieve. One is to help the cats and dogs to learn from each other. What are the things that one group has learned that the other might profit from knowing? And the other is to get the cats to be more like the dogs - to ensure that each new Big Picture School wants to have a community of practice, regards it as part of the Big picture design; and that it does not have to go about the task of inventing a community of practice all by itself, but can borrow norms and practices from others.

Can cats learn from dogs, and vice versa? Can cats become more like dogs? “Widen the circle to solve the problem,” says one BP staff member with regard to the power of networking. But how?

The Great Harvest Bread Company hires what it calls “field representatives” who visit bakeries to “act as bees, buzzing from bloom to bloom, cross-pollinating as they go, making sure knowledge passes from bakery to bakery” (McMakin, 2001, 63). Another way the company has encouraged networking is through its “cross travel program” in which an owner or employee of a bakery can visit another bakery and the company will pay for half the cost of the travel – no reports, no permission, no questions.

Great Harvest is a networked organization - or, as it calls itself, a “freedom franchise.” As Tom McMakin puts it, the company is a cross between the big corporation where one of his friends works, and the bike store that another friend owns. “The woman who works for the big company says she loves it - she’s forever bumping into really smart people, which causes her to bubble over with ideas about how to improve the business. Problem is, she says, she has little authority to make anything happen” (59). Meanwhile McMakin’s bike store friend complains that he spends most of his day alone. “I have all the power in the world to do whatever I want,” he says, “but it’s hard to get inspired. It is difficult to find time to read business books, or travel to small business conventions, much less talk to other small bike shop owners, who on some level I view as competition” (59).

Big Picture has some aspects too of a “freedom franchise,” though also of a franchise plain and simple. In managing the dilemma of fidelity and adaptation, it falls somewhere in between Edison, Inc., and the Coalition of Essential Schools. On the one hand, it cares a lot about fidelity; on the other hand, it also cares about being what it calls “a movement” - of like-minded, passionate people with a sense of shared ownership of an evolving design. The tug it occasionally feels between the two is a test of Elliot Washor’s “and/both” philosophy. Clearly, its capacity to build and network communities of practice will be crucial to passing the test. Without local communities of practice, BP

will have to build an elaborate rulebook for its franchises - one that will eliminate the possibility of “movement.” And without networking the communities, the movement will inevitably splinter the design into hundreds of fragments.

Thus BP has a number of networking plans under development. There is BP Online, for example, with its chat rooms and forums. Although a great place to download tools, it has largely proved uninviting thus far as a networking medium. That may be because parts of it need further technical work, or it may be because the communities of practice are too busy with practice to think about networking. There is also the Big Bang, which this summer will take on more fully the character of a networking opportunity for communities of practice, since there will be more established communities of practice attending this time. And there are the plans next year to launch a video conferencing project.

To understand the latter, it helps to know that in the mid-1990’s, Elliot Washor and Dennis Littky tried to use a hybrid cable- and satellite-based television program to network the many communities of practice within the Coalition of Essential Schools, and the other reform networks associated with the ATLAS Project.¹⁴ The program was called *Here, Thayer, and Everywhere* - New Hampshire’s Thayer High School being the Coalition-affiliated school where Dennis Littky was then principal. The title captures what Washor would call its “and/both” quality – its attempt to work at once both locally and nationally, to deepen one school’s reform practice even as it used the practice to strengthen reform networks. Each month, live from New Hampshire, Littky hosted the show, featuring Thayer teachers and students talking about their work, interviews of expert guests, and video shot on location in other schools. It also included many Big-Bang-like antics: funny hats, practical jokes, and so on. It seemed something of a cross between Bill Moyers and Sesame Street, though it was meant to be viewed by communities of practice, rather than by individuals. Indeed, many of the Coalition’s regional centers and other regional reform groups sponsored workshops for local schools that were built around the show.

Here, Thayer, and Everywhere (H.T.E.) ran for three seasons. It ended when Littky decided to leave Thayer, and after a long vacation, to take up residence at the Annenberg Institute in Providence as a Fellow. Under Ted Sizer’s leadership, the Institute’s Fellows program funded visionary practitioners and helped them incubate new efforts. Littky used his Fellowship to incubate the Big Picture Company - in partnership with Washor who had come to the Institute the year before. But it was not just Littky’s and Washor’s involvement with the new BP project that caused *H. T. E.* to go dark. The show had never quite fulfilled its promise, despite its technical and pedagogical

¹⁴ The ATLAS Project is one of the original New American Schools projects – a collaboration of the Coalition of Essential Schools, the School Development or Comer Project, Project Zero, and the Education Development Center. See McDonald, et al., 1999.

inventiveness. The reasons seem important to consider, as BP attempts to build in effect the program's next-generation counterpart.¹⁵

For one thing, the communities of practice that constituted the program's audience were rarely the real thing. That is, they were not, by and large, like that of the Xerox repair people. They were not groups of people who worked closely with each other in the same work environment, and who shared a need to find out how others approached problems similar to their own. They were more typically professional educators from different schools and districts, sharing a relatively loose allegiance to a particular reform initiative like the Coalition, and attending what they regarded as a professional development workshop.

But a deeper and related reason is that the program's format – dictated at least partly by its technology – was wrong for its purposes. Recall that these purposes were both local and national. They were about improving practice at Thayer, and also about improving the practice across a network of reform-minded schools. In the case of Thayer, the problem is that preparing for a “show” is not necessarily a good way to improve one's practice – at least absent parallel efforts to undergo serious critique, and engage in dialogue with knowledgeable others. Indeed, having to put on a show can distract from the purpose of improvement, and there is some evidence that this happened at Thayer. Secondly, watching a show is generally not good professional development practice, at least absent thoughtfully facilitated “off-line” conversations about the show's content. This is true whether or not the watchers are members of genuine communities of practice. The *H. T. E.* developers knew this, and tried to compensate with built in “off-line” time. That is, the show would periodically pause – for, say, a half-hour – so that local groups watching could discuss what they had just watched; but the device often proved awkward in practice, and the facilitation poor.

Now, nearly a decade later, BP has the option to use video conferencing as the technological vehicle for what we suggested above might be regarded as “*H. T. E., the Next Generation.*” As it happens (by design, not accident) the Public Street campus of the Met has a state-of-the-art video studio and conferencing center. Meanwhile, the conferencers will be people working in Big Picture schools – that is, members of actual communities of practice, provided BP is successful in building communities of practice in its new sites. And BP is counting on eagerness among these communities of practice to learn from their distant counterparts. Learning from distant counterparts is essentially the definition of *networking communities of practice*.

Indeed, we have found an eagerness for networking among the TYBO 1 and TYBO 2 principals, though a strong sense of the obstacles too. One principal told us, “Time makes it hard,” which is why, she says, “BP needs to make more of an effort to

¹⁵ In characterizing *Here, Thayer, and Everywhere*, one of the authors of this essay (McDonald) draws on previous research. During the program's run, he was engaged in a study of school reform efforts in a dozen reform-minded schools, one of which was Thayer High School. See McDonald, 1996.

push [us] to get together.” Even in the face of great support from BP staff, another one said, the new Big Picture principals still tend to “go off into their corners and worry. We each have our own personal nightmares.”

Of course, it is much too early to discern whether BP can pull it off - can both build *and* network communities of practice. There are simply too few schools yet. In the end, however, it is likely to take more than a “push” from BP matched by “eagerness” on the part of the communities of practice, and more than good tools also. McMakin, of the Great Harvest Bread Company, says that it takes a certain kind of leadership to make a networked world:

Net leaders assume that everyone has a contribution to make that far exceeds their role. A leaders’ job in a decentralized organization is to create space for that contribution and to help set it in the context of a larger strategy.

The Mexpert Perspective

While much of the focus of BP's scaling-up work naturally focuses on adults, it is ultimately the students who make a Big Picture School. When a new school starts -a Met, Middleton, Clemente, or Washburn - the students create their own community of practice. In an unavoidable sense, they are the school's founders. Showing her sense of this, one Met student writes, "It was pretty hard to get the Met started because there were no other schools like it. We had to make things up, and we continue to change things so that the school can work better for students and staff." Why did she become a *Mexpert*? "The Mexperts feel that because we went through this challenging process, our experiences would be beneficial to the new schools." This seems the perfect definition of Networking Communities of Practice.

The Mexpert program, which started in the fall of 2002, is the joint creation of two Met seniors, Eliani and Julie, who developed it as their Senior Thesis Project, with assistance from a mentor who is a BP staff member. In a Big Picture School, the Senior Thesis Project is a mentored year-long project completed by every senior, and designed to give back to the community.

To join Mexperts, students need to be in 11th grade, and committed to attending trainings and workshops held throughout the year. Mexperts commit also to being leaders at the Met, running workshops at new Big Picture Schools, and documenting their efforts. In return, they gain the opportunity to travel - this year, to the West Coast. The commitments are demanding, and the first cohort got quickly whittled down from 20 students who attended the first meeting to five eleventh-grade students and the two senior leaders.

In her part of the Senior Thesis project, Eliani focused on organizing the trainings. She started by stuffing Met and Big Picture staff mailboxes with a flier that stated, "We need your help!" and asked for volunteers to facilitate trainings around specific topics. For example, "What makes a good PMU? [Pick-Me-Up]" "Learning Plans," "What makes a good exhibition?" and "Project proposals." In addition, trainers were sought for non-Big Picture related topics such as, "Travel tips for rookie travelers." The flier exclaimed, "Mexperts will carry your knowledge, insight and tips to schools 3,000 miles away. We need and appreciate your help!"

Seasoned advisors from the Met and Big Picture staff agreed to lead the Mexpert trainings, and Eliani gave them their assignments. One week Mexperts were trained on exhibitions – What elements go into a good exhibition? How do you coach others in preparing for a good exhibition? And the next week they were trained on feedback – Why is positive critical feedback important? How do you give good feedback? Mexperts were also trained in documentation – tools for documenting their trip, questions to ask,

things to look for. A “Mexpert anthropology” was drafted to guide their documentation efforts.

While Eliani oversaw the trainings, Julie researched and collected information on the cities and the schools that Mexperts would be visiting. In the late winter of 2003, she led a training session in the style of a game show that conveyed the information she had found. For example, Mexperts learned which host city of a Big Picture School had the highest level of poverty (Providence); which Big Picture School had the highest percentage of students out at LTIs as of December, 2002 (Clemente); and which Big Picture Schools are required by state law to have their students take and pass an exit exam before they graduate (Clemente and Washburn).

In mid-March, Mexperts traveled in teams of two or three to the new Big Picture Schools. Prior to traveling, Mexperts consulted with the principals of the schools and the school coaches, and drafted an agenda for their visit. Each agenda reflected both the needs of the school and the interests of the Mexpert team. The Mexperts who traveled to Washburn, for example, met with small groups of students about their project proposals and helped students with practice exhibitions. At Clemente, Mexperts spoke with small groups of students about Gateway exhibitions and College Portfolios. At Middleton, Mexperts wrote and performed a skit as a starting point for a discussion on the elements of a good exhibition. Mexperts there also attended and spoke at a staff meeting. All three teams of Mexperts ran a Pick-Me-Up and advisory discussions at the schools they visited.

While Mexperts may best be considered an example of the training strategy - in the terms of this essay’s typology - a closer look at the program and how it plays out in use reveals other scaling-up strategies embedded within it.

Articulation. Mexperts are both articulators of Big Picture philosophy, and themselves an articulation of the philosophy in use. The trainings they attended during the year provided an opportunity for Mexperts to see the bigger picture of Big Picture design. They researched, thought about, and articulated “what a Big Picture School stands for, what it consists of, and how it works.” In the process, they gained a metacognitive view of their own education. In her reflection on Mexperts, Eliani hints at the effect. She writes about an incident at the airport in Providence:

While we waited in line, a lady asked us if we were on a school trip. We explained what the trip was about and she seemed very interested. But I was even more interested and amazed by the way Mexperts answered her questions. They were so clear about the Big Picture philosophy. This really gave me a good feeling. It seems like my trainings really worked for Mexperts. I could see the difference in their excitement about the Met.

Meeting the Mexperts and hearing their stories put many parents’ minds at ease at the West Coast schools. In this sense, the Mexperts seemed themselves an articulation of the Big Picture philosophy. Evidence of this appears throughout Eliani’s reflection of

her trip to Clemente. For example, she writes about her home stay with one of the students: “Her parents had a lot of questions for me about college and the school. I know [the] family really benefited from my visit. . . . We spoke the whole day.”

Differentiation and Learning from Experience. Given their immersion in the articulation of Big Picture philosophy, and their documentation of what they see and hear at the TYBO schools, Mexperts end up playing an important role in helping the BP staff understand where new schools “get it” (fidelity), where they have improvised successfully on the philosophy (adaptation), or fallen short (backsliding). In some cases, because they are students, Mexperts may get away with providing more blunt feedback on what they see. In the same way, any news they bring back to the Met about “cool” innovations is heard differently from their mouths than it might be from others’. In this way they serve as an important source of feedback.

There are several places in Eliani’s reflection where she affirms Clemente’s Big Picture-ness and points to what seem to her worthy improvisations on the design - indeed, ones that compare quite favorably with Met traditions. About BP Online, she observes, “At [Clemente] High School, the students really use BP Online. As I walked into an advisory, a row of students had the same thing on their computer screen – BP Online. I thought it was the funniest thing! The students at the Met do not use BP Online, including me, as much as other Big Picture Schools.” Because of their more automobile-dependent location, Clemente students start and end their Tuesdays and Thursdays (LTI days) at the school. This is very different from Tuesdays and Thursdays at the Met, where students go directly to their LTIs on those days. Eliani writes, “When we drove back to the school [on Tuesday afternoon], all the students were waiting for their parents. The students were talking about their experiences at their LTIs. I was amazed by all the things these kids learned. At the Met we never talk [to each other] about experiences that happened at our LTIs.” Pick-Me-Ups at Clemente are run by students – an idea Eliani thinks should be brought back to the Met. “Clemente’s idea of creating a student Pick Me Up committee is very smart,” she writes. “The students are more engaged, responsible and excited about PMUs. A PMU committee would definitely benefit the Met community. Students at the Met are not as involved in PMUs. I will take this idea back and share it with my peers and make some changes!”

Training and Coaching. The Mexperts serve the new Big Picture Schools as trainers, even coaches. They bring to this work the benefit of their turnkey training (in the Mexpert training sessions), but also and perhaps more importantly, the benefit of their experience as Big Picture School clients. They understand the design from the learner’s side, and this side is important for new advisors and principals (as well as new students) to get clearer about. At the end of their visits, all the Mexperts were asked by their host school’s principal and staff to offer assessments of what they had seen. The Mexperts at Middleton offered their thoughts at Middleton’s weekly staff meeting. Although their concern about fidelity (Middleton being a conversion school) matched that of the BP staff coaches, the Mexperts’ credibility as students drove the point home in a different way.

In their follow-up reflection, all the Mexperts offered suggestions to the schools they had visited. Katrina, a Mexpert on the Middleton team wrote, “In general, I think that Middleton does not yet understand the Big Picture philosophy. [But] I believe that with time and guidance, they will make tremendous progress. For instance, when, “I *have* to do this,” starts turning into, “I *want* to do this,” that is when Middleton will have made the transition.” And here is Eliani again, on Clemente:

Learning at Clemente is going in the right direction. Clemente is really using their resources well. Every time I walked into a room, all the students were using computers and logged into BP Online. I wish I had the opportunity to have some of their amazing LTIs. I did notice though that many of the students aren’t clear about their LTI projects. As I visited some LTIs, I asked about LTI projects, but I did not receive an answer. Students do not know what they can get out of their LTIs yet. I suggest more mentor meetings. Mentors need to be aware of their importance in the students’ education. I suggest mentor/staff and parent dinners to discuss possible projects for students.

Eliani goes on to give a specific example for a student with an LTI at a local preschool. “Charlotte’s project is to put together a cookbook of the children’s favorite cookies. But what are Charlotte and the preschool getting out of this project? Maybe she could teach the children the math involved in the recipes and she will help the preschool educate the children in math.”

Building and Networking Communities of Practice. As we suggested above, the students at a Big Picture School constitute their own community of practice – one with unique needs. They need to learn how to put together an LTI and make it work; how to make a Learning Plan and follow it; how to organize their time well to get their work done and meet their commitments; how to negotiate with the adults helping them with their education: their advisor, parents, LTI mentors, and others; how to organize for exhibitions and portfolios; and, above all, how to unlearn what school is *supposed* to look like and be like. At the Met in Providence, new students are deliberately mentored into the existing communities of practice. First, there is Summer Infusion, a two-week “boot camp” for incoming freshmen - run primarily by experienced Met students and alumni. Then there is the fact that 10th-, 11th-, and 12th-grade students surround the newcomers at school. They model for the newcomers, and sometimes explicitly teach them what they need to learn to function well in the community.

As one of the Mexperts put it in the opening paragraph of this part of our essay, the Mexpert Program was founded to help ensure that no one ever again has to do what the first group of Met students had to do, namely start their community of practice from scratch. While curriculum materials and other online tools provide virtual support to new Big Picture communities of student practice, they cannot substitute for the relationship building that make the Met’s communities of practice continuous year to year. Only deliberate student networking can do that.

Mexperts bring empathy to students at start-up schools - about how long it can take to unlearn old ways of learning; about how difficult it is to articulate the Big Picture School philosophy to others (for example, family members, neighbors, friends from other schools); about the stigma that may be attached to going to a school that is so different; about the doubts that can arise about whether one is learning “enough of the right things”; and also about the rush one gets in following one’s own passions as a learner and in taking charge of one’s own education.

Students at Clemente asked the Mexperts:

- “I feel like I’m not learning the basics. Did you ever feel this way?”
- “Did your friends call you a retard for going to the Met?”
- “What is the best independent project you’ve done in your time at the Met?”
- “Did your interests change over your time at the Met?”
- “What colleges have you gotten into?”
- “What was hardest to grasp about the Big Picture philosophy?”
- “What was the most important thing you did to get into college?”
- “What is it like to have the same advisor for so many years?”
- “Are there qualities that your advisor has that you don’t like?”

As happens with some Senior Thesis Projects at the Met, the Mexperts Program is being handed down to two juniors, and will become their Senior Thesis Project next year. These two students, both Mexperts during the past year, are already working to shift the focus off Met students as “experts” and toward the creation of a network of student leaders across Big Picture Schools. Through a nomination, application and interview process, they are currently selecting two students from each of this year’s new Big Picture Schools - the ones they traveled to: Middleton, Clemente, and Washburn. Together with the Met’s Mexperts, these students will hold a retreat concurrent with this summer’s Big Bang. Next year, teams composed of students from at least two Big Picture Schools will travel to the new schools that will come from this past year’s TYBO 2 process. There they will help these schools’ students build their own communities of practice, and, of course, document what they see as a source of feedback for the whole Big Picture Network.

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Scaling Up the Big Picture

Essay 3

**from a study funded by an anonymous foundation
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Resources and the Big Picture

The title of our research project - Scaling Up the Big Picture - needs an explanation. The term big picture refers to a non-profit organization called the Big Picture Company (BP), and to its signature design for small high schools. The design is the product of BP's experience since 1995 in building, developing, and operating six state-funded small high schools in Providence, Rhode Island. The Big Picture school design emphasizes education tailored to the unique interests of learners, and the use of the community as a resource for their learning. The term big picture also refers to big ideas that underlie these emphases – ideas with a lineage back to John Dewey: about how teaching and learning really work, about continuity in the educational experience of the young, and about the insufficiency and even the danger of schooling as ordinarily conceived.

Meanwhile, the term scaling up refers to BP's efforts to install its school design in places far from Providence – for example, Detroit, Chicago, Sacramento, and Denver. By the 2007-2008 school year, with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, BP plans to have 60 Big Picture schools operating in at least nine states. At the same time, the term scaling up concerns BP's ambition to be influential beyond its own schools (whatever the final number of these turns out to be). BP views itself as more than a school design vendor in an emerging market for school designs. In this regard, it is like other school reform organizations for whom the word scale means more than market share. We think, for example, of the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE) that aims not just to promote adoption of the America's Choice school design, but to re-conceive all of American education in the image of the high-end post-industrial corporation. Or we think of the Success for All Foundation (SFA) that aims not just to promote an early literacy program, but to install efficient and equity-focused curricular machinery throughout American urban education.

How do BP's ideas about schooling compare with the ideas of these other ambitious organizations? If NCEE is post-industrial, and SFA just plain industrial, then BP seems pre-industrial. When she first figured out what BP was up to, writes Deborah Meier, she gasped. It was “taking on the unmentionable” in school reform. “Suppose we just turned the whole thing upside down,” she explains, “and went back to the oldest and most traditional idea around: Let kids learn mostly in the settings in which real people do interesting work. Let novices learn from masters. Then let's create a part-time community of kids where they can use these experiences of the real thing to grow” (Meier, November 2003, p. 9).¹⁶

¹⁶ The “past” in this sense may be prologue – so claims Wayne Gerson (2003) in a recent *Education Week* article. There he describes a “personalized public school” that may “be the wave of the future.” Mountain Oaks School, in Calaveras County, California, provides networked services, as well as community meeting space, and a lending library to families involved in home schooling. Although all the current Big Picture schools operate as state-directed (RI), district-based, or charter schools, they are functionally similar to the school that Gerson describes.

In relation to a “pre-industrial” attitude, the metaphor scaling up seems unsuitable. Can one scale up a design that “turns the whole thing upside down,” in Meier’s words? Can one scale up big ideas? BP itself continually wrestles with a related question: Which takes precedence in educational influence - designs or the ideas that infuse them?

On the one hand, BP favors the fidelity side of what we termed in our previous essays the dilemma of whether to favor fidelity or adaptation. It wants to make sure that new Big Picture schools really follow the design, rather than merely allow themselves to be inspired by it. BP criticizes other school reform efforts that in BP co-founder Elliot Washor’s words, “lose control of their own ideas.” On the other hand, BP also tends to worry about achieving fidelity by contractual remote control without opportunity for BP’s own touch or the school’s “push back.” This worry is frequently expressed by other BP co-founder Dennis Littky – where it surfaces as a concern about numbers: “Should we really have 60 schools? Wouldn’t 20 be enough?”

Among their intellectual mentors, both Littky and Washor consistently claim Meier and Ted Sizer, as well as John Dewey - all of them founders of small schools that have served as intellectual outposts as well as schools. These mentors’ schools have represented a different idea of school, and this seems to have been more their purpose than to enact a particular design. Littky and Washor also claim Myles Horton as an intellectual mentor, whose Highlander Folk School attempted to appropriate the word school to an emancipatory cultural and political purpose; and Ivan Illych, who advocated the de-schooling of society – though he founded a kind of school to help accomplish this end.

This is an essay about the impact of resources on ambition – financial resources, human resources, and intellectual resources. Of these three, the last may be the most consequential since they play a crucial role in defining the ambition in the first place, and also in defining the role that the other two kinds of resources must play in furthering the ambition. When Littky and Washor told yet another of their intellectual mentors, Seymour Sarason, that they had been funded by the Gates Foundation to scale up the Big Picture school design, he told them, “Give back the money. Give it right back.” Long the school reform gadfly, Sarason worries that the Big Picture idea – which he admires in its Providence setting – will be hurt by a growth and funding strategy based on closely specifying the design and then trying to replicate it in many other places.

Background

The first Big Picture School, called the “Met” (for the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center) opened in 1996 in a corridor of the State Education Department building, and offered 110 students a personally tailored and workplace-focused curriculum. The major features of its curriculum are advisory - in which a single advisor oversees the student’s pursuit of an individualized Learning Plan, and a group of 14 peers work to establish a supportive learning community; and the LTI (short for Learning Through Internship) – in which a student works closely two days a week

with an outside mentor in a workplace setting. Today, there are six Met sites in Providence – four of them sharing a campus in the heart of one of the city’s poorest neighborhoods. Together, the six sites form a virtual school district that falls within the purview of Rhode Island’s statewide vocational education system. Under the watchful eye of Dennis Littky, the six also serve as BP lab and showcase. Meanwhile, his partner Elliot Washor – living in San Diego, but traveling nearly continuously - oversees what BP calls the “prospecting” part of its scaling up. This involves figuring out where Big Picture schools might flourish as the result of favorable local conditions, and then assisting in their implantation.

This essay is the third of four planned essays on scaling up the Big Picture. By means of these essays and the research that underlies them, we hope to illuminate issues related to scaling up new innovative schools generally. Essay 1, entitled “The Difference Difference Makes” (February 2003) explored the characteristics and qualities of the Big Picture School design, noting its contrast with conventional American high school design. The essay also raised some strategic questions. How much standardization does scale demand? How much adaptation to local context? How much is scale dependent on fidelity, and how much on local invention? These questions are relevant beyond the Big Picture Company, and even beyond the dozens of enterprises now scaling up other small high school designs. We think BP provides a good context in which to study the questions, but other contexts would do as well. These include contexts beyond education, as we pointed out in both of our previous essays, and as we suggest also in the concluding section of this essay.

In Essay 2, entitled “Challenges and Strategies” (June 2003), we named seven core challenges of scaling up, and explored in detail the first five of them. We also named and explored strategies and tools that BP has developed for dealing with these challenges. Here is an updated list of challenges, derived from our most recent analysis of data:

Challenges of Scaling Up New School Designs

1. Balancing fidelity and adaptation
2. Teaching and learning the design
3. Instilling shared ownership of the design
4. Communicating effectively across contexts
5. Using experience in new settings to improve the design
6. Obtaining and managing the resources sufficient to scale
7. Negotiating the politics of local adoption

Our naming and enumerating is a kind of theorizing, one that adds to BP's own theorizing about its ideas, strategies, and tools. The difference is that we have an eye to the ways in which BP's practice may inform the practice of others. In the essay that follows, we extend our theorizing to the sixth challenge – obtaining and managing resources sufficient to scale: money, people, and ideas. We uncover what we take to be the hidden aspects of obtaining and managing these resources. We also provide a kind of catalogue of the strategies BP is using to find, generate, and allocate resources in these three areas. Finally, in a special concluding section, we draw a comparison between BP's efforts to cope with resource challenges and those of another organization operating within another economic sector.

In Essay 4, planned for June 2004, we will explore the seventh challenge: negotiating the politics of local adoption. What happens on the ground politically as BP and its design come to Denver, Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, San Diego, and other places? What strategies does BP use to manage the political challenges? What effect do these strategies have?

For the culminating product of our study, we plan a book that will draw on the four essays with their data sources, and also on two dissertation studies with their own independent data sources. Both dissertation studies are now underway. Emily Klein's is focused on the professional learning needs of a diverse group of Big Picture school advisors, while Megan Riordan's is focused on the learning experiences of a group of Big Picture school students in their Learning Through Internships.

2.

Uncovering the Resource Challenge

Isn't the resource challenge obvious? Scaling up a new school design takes lots of money, smart people, and good ideas – and these are all in chronically short supply.

Yes. Plus the challenge has less obvious dimensions too. They're less obvious because the enterprise is so novel. It was not until the early 1990's – with the development of the Edison and New American Schools Projects, and the advent of school chartering and contracting – that anything like the phenomenon we are now studying became imaginable. The U.S. has always had school reform, and questions of how reform spreads and of what spread really means have always been of interest. However, the central question that concerns us here – how a third-party proprietary designer of comprehensive schooling might best go about installing and supporting the design in many public school policy contexts – has few direct antecedents in educational inquiry. Thus it is not surprising that certain dimensions of the problem of funding it, staffing it, and thinking about it become apparent only as one really begins to do it.

Hidden Dimensions of the Resource Challenge

- The three aspects of the challenge interrelate: financial, human, and intellectual.
- The demands of the challenge vary with the phases of scaling up.
- Meeting these demands puts strains on organizational culture, leadership, and theory of action.
- School designers have to manage resources within an environment lacking ready indicators of effectiveness, and with few proven allocation mechanisms.

In what follows, we explore in turn each of these hidden dimensions of the resource challenge. We end each exploration by deriving some lessons from the Big Picture experience.

Aspects Interrelate

There are three aspects of the resource challenge, as we define it. First, there is the one that involves finding and generating enough financial resources. The third-party designer typically meets this part of the challenge by obtaining grants from foundations or corporations or private donors, by obtaining venture capital in the form of grants or

loans from social investors, by marketing services and products, or by partnering in a way that provides in-kind benefits. The first and second parties – that is, the school itself, and the district or chartering agency – meet this part of the challenge by tapping into whatever revenue streams already exist: for example, district per-pupil funding, charter funding, Title I or other federal funding, or special state funding (vocational, drop-out prevention, etc.); and also by augmenting these with private fundraising. At both levels, this aspect of the challenge requires planning an overall development strategy that matches revenue to need, and involves budgeting well, spending smartly, and accounting for what is spent.

Second, there is the aspect of the resource challenge that involves finding and developing appropriate human resources. It includes recruiting, hiring, training, and deploying people. Deployment involves not only matching skills and talents to problems and tasks, but building infrastructures for coaching, support, and supervision.

Third, there is the aspect of the resource challenge that involves finding and generating the right intellectual resources: tuning into outside ideas, capturing inside insights, using both to generate fresh perspectives, and then putting the ideas to use at the right places and in time to do the most good.

One of the things that makes the resource challenge particularly difficult is that these three aspects interrelate. For example, getting enough money may depend a lot on having the right people in place with hands-on design skills and fundraising expertise. But getting these people may depend on having enough money to pay them. Meanwhile, getting good ideas in place that are adequate to the work, and articulating these ideas in ways that remote users can understand, depend on having people with yet other skill sets, and also on having the money to support the expensive work they do.

Managing the risks and trade-offs here are a constant part of the management environment at BP. For a long time, the organization stayed small and local, and depended on a staff of smart, young generalists. But now it is in an aggressive phase: rapidly increasing the number of schools it works with in order to expand its financial base; recruiting high-quality specialized staff and engaging in rapid staff turnover; and working hard on the cultivation and dissemination of ideas.¹⁷ In these ways, it has acquired some slack in all three resource categories - enough to cover inevitable pockets of deficit. So it relies on dollars from unfilled positions or other budget savings to cover core costs even as it searches for a donor willing to cover them, or until it develops a marketing plan that can do so. And it gets by for awhile with a bookkeeper until it finds the right CFO, and with intuition about what makes a Big Picture school Big Picture until it gains enough experience to spell this out. This is a kind of “rash” maneuvering that all growing companies – whether non-profit or for-profit – have to learn to do well.

Schools starting up have to learn to do it well also. But at this level, interrelation effects can be even more dangerous, threatening a kind of “poor get poorer” slide that can

¹⁷ The principal source of funding for the Big Picture Company today is a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which provides a certain sum for each of the new schools BP has committed to open.

require rescue or lead to failure. For example, one of the new Big Picture schools starting up in a big city has had a very hard time getting the financial machinery of its district even to recognize that it exists. “Aren’t you a charter school?” someone downtown asked. The school is not. The consequence of this neglect is that several months into its first school year, the school had no computers in its computer lab, no copier, and a fax machine that only dialed locally. There was a laptop at the school which someone brought from home and that students used for word processing, but there was no internet connection, and thus no chance that the students – or their advisors (at least at work) could access the ideas and materials available to them at Big Picture Online.

As often happens in large school districts, when funds become available here – suddenly and mysteriously as the result of budget shifts somewhere higher up – they have to be spent quickly. Last summer, the principal was asked to spend \$150,000 in three days, with purchases restricted to school supplies and instructional materials. Naturally, he made mistakes. “Do you need any paper clips?” he asked us on a visit, implying he had plenty to go around. But he refused to spend all of his “start-up” money, as the district called it, leaving nearly \$40,000 so that the teachers he had not yet hired could make some of the decisions about instructional materials. In retrospect, he realizes that he should have acted more “rashly.” That is because he learned in September that the funds he thought he still controlled had been frozen. When we spoke with him more than a month later, he was still “following up.” Following up in a huge bureaucracy where nobody knows your name (or even the name of your school) can be a daunting task.

Meanwhile, this new principal of a new school based on an unusual design – one that nobody else in his district has ever experienced - is also new to the job of being principal. So he must learn general school management skills on the job (as new principals always do), even as he continues to learn about the Big Picture school design, and the intricacies of an intricate district. Looking for teachers to hire as the new school’s first advisors, he told us that he especially searched for people who could believe in the potential of the kids and in the ideas of the school, who could connect well with kids one-on-one, who seemed to have good problem-solving skills, and who were bilingual. Although he seems to have hired well according to these criteria, he also ended up with two first-year teachers. They are now learning on the job how the Big Picture school design works, and struggling to create an advisory culture with a group of students new to each other. But as first-year teachers, they are also learning basic group management techniques. Of course, if there were already experienced Big Picture advisors in the school – or even nearby - or if the principal himself had been a Big Picture advisor, or had had enough money to hire a third teacher who was experienced, then the resource gap would not be so disadvantageous.

Interrelated resource shortages put great demands not only on principals and others at start-up sites like this one, but also on BP’s back-up support systems. In this case, BP has supplied emergency coaching (from a Met advisor flown in to help the school’s inexperienced advisors); ongoing support for the principal from BP staff in person and by phone; and even some BP political intervention with the district.

Meanwhile, the principal told us that he holds fast to two ideas he gained in his BP training. The first is that even a toehold on one resource can help over time to bring in the others. So the principal hired good support staff – who may help the school be noticed and appreciated in the community, which may in turn bring in a steady stream of students and LTI mentors. And this could well result in political support, money, and ideas. The security guard, for example, is an active, respected adult who interacts with the students – and to whom the students clearly look for guidance. The office manager/secretary likes kids, and talks with them – not just about their lives but about their LTIs. And the maintenance man tells the kids stories they love, and interacts well with the advisors. All are from the neighborhood, and all are bilingual.

And the second idea - which the principal said Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor told him again and again – is that everything depends on making connections. In the hopes of helping to fill his resource gaps, the principal sought out a neighborhood priest who works with gang-related youth, and who has in turn connected him to other important neighborhood resource providers, including a college professor who is now planning an after-school video production program at the school, and who is likely to be a source of student teachers. The professor also happens to be well connected to academics and activists in the city, who may be useful in helping the school with ideas and fundraising. In an interview with us, Elliot Washor called this “going from connection to connection to connection,” and he claimed that it is the best way to solve the resource challenge in all its dimensions.

To manage interrelated resource needs

- Act “rashly” to build resources.
- Use slack to cover inevitable pockets of deficit.
- Expect local resource emergencies, and plan to deploy central resources to fill the gaps.
- Connect, connect. Every connection is a potential resource gain.

Demands Vary by Phase

A second hidden dimension of the resource challenge involves the fact that different phases of scale demand not only different quantities of resource but different qualities too. For example, a third-party school designer probably *should* share financial resources with pioneer clients – resources that may come from foundation or corporate sources. In the earliest phase of scaling up, these pioneers are really co-designers rather than clients in the ordinary sense. Later, however, such sharing of resources with clients

may prove counterproductive.¹⁸ It may shield everyone involved from understanding the true costs of adopting the design, may weaken the third-party organization's efforts to develop a real-cost accounting system, and may actually devalue the design in the clients' eyes.

BP seems currently at a point in its financial development where it must shift from sharing its expertise to charging for it. The shift is difficult. As Dennis Littky put it, "We're talking about charging a school for our materials when we know that the school doesn't even have enough money to pay for a secretary." Another new Big Picture school – a charter school whose revenue stream does not cover its capital expenses – faces a yearly deficit of \$100,000.

Some third-party school designers – for example, the Success for All Foundation - charge client schools the full cost of support materials and services from the beginning – wary about the shock effect of charging later for something that started off free. But these designers count on the fact that their client schools have a reliable funding stream to use for this purpose – typically Federal Title I or other federal funding. A Big Picture start-up school cannot depend on such sources. Thus BP counts on the fact that other costs will decline as a Big Picture school moves beyond the start-up phase, that the resulting slack will be enough to pay for some reasonable BP fee for service, and that the school will want to continue the relationship on this basis. At this point, however, BP has not yet figured out the specifics of this calculus.

The demand for human resources also varies qualitatively across phases of scaling up. Thus at first – during the hands-on phase of working with pioneer sites – the third-party designer may need generalists who can do everything from coach new principals effectively to prepare materials and raise funds. Later, such functions as coaching and material preparation and fundraising are likely to need specialists at various levels. For example, as they scale up, some third-party school designers move from a system of headquarters-based coaches to one using a combination of local school coaches, regional trainers of coaches, and headquarters-based designers of coaching strategy. BP is not at this point yet, but it is currently redesigning its coaching system for a second time – having moved from two headquarters-based coaches, to a system of partly local/partly itinerant coaches, to a new system that will rely especially on peer coaches – Met advisors who will travel to other school sites in the company of Met students. Now the only specialist traveling to the new schools deals with quantitative reasoning and math, but the plan is to send other specialists as the schools need them, such as college counselors, and special education personnel. Similarly, in response to this phase demand, BP is vastly overhauling its financial operations, its telecommunications operations, and its training operations – with all of these involving staff changes.

¹⁸ Both Marc Tucker and John Chubb (discussing the experience of America's Choice and Edison Schools respectively) - make this point in a forthcoming Rand volume about scaling up school reform, edited by Bodilly and Glennan.

Meanwhile, at the school level too, the different phases of development may require different kinds and degrees of human resource. For example, the early phases of the first Big Picture start-ups have put enormous and enormously varied demands on principals. These principals have felt pressure to find political and financial angels. Most have had to find and renovate space. All have had to hire whole staffs, and educate staff members (along with students, parents, mentors, and others) in the Big Picture ideas - even while still educating themselves. They have also had to negotiate all the politics that attend doing anything different in education - from convincing a superintendent that some reporting requirement is incompatible with the Big Picture design, to figuring out what to do about state testing requirements, or (to reassure parents ahead of time) what to do about state university admissions requirements. Then, once their schools open, the principals must continue to do all of the above, plus create an accountable learning community, a respectful school culture, and an efficient set of operations that use the Big Picture materials and structures well. Meanwhile, all these tasks are more onerous because the Big Picture school is like few others inasmuch as it draws substantially on the learning resources of the larger community, and uses numerous structural and cultural elements unique to the design.

BP is counting on a decline in such demands as routines become established within new schools, as clusters of Big Picture schools develop within a city or region, and as BP gets clearer about the essential elements of the design and firmer in its contracting with regard to the contractor's obligations to enact them. Such a decline in role demands will be crucial to the success of Big Picture schools over the long haul, since experience to date suggests that the demands on the principal in a Big Picture school's start-up phase may exceed most people's capacity to meet them.

Finally, even intellectual resources needed for scaling up vary by phase. In the earliest phases, the most valuable intellectual resources may be those that help illuminate design issues and site-level implementation issues. Later, the most valuable may be those that help illuminate system issues related to communication, training, or resource allocation. Little more than a year ago, BP especially needed ideas related to the development of materials and training procedures that "capture" the design in action. Today, it especially needs ideas related to the costing out and the marketing of these materials and training procedures, as well as ideas about coaching and training at a national level.

At the school level also, different intellectual resources are likely to be needed at different levels of school development. This is evident in a comparison of what the newest Big Picture schools need versus what the longer established Met campuses need. The latter still hire new staff, of course, and these newcomers need access to basic ideas and materials; but the continuing staff and leadership need intellectual resources that push practice deeper. One rationale for BP co-director Dennis Littky's enhanced presence at the Met is that he will orchestrate the effort there to generate and allocate intellectual resources sufficient to pushing practice deeper. The working assumption is that this effort is crucial to establishing the Met as a genuine lab school for the network of Big Picture schools, and so crucial to the overall scaling up effort.

To manage varying demands

- Design for cost sharing, and help schools budget for it.
- Keep all systems nimble, and expect to change them frequently as you grow.
- Be realistic about the job demands of site-level leadership, and tailor training and support mechanisms accordingly.
- Design for the continual infusion of new ideas.

Strains on Organizational Culture, Leadership, and Theory of Action

To accommodate shifts in resource demands during scale up, a school designer must periodically add some organizational functions and adjust others. This may involve deep changes in culture and leadership, and may lead to explicit or implicit shifts in the organization's theory of action. The strains are inevitable. The consequence of the strains depends on how they are managed.

A close observer of New American Schools (a group of affiliated third-party school designers), says that as its affiliates scaled up in the 1990's, they found themselves having to change their organizational culture from that of a think tank to that of a professional services firm (Millot, forthcoming). This meant adopting the operations and attitudes of a fee-for-service company, hiring specialists to oversee the quality of particular services and their delivery systems, and focusing more on the stability of the school design than on its evolution.

Signs of a similar transformation are evident today at BP – as are signs of resulting dislocation and resistance. As we suggested above, BP has recently experienced substantial staffing changes. Indeed, since the start of our study it has almost completely turned over in its staff. In the process, it has opted for more specialization within a more hierarchical reporting system (with staff reporting to directors in such areas as school development, communications, research, and financial operations). The rationale for the change is that the originally flat BP staffing arrangement, with its reliance on relatively young and inexperienced staff, fluid job descriptions, and invent-as-you-go operations seems ill-suited to the design support needs of sixty schools scattered across the United States. The task is too big, and the financial resources too slim to tolerate such a degree of organizational slack. Yet nearly everyone acknowledges that this slack had been a wellspring of BP creativity.

Of course, BP did not turn over its staff in one sweep. Thus staff members used to an apparently fading organizational culture interacted somewhat uneasily all year with those expected to create a new one. Some of the former report the loss of an organization that once felt more democratic in terms of the generation and allocation of resources, one where they had greater voice. And some of the newcomers report resistance to the new reporting structures and protocols. This resistance may be the last pain of a new order settling in, or it may be a sign of a transition that has hardly begun, and whose ultimate organizational impact is still unclear.

Meanwhile, BP leadership seems in transition to a yet indiscernible state. Dees, Emerson, and Economy (2001) warn that the leader dependency crucial to the start-up phase of a socially innovative organization may settle later on into what they call “founder’s syndrome” (p. 186). This is when the leader’s take on the founding vision deliberately or inadvertently comes to preclude necessary innovation. A variety of founder’s syndrome may be playing out now at BP. It has to do first of all with Dennis Littky’s and Elliot Washor’s intuitive ways of leading and working – their penchant for surprise, quick re-direction, and playfulness. It also has to do with the fact that they are *co-founders* – with somewhat different takes on the founding vision, and a strong tendency to pull at least temporarily in opposite directions pending the outcome of intense conversations with each other.

The premise of BP’s most recent organizational moves is that BP has now reached a level of scale where it requires some organizational space free of its founders’ operating style. This new space is characterized by rational planning, budgeting models, role definition, and standard operating procedures. As if to signal their acquiescence on this point, Washor and Littky have been relatively absent from BP headquarters since September. Washor is much on the road now overseeing the prospecting for new Big Picture sites, and acting in his words as the network’s “glue.” And he has moved his home to San Diego. Meanwhile, Littky has moved his office to the Met, where he is working to make it more explicitly and successfully a lab school for the entire network of Big Picture schools.

Although Littky and Washor remain the paramount leaders of BP intellectually, strategically, and politically, they have ceded much operational authority to a managing director who explicitly promotes a more rational organizational structure. Still, there are signs that Littky at least is uneasy with the new arrangement. For one thing, he worries that specialization may squeeze out some of the organization’s spirit and creativity. At the fall 2003 staff retreat, he complained that “as we get bigger, people get pushed into being solely in charge of something.” He prefers, he said, “this thing I keep reading about – synchronicity. It’s about dance, but it applies to us too.” When at one point in the retreat, he called for “re-inventing ourselves,” it seemed that he might be referring to an organizational dislocation yet to come, rather than one nearly over.

Meanwhile, there is the matter of the impact of distance on the Littky-Washor relationship. The organization is used to the dynamic that we describe above of their pulling temporarily in different directions, then resolving the tension in one-on-one

conversation. But lately, BP staff have told us, their differences appear sharper. Washor said Littky told him that he misses their Sunday conversations. Littky told us that he feels the burden of being the co-leader closest to headquarters. The organizational design that has been emerging this year at BP – with its separate arenas of interest for each of its co-leaders, plus a third arena for rational operations overseen by the managing director – depends ultimately on strong relationships and excellent communication across the archipelago. Otherwise some other organizational design will have to emerge, and possibly some other leadership structure.

Then there is the role of the Met, the original Big Picture School in Providence. It is important to note here that BP's expertise is steeped in its intimate relationship with the Met. Although BP as an organization pre-dates the Met, and has always had other projects besides the Met, its association with the Met over the last decade has been so close – particularly given the migration of personnel from one to the other, and sometimes back again – that it has often been hard to discern the organizational boundaries between the two. An important consequence of this association has been a grounding of BP design – both school design and scaling-up design – in an intimate perspective on actual schooling with its incessant uncertainty and volatility. Dennis Littky, for example, frequently criticizes other school designers – as well as BP's own staff – for tending to overlook the uncertainty and volatility of schools – to think of them as simpler than they can possibly be. Some other Gates-funded new school designers are like BP with regard to this deep attachment to one actual setting – for example, the High Tech High Foundation, and the Cristo Rey Network. However, all such designers are in a distinct minority among third-party school designers generally – for whom, in effect, a set of blueprints preceded a set of actual schools.

The difference has consequences for a third-party designer's *theory of action*. We use the term as Donald A. Schon used it – to designate the idea implicit in the sum of an organization's pronouncements, instincts, tools, and practices – at all levels, and whether coherent or not. A theory of action, simply put, answers the questions: What does the organization mean to do, and why does it think that doing it will make a difference in the part of the world it cares about? Schon argued that most organizations operate with inexplicit and incoherent theories of action, and that the chief function of organizational development ought to be to help them become more explicit and more coherent (Schon and McDonald, 1998).

The implicit theory of action governing most third-party school design takes schools to be simpler than they can possibly be - *as if* what were being designed could actually be put into place as designed. This is essentially what Millot (forthcoming) describes as the theory of action behind the scaling up of the New American Schools designs. It depends fundamentally on getting the blueprint right, and then standardizing implementation. But it denies a generation of research and practice in school reform which suggests that schools adapt designs rather than adopt them (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978; Berends, Bodilly, and Kirby, 2001).

Dennis Littky understands that this theory of action rests on a fictional premise – one that becomes more pronounced across the phases of scaling up, as the designers lose touch with their prototype schools, and as they become necessarily more remote from where their designs land. It may be a useful fiction to some extent – preserving hope and energy for the sake of invention. But when one faces up to it *as* fiction – as Littky tends to do – than one can begin to question the very value of scale. This is why Littky raises doubts continually about BP’s commitment to create 60 or more schools.

Yet he knows well that this commitment was crucial to gaining the financial resources that BP needs to be influential. What then can be done? The answer is to construct an alternative theory of action, one truer to actual new school development. Hence the importance in his mind of the Met as lab school. The strategy that he and Washor are developing, and that may evolve into a distinctly different theory of action than the one BP tends now implicitly to follow, is the one we termed in Essay 2 *networking communities of practice*. “What I hear,” Littky told us, “is that people out there want to talk to advisors, and we have 70 people next door [at the Met campuses] who, if trained right, could go out on a limited basis and provide the right support.” But pulling this off – through some combination of brief staff and student exchanges (Met to new schools first, then older schools to newer schools), and both web-based communications and video conferencing – require major shifts of BP resources.

To understand the theoretical stakes involved here, it helps to focus on BP’s recent work to develop a set of design benchmarks that it calls “School Distinguishers.” These include “Learning in the Real World,” “One-Student-at-a-Time Personalization,” and “Authentic Assessment.” Each distinguisher has a set of essential elements, as well as recommended elements. The question the organization faces now concerns how these *distinguishers* will be used. Will they be the terms by which a third-party designer of schools offers, extends, and occasionally withdraws the right to use its name and materials? According to Bradach (2003), it is crucial that designers of complex innovations like the Big Picture school spell out the terms of their designs in this way, and then insist that its clients adopt them. Some of the conversation concerning the distinguishers suggest that this is indeed their purpose - to standardize the Big Picture design. Yet other parts of the conversation suggest that the distinguishers are meant instead to be the basis of conversation and negotiation among critical friends over a network of linked communities of practice. It is possible to imagine these uses as complementary, but it is probable that they are in practice contradictory.

To cope with strains on culture, leadership, and theory of action

- Expect turbulence, and figure out how to talk openly about its sources and its inevitability.
- Understand that different levels of scale require different management and communication systems, and different leadership. Make appropriate adjustments.
- Seize opportunities to make the organization's theory of action explicit and coherent.

Inadequate Indicators and Models

A fourth hidden dimension of the resource challenge in third-party school design concerns the inadequacy of school-level indicators to guide the smart allocation of resources, and the scarcity of available allocation mechanisms. The result of this one-two punch is that third-party school designers have to spend an inordinate amount of time and effort inventing what entrepreneurs in other sectors can take for granted.

First, on the indicator side, new school designers want to get the right resources to the right places at the right time to support the development of their schools. How can they do this? When their overall operations are small and their staffs still generalist and highly integrated, they can visit their pilot schools and make collective judgments about what the schools need. As their operations scale up, however, and they begin to hire specialists, they lose the opportunity for frequent eyes-on monitoring, and also the capacity to pool judgment calls. This is when indicator systems become very important. By paying close attention to sensitive indicators of their new schools' effectiveness – ones highly correlated with essential design features - and by standardizing their resource allocations to what the indicators tell them, third-party school designers can operate smartly at scale.

The problem is that readily available indicators of school effectiveness – for new schools as well as established ones – are very crude. For students' intellectual engagement, there are average daily attendance reports; for their intellectual achievement gains, there are standardized test results generally reported cross-sectionally rather than longitudinally; for their moral development or citizenship or sense of safety, there is the number of yearly police incidents, or some similar measure; for school progress in narrowing achievement gaps, there are the NCLB target reports which for small schools with necessarily small numbers in population sub-groups are statistical fluctuations rather than indicators; for the quality of the lives students live outside schools, there are the free and reduced lunch statistics.

Chris Whittle, the founder and CEO of Edison Schools, says that Federal Express and UPS know much more about the packages they ship than American schools know

about their students (Chubb, forthcoming). If they need richer indicators – and they do – school designers have to invent or adapt other measures: student work samples, parent and student satisfaction surveys, school visitation protocols, longitudinal value-added analyses, home and community surveys, follow-up studies of graduates, and so on. Moreover, these measures have to be built into the school design itself. That is, the school must be designed for research capacity – must be designed to be mindful of its own effectiveness. And the results of its research must be monitored. An example of the kind of indicator system that BP will eventually have to invent is the one that YouthBuild developed. This large-scale and innovative youth program conducts biennial audits of each of its local programs, using internal assessments of more than a hundred performance indicators, plus site visits to audit the assessments (Bradach, 2003).

Developing such built-in measures and external auditing systems will demand and consume resources that are in short supply – both human and financial resources. BP’s effort to develop Big Picture Online as an important mechanism for tracking students and school progress remains underfunded. Its effort to hire a Research Director, whose job description would involve developing novel measures for assessing student and school growth, is stalled for want of good candidates. And its effort to build a longitudinal study of Met and other Big Picture School graduates is still searching for start-up funding. On the other hand, *not* developing such measures eats up resources too. Without better indicators, schools have no easy means of self-regulating, and thus the third-party designer has to engage in the most costly form of management, namely direct supervision (Chubb, forthcoming).

On the resource allocation side also, third-party school designers must expend much time and effort inventing, testing, and piloting mechanisms. In the area of financial resources, for example, many designers – and BP is among them – cannot take for granted that there are local funding streams adequate to support the implementation of their designs. They must therefore help local start-ups gain expertise in such areas as fundraising. Moreover, school contracting is too new a phenomenon to have yet generated reliable guidelines for practice – whether in districts or states, or in organizations scaling up designs; whether among CEOs, CFOs, policymakers, principals, lawyers, or accountants.

In the area of human resources too, third-party school designers cannot count on proven recruitment, training, and deployment models. In the crucial area of school coaching, for example, there are no proven and ready models of effective school coaching – never mind a pool of experienced school coaches to draw from, or well developed training protocols that can be adapted. There are not even any well articulated theories of school coaching. Although many reform groups are now engaged in what they call school coaching, what they actually do varies widely (in many cases within as well as across groups). This gap means that an organization like BP, even as it struggles to scale up its coaching, must simultaneously struggle to figure out what coaching is and what skill sets it requires. Similarly, BP is learning that it cannot simply delegate the recruitment and training of appropriate local staff to local principals. The attitude and skill sets needed are in rare supply, and people who possess them will probably have to

be recruited nationally. Moreover, the jobs themselves – for example, that of advisor or LTI coordinator are so different from their counterparts in conventional high schools, and the experience of new Big Picture principals so thin with respect to Big Picture practice, that some regional training scheme or centrally devised staff training protocols seem called for.

Similarly, in the area of intellectual resources, good models of networking are still scarce despite evidence of the power of networking in spreading ideas. Again, this is not because networking is rare, but because the practice of it remains under-theorized. Thus practitioners are forced continually to re-invent good practice, rather than merely adopt it.¹⁹ Moreover, as Bradach (2003) points out, different degrees of network “tightness” are needed depending upon the degree to which an organization scaling up can standardize its design. The more standardization it can achieve, he argues, the looser its networking can be – and loose networking is advantageous in the non-profit world where entrepreneurs – for example, individuals likely to want to be principals of Big Picture schools - tend to prize autonomy. But there are no formulas to depend on in this regard. Although BP is now engaged in an effort to describe the essential core practices and technologies of Big Picture schooling, there are probably limits to how much standardization it can achieve. In the end the “big picture” here is more than a set of ideas or a core set of practices and technologies. As Dennis Littky makes clear in a forthcoming book, it is fundamentally a culture. And as Bradach points out, cultures are among the hardest innovations to scale up because they require not only strong and clear theories of action, but also tighter than average networks. “This does not necessarily mean,” he explains, “that control has to emanate from the network’s center, but it is apt to involve substantial interaction between the local office and the center and among the [local] programs” (p. 24). Designing for this interaction will require much invention.

To cope with inadequate indicators and allocation mechanisms

- Build rich indicator systems into the school design.
- Invest in internal research capacity.
- Network for accountability as well as communication.
- Be prepared to be inventive.

¹⁹ Two of us make this point in a recent article about the use of networking in school reform. See McDonald and Klein (2003).

3.

Managing the Resource Challenge

To manage the real resource challenge of scaling up new school designs – hidden aspects included - school designers have to develop strategies for finding and generating resources, and also systems for planning and allocation. What follows is a kind of catalogue of the strategies and systems that BP has developed or is in the process of developing in order to do these things. We have arranged the catalogue by resource dimension.

Financial Resources

Finding and Generating

- Foundation and corporate fundraising. BP Central relies predominantly on the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which funds a large share of its staff costs – 100% of those directly tied to school start-ups, and a proportion of those indirectly tied to start-ups. The heavy reliance on Gates, however, may be deterring other foundation backing. It may also be pushing growth too fast, since Gates funding is tied to numbers of new schools under development. The only corporate gift to BP Central to date has been one from the CVS Corporation, whose founder is Chair of the Met Board. At the local level, there has been significant foundation funding in Denver and Detroit; also in Vermont, though the planning effort there collapsed.
- Private donorship. There is one example of this at the level of BP Central, but the Board is pushing for more. The only example at the local level to date is Detroit, but the scale of the anticipated gift there was far less than originally projected.
- Fees for contracted services and products. The BP Memorandum of Understanding with parties interested in adopting the Big Picture school design establishes a fee-for-service basis in principle, but there has been a lag in putting a fee-for-service structure into place. The new Chief Financial Officer (CFO), recently hired by BP, will approach this task bottom-up – that is, by first building school-level budget models that incorporate fee-for-service.
- Open marketing. There has been talk about this at BP – regarding, for example, selling curriculum materials to any small high schools, or to home schooling families. Given the demands of meeting its obligations under second-round Gates funding to open many more schools, however, BP has decided to defer planning for open marketing until at least 2005.
- Raising “venture capital.” In the non-profit world, this can take the form of accepting help from an “incubating” parent – generally with management strings attached – for example, a seat on the Board, management consulting, and so on. There has been some exploration of this with a New England group, but no concrete developments yet.

- Consulting. BP’s work with youth development groups starting their own high schools— though funded by Gates rather than on a fee-for-service basis – is an example of an income-generating consulting practice.
- State funding streams. The Denver and Detroit Big Picture schools are state-funded charter schools. The schools in Providence are also funded directly by the state as regional vocational schools. There is talk in California of accessing state funding for “continuation schools” as a revenue stream for Big Picture schools there. Most state revenue streams are for per-pupil expenditure only, and do not cover capital costs. Hence the dependence in Detroit and Denver on philanthropy. Capital costs in Providence were covered by a one-time voter-approved bond issue.
- School district funding streams. This is the main source of funding for Big Picture schools not funded directly by their states. Districts fund capital costs also – for example, rental charges and space renovations. Average per pupil expenditure levels vary dramatically across and sometimes within states. For example, among current Big Picture start-up sites, Camden, NJ per-pupil expenditure is \$13,787, Bloomfield, CT \$10,500, San Diego \$8,483, and New Orleans \$6,262 (NCES, 1999-2000 data).

Planning and Allocating

- Cost accounting. BP’s scaling efforts have been hampered to date for want of a reliable accounting of the actual costs of Big Picture school development. Such accounting will be one of the first tasks of the newly appointed CFO.
- Growth management. BP was selected as one of a small number of Gates grantees to be offered extensive and customized consulting services from the Bridgespan Group. A non-profit spin-off of Bain and Company, the Bridgespan Group focuses on the particular challenges that non-profits face, and seeks to equip them with strategies and tools they need to address them.
- Financial management. BP Central has significantly transformed its overall management systems over the course of the last year. More change is likely to follow given the appointment of a CFO with significant management experience. Among her tasks will be to assist start-up schools with their budgeting efforts.
- Financial planning. BP Central called on consultants to undertake several planning efforts during the last year, including the development of a business plan, and a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). These proved helpful in highlighting the need for still more planning and analysis, including the appointment of a CFO with experience appropriate to full-scale operations.
- Financial development. BP Central hired a Director of Development in the summer of 2002 – as part of the revamping of its core staff operations. He and a consultant specifically hired for this purpose have provided some support for development efforts by local schools, but principals mostly rely on their own expertise and contacts (or suffer the lack thereof). Some complain of feeling abandoned in this regard. A possible structural problem here is that many start-up schools may have regular funding streams inadequate to the full

implementation of the Big Picture design. However, a final determination of this will depend on a full cost accounting.

Human Resources

Finding and Generating

- Recruiting. For most of its scaling-up period, BP has relied largely on two classic methods of recruiting staff. The first is to promote talented people within the organization – especially among Met advisors. This has helped to ensure that staff members assisting in local design development have experience with the design. It has also helped the organization hold onto expertise otherwise prone to move (that of Met advisors who have tended not to “re-up” when their first cohort of advisees graduates). The second method is to depend on network connections – for example, within the Coalition of Essential Schools. But BP’s current pace of scale up has outstripped the capacity of both methods. Hence it has been relying on the thin set of contacts that it manages to acquire during what it calls the “prospecting” stage of school development – when it first entertains inquiries in Indianapolis or Bloomfield, Connecticut, and so on. BP Co-Director Dennis Littky told us that he believes the organization must soon develop a national recruitment strategy and staff it appropriately. This is a common strategy used by third-party school designers working at a larger scale.
- Training. BP follows a combination of networking and turn-key approaches to training staff for new Big Picture schools. It contracts with school districts or charter holders to train principals who have been jointly selected by them and by BP – beginning in the year before the school is scheduled to open. Then it connects these principals to each other and to Met “buddies” in Providence residencies which are scheduled for short periods of time during the TYBO (The Year Before Opening). Then in turn-key fashion, the principals recruit and train their own staffs. By means of a summer training experience and on-line networking, BP next tries to link these staff members to each other. For various reasons, however, which include turnover in the training staff, a lag in developing on-line networking capacity, and the sheer demands of the jobs the trainees train for, the BP training approaches have not been as successful as the organization had hoped to make them. Current efforts to raise the profile of the Met as a lab school, and to link it to other schools via telecommunications are intended to address this problem.

Planning and Allocating

- Articulating a theory of action. BP has been slow to develop training and coaching protocols. This is likely because it is still working to articulate the essential features of the Big Picture School design – what it calls distinguishers. This effort is nearly complete now, and is likely to have a major impact on scaling up. BP will similarly need to articulate more precisely its theory of school development. This may be one outcome of its work with the Bridgespan Group, whose co-founder and managing partner, Jeffrey Bradach (2003), argues that a strong and articulated theory of action is fundamental to scaling up.
- Coaching and consulting. As we stated above, BP has undergone numerous shifts in its coaching strategies. The emerging profile situates several field-based staff as “relationship managers” (all these terms are still in flux), or brokers between sets of schools and the human resources of the larger network; the continued “connecting” work of Elliot Washor who travels among the schools; a group of specialists based at BP who may provide assistance in person or online; and teams of trained advisors and students from Big Picture Schools (especially the Met) who have a limited number of consulting days on which they may travel to other schools in the network.
- Leveraging other organizations. BP has attempted with mixed results to partner with local reform organizations – for example, the Small Schools Network in Chicago, the Bay Area Coalition of Equitable Schools in Oakland, and the Colorado Children’s Campaign in Denver – to provide consulting assistance or political support to Big Picture start-up schools in their areas. The effort acknowledges the fact that a significant degree of the overall challenge of starting and sustaining Big Picture schools involves managing local political circumstances. Without a regional infrastructure of some kind, it is unlikely that BP can provide sufficient assistance in meeting this part of the challenge. But trusting local reform organizations to play this role can pose significant threats to BP’s emphasis on the fidelity side of the continuum between fidelity and adaptation. This has happened in at least one case that we know of.
- Networking communities of practice. This remains a principal strategy in BP’s overall effort to meet the challenge of teaching and learning its school design, and specifically in managing the challenge of human resource shortfalls. This is the reason that it is investing substantially in the development of Big Picture Online, and in a new telecommunications operation. The latter represents an important and potentially transformative development (See below).

Intellectual Resources

Finding and Generating

- Reading. There is always a text circulating within BP and across the Big Picture network. Sometimes it is a book – for example, Ron Berger’s (2003), Malcolm Gladwell’s (2001), or Elliot Levine’s (2002). But more frequently it is shorter: an essay on Robert Redford and the Sundance vision (Zades, 2003), or a *New Yorker* piece about *Saturday Night Live* (Gladwell, 2002), or an article about the Blue Man Group (Walker, 2003) or Zingerman’s Deli (Brokaw, 2003).
- Citing. Those cited include John Dewey, Art Powell, Frederick Law Olmsted, and many others. The weekly TGIFs are full of citations – especially in what the Co-Directors write, but in others’ entries also (see below). The citations are evocations of authority and of intellectual lineage, but they are also prods to think deeply or in another key, to read, and to reflect.
- Identifying and cultivating intellectual mentors. Among the prized ones to date are Ted Sizer, Debbie Meier, Ron Wolk, Frank Wilson (1998), Seymour Sarason, Tom Peters, and Stanley Goldstein.

Planning and Allocating

- Writing. The best and most recent example of how BP uses writing to “allocate” intellectual resources is Dennis Littky’s new book, about to be published by ASCD. Tentatively entitled *The Big Picture*, the book is a lively and engaging account of Littky’s intellectual roots and influences, and of the principles that have guided his work. Other examples include Met advisor Eliot Levine’s (2002) book, and Elliot Washor’s (2002) doctoral dissertation.
- Conversing in Salons and Brewhouses. BP has appropriated these 17th and 18th century terms to describe major vehicles for sharing and critiquing ideas – especially in Providence. The former are focused and frank discussions of key issues. The latter are informal encounters among members of a professional community of practice (Wenger, 1998).
- Publishing TGIFs. These are reflections on a week’s work written by Big Picture School principals and teachers, and by BP staff. In Essay 2, we described these as efforts to achieve transparency of operations, and suggested that their record in this regard is mixed. Perhaps their more important functions, however, are to build community, celebrate success, and spread ideas.
- Publishing Snapshots and the Wizer Advisor. These are new online network journals focused on spreading ideas of best Big Picture practice.
- Communicating interactively online. Although the original expectations for BP Online as a means of achieving school and network transparency seem now to have been inflated, its usefulness as a resource in articulating and sharing Big Picture ideas has been considerable.
- Video making and video conferencing. This is the BP new frontier. It echoes the experience that both of BP’s Co-Directors had in the mid-1990s with a precursor

effort called *Here, Thayer, and Everywhere*. The latter was a hybrid cable- and satellite-based television program which attempted to network the many communities of practice within the Coalition of Essential Schools, and the other reform networks associated with the ATLAS Project (a high-school design effort associated with New American Schools). The pun in the program's title refers to New Hampshire's Thayer High School, where Dennis Littky was principal, but the whole title reflects the serious purpose of using local practices as the basis for a national conversation. Each month, live from New Hampshire, Littky hosted the program, which featured Thayer teachers and students talking about their work, interviews of expert guests, and video shot on location in other schools. It also included many antics: funny hats, practical jokes, and so on. In Essay 2, we described HT&E as something of a cross between Bill Moyers and Sesame Street. The new effort – scheduled to begin next month – will employ teleconferencing rather than telecasting, and thus be far more interactive. However, plans still draw some inspiration from television – in this case, reality TV. Videographer Christine Sommers, formerly a public television producer and now on the BP staff, has been filming the daily life of a Met advisory, and episodes from this documentary titled *The Advisory* will be texts for the teleconferences.

4.

An Imperfect Analogy

In this final section of our essay, we reprise some of the earlier themes by way of an extended analogy between the Big Picture Company and Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream²⁰. In doing so, we mean to highlight the ways in which the resource challenges that non-profit entities face are both like and unlike the ones that for-profits face.

Although we foreground the Ben & Jerry narrative, we also interrupt it several times to call attention to the *other* narrative, the Big Picture narrative, and to the ways in which the two both coincide and diverge.

Is It About Who or What?

In his 1994 book, Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream CEO Fred "Chico" Lager traces the history of the company's humble beginnings through its growth into what was by 1994 a "\$100 million publicly held company nationally recognized as one of the most innovative, progressive, and socially responsible businesses in the world"(xi). (Later, it got even bigger.) Part of Lager's book focuses on the lives and personalities of Ben and Jerry themselves, arguing in effect that their characters and histories largely shaped how their business developed.

He may be right on this point, or his argument may be business hagiography, as Joel Spolsky (2000) suggests. Spolsky claims that whatever the men's backgrounds, their business developed fairly predictably along one of only two routes possible. Its route was the "organic" one - "Start small with limited goals, and slowly build a business over a long period of time." He contrasts this with the "Get big fast" or Amazon.com route. In *either* case, Spolsky argues, scaling up is both difficult along the way, and transformative in the end – regardless of the personalities or ideals of the company founders. In other words, when you get bigger at any pace, you change – big-time.

Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield were both born in Brooklyn in 1951, but met on Long Island in the 7th grade. This places them generationally among the baby boomers, the first suburbanites, those subject to the Viet Nam War draft, and the pioneers of the "counterculture." They became pals at Calhoun High School, in Merrick, NY, where Jerry suggests they may have been drawn together partly because they were fat. As a senior there, Ben took a job as an "ice cream man" on a truck with bells, a regular feature of Long Island neighborhoods then and now. After graduation, he went to Colgate, while Jerry went to Oberlin (where he got his first professional ice cream job dishing it in the

²⁰ The principal sources for this section of the essay are Lager (1994), the Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream website (www.benjerry.com), Ben & Jerry's own book (Cohen and Greenfield, 1997), and a small number of secondary sources. Because of the obvious limitations of these sources, the reader should not take what we say here as a definitive analysis of Ben & Jerry's. What we intend is a distant mirror for the Big Picture Company, constructed of Ben & Jerry material.

cafeteria). Oberlin's progressive, free-thinking environment suited Jerry well; but Ben hated the more traditional Colgate, and dropped out after a year and a half.

Jerry stayed at Oberlin for four years, studied, and played sports. He applied to numerous medical schools, but was rejected by all. Ben, meanwhile, hitchhiked, took pottery, film, and design courses at Skidmore's University Without Walls, and held various jobs including cashier at McDonald's and night mopper at Friendly's. He must have had a high number in the draft lottery.

By 1974, Ben was teaching pottery and other crafts, and working as the school's cook at the Highland Community School in the Adirondacks, a non-traditional high school. He built his own house there. Meanwhile, Jerry was in New York City working as a lab technician. After a year, he applied to medical school again, and was rejected again. A little later, he shared an apartment with his old friend Ben, on 10th St. in the East Village, then one of the world's great Hippie neighborhoods.

The *Other* Narrative

- Start-up imagination and energy often come from personal chemistry in the non-profit arena too (and, by the way, Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor also met on Long Island).
- The BP story, though certainly about *who*, is also about *what*. That is, the story is about a different idea of high schooling, and about the somewhat predictable and somewhat unpredictable fate of the idea in the real world.
- With respect to *who* as well as *what*, scale is bringing changes to the BP story, as it did to B & J's.

The Start-up

By 1976, Ben and Jerry decided they wanted to start a business together. Initially, they wanted to make and sell bagels, but they discovered that the equipment they'd need was too expensive. They never actually priced the equipment needed to make ice cream, but assumed that it must be cheaper than bagel-making equipment. However, they did do some research: they visited homemade ice cream shops and took a \$5 correspondence course on ice cream making through Penn State University. They got A's in the course, since the test was open-book.

In 1978, with a \$12,000 investment, they opened the first Ben & Jerry's scoop shop on a busy downtown corner in Burlington, Vermont. The building had formerly housed a gas station. There they experimented with making ice cream (using only the highest quality ingredients), seeking a rich, dense, smooth, and chewy product. Because Ben had sinus problems, their batches became heavily flavored with chunks or add-ins so that he could distinguish the flavors. They also offered soup and crepes – both sweet and

savory - but these didn't sell well. Their ice cream, however, was well received, bringing in \$650 a day and causing long lines at the counter. To keep the customers happy while they waited, the partners created a fun atmosphere. They had a player piano, and also a piano player. They made signs advertising "Today's Orgasmic Flavors."

Meanwhile, they tried hard to get their hired 'scoopers' not to talk too much. Talking among scoopers slowed down the line. Habits of slow scooping or over-scooping were the principal reasons for staff turnover at Ben & Jerry's in these earliest days: they got you fired. Though neither man liked to be boss, it was Ben who liked it least. Still it was he who did the firing. "When they knew that someone had to go, they'd say to each other, 'The monster is hungry, the monster must eat,' and Ben would begin to practice his role of rumbling and acting tough." He would then give the failed scooper a "compassionate speech" about how his or her future career – as doctor, lawyer, executive – would not be affected by incompetence in rolling a scoop of ice cream into a sugar cone (Lager, 1994, pp. 27-28).

Another role that neither man liked was that of accountant. They never managed to create a system: at first Jerry paid bills, then Ben. Then they stopped paying bills and cash-flow improved! However, the bank's balance almost never matched their own. Meanwhile, though they sold lots of ice cream, they had little to show for it (Lager, 1994).

Consequently, whenever they advertised, they did it cheaply. They adopted their hand-lettered, chunky logo because it was less expensive for a graphic designer friend to draw it than to have it typeset. The designer, Lyn Severance, "put herself into the mindset of a five-year-old in an ice-cream-mode." She also urged the boys to repaint the store with bright, primary colors, and to add roof-art – ice cream cones and coffee cups, cut from plywood and painted (Lager, 1994, p. 30). They depended for the bulk of their draw, however, not on advertising but on events. They threw end-of-summer celebrations with dancers, jugglers, frog jumping, and ice cream eating contests. They had a winter promotion: POPCDBZWE, which stands for Penny Off Per Celsius Degree Below Zero Winter Extravaganza. They also showed free movies outdoors in the summertime, projecting on the wall of the building beside their store. On their first anniversary, they held a Free Cone Day.

Jerry's slogan became, "If it's not fun, why do it?" Ben's became "Business has a responsibility to give back to the community from which it draws support" (Lager, 1994, p. 36). Both ideas had roots in the hippie movement. Meanwhile, sales doubled – still without much of a business strategy in place.

The *Other* Narrative

- The start-up of a successful organization like BP or B& J's can seem from one perspective crazy and accidental, and the actions of its entrepreneurs irrational. In fact, this perception overlooks the crucial role in success of out-of-the-box thinking, of serendipity, and of fast adaptation. Moreover, the surface details of a start-up can belie the power of a driving mission, one that has been years in the making, one that involves serious ideas.

Scaling Up

In 1979, Ben and Jerry got into the wholesale ice cream business. They did it for two reasons. First, they figured they'd never make money just scooping because there was no way to control scoop portions. Second, Ben felt envious of the salespeople who came into the shop to sell ingredients and supplies. He longed to be on the road, too. So he began lining up accounts with restaurants in Vermont and upstate New York.

To keep both their Burlington scoop shop and their emerging wholesale business in good supply, Ben and Jerry purchased an old textile mill and turned it into an ice cream manufacturing plant. By the summer of 1980, Jerry was overseeing the plant, a manager was running the scoop shop, and Ben was on the road selling and delivering, though no longer just to restaurants. That is because he had seized on a transformative idea. He thought Ben & Jerry's should package ice cream in pints and sell it to mom and pop grocery stores. Initially, Jerry resisted this idea, thinking it would be too much work (remember his slogan). Eventually he relented, however, and their designer friend Lyn was called in to create the pint packaging. She argued for a picture of the two men on the package. Ben wasn't thrilled at having his face displayed so widely, but he agreed eventually. This would forever brand the product in a highly personalized way. Later, Ben and Jerry both became tireless personalizers.

The *Other* Narrative

- Personal branding is an important factor in the BP story too. One result is that the personal choices of its founders matter more than they otherwise might – whether, for example, they stay home or go on the road.

Partnering

Within a few months, Ben & Jerry's had 200 on-the-road accounts (mostly mom and pop stores), and decided to approach local supermarkets too. Within a year, it had expanded its pint-packing operation beyond the old textile mill, and was also looking for a distributor. The 300% increase in sales was a bit much for Ben's VW station wagon to handle. So the company signed a contract with Real Ice Cream, giving it exclusive distribution rights in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. All Ben & Jerry's accounts had to buy from Real. But the deal unraveled quickly, teaching Ben and Jerry what they then took to be a valuable lesson: Don't trust others to commit to your product as you do (Lager, 1994).

The problem remained, however, that Ben and Jerry couldn't service their growth with only their own truck. Briefly, they considered selling the business to a former executive with M&M Mars. Ben felt reluctant, but he also struggled with being a businessman. He felt it conflicted with his hippie ideas and ideals. During a conversation with a friend, he said, "It's just a business, like all others, exploits its workers and the community." But his friend countered, "You don't have to run your business that way. If there's something you don't like about the business, change it." The conversation marked the beginning of Ben's efforts to run what he termed a socially conscious business (Lager, 1994, p. 57).

Meanwhile, franchising the business required trusting in others' commitment. The first franchised Ben & Jerry's opened in Shelburne, Vermont, in 1981, and the first out-of-state franchise opened in Portland, Maine, in 1983. Opening a Boston market in the same year required depending on independent distributors as well as franchise owners.

Then in 1984, the company took its biggest step into dependence by issuing a public stock offering. It went public for the same reason that companies always do – because it needed new sources of revenue in order to support growth. In particular, it needed the capital to build a new manufacturing plant. But it went public in an oddly local way: the initial public offering was for Vermont residents only.

The *Other* Narrative

- Non-profits like BP cannot, of course, become public companies, but there are other ways in which a certain kind of dependence – for the purpose of gaining resources - may become for them also the price of going to scale. For example, they may partner with a school district, link with a local reform effort, and come to rely on one or more key funders.

Gaining Attention

The next year the company went beyond New England in its marketing, but only as far as New York City, the founders' old hometown. There it decided to take on the premium ice-cream giant Haagen Dazs. It wasn't the first joust between Ben & Jerry's and this subsidiary of Pillsbury. The year before, Haagen Dazs had tried to limit Ben & Jerry distribution in Boston by telling its own distributors that they couldn't distribute both brands. Haagen Dazs then had the higher market share, and the distributors knew that they would take a big hit if it pulled its brand. Ben and Jerry fought back in their unique fashion. Jerry picketed in front of the Pillsbury Headquarters in Minneapolis. He held a hand-lettered sign reading "What's the Dough-boy Afraid of?" He handed out leaflets with a description of the Haagen-Dazs effort in Boston, and a kit that had sample letters of protest to the FTC and to the Chair of Pillsbury's board. The Pillsbury letter said, "Why don't you pick on someone your own size?" He also handed out a coupon redeemable for a T-shirt with the slogan "Ben & Jerry's legal defense fund major contributor."

As anticipated, the press ran with the picketing story and interviewed Jerry. Meanwhile, Ben & Jerry pints began carrying stickers advising customers to call an 800 number to support the cause. Lager's (1994) assessment of the results of this joust is that Pillsbury had unwittingly handed Ben & Jerry's "a public-relations bonanza that created brand awareness" for its ice cream in excess of anything the company could have created with paid advertising (p. 120). Moreover, Ben & Jerry's took Pillsbury to court and won.

Moving into New York against Haagen Dazs, Ben & Jerry's felt cocky. The company believed that its ice cream and image were unique. Lager (1994), recalling the company's mood then, says, "If Haagen-Dazs and the clones were worldly and sophisticated, then we were funky and unpretentious. If they were slick and elegant, Ben & Jerry's was down-home and genuine. 'We're the only super-premium whose name you can pronounce,' Ben would say..." (p. 81). Moreover, Ben & Jerry's flavors were different, and had chunks added in.

Without having given serious thought to the profitability outcome, Ben & Jerry's had created a unique identity.

The *Other* Narrative

- As B & J's famously did with respect to the ice cream business, BP uses an antic image to capture its iconoclastic ideas about high schooling.
- The tight market that B & J's first faced – and that it helped open up – may be equivalent to the expectations that local Big Picture school developers must overturn – about what a high school is and how it ought to function.
- The distinguishability of the Big Picture design – like the distinguishability of B & J's ice cream – is the leverage that the headquarters operation offers its local marketers. Without it, they cannot make the sell.

Moving On

Soon Ben & Jerry's the corporation became somewhat less equivalent to Ben and Jerry the actual people – the first of several shifts in this direction. Jerry decided to move to Arizona with his girlfriend, selling all but 10% of his interest in the company to Ben. Given the personalized branding, however, the two friends negotiated an agreement whereby Jerry would return to Burlington four times a year to participate in promotions, consult, and help with advertising.

In fact, by 1985, Jerry had come back to Burlington full-time to become the company's "Director of Mobile Promotions," and Vice-Chair of the Board. The Chair was Ben. One of Jerry's mobile promotions happened in the summer of 1986, when Ben and Jerry traveled across the country together in a "cowmobile," serving up free samples of their ice cream. But the cowmobile caught fire and burned to the ground outside Cleveland. Ben was quoted in news stories across the country as claiming that the burning cowmobile "looked like a giant baked Alaska." It was among their many stunts that raised market share – from the dough-boy attack, to the world's largest sundae weighing in at St. Alban's, Vermont, at 27,102 pounds then slowly melting, to sending a "scoop vehicle" to Wall Street after the crash of 1987 to serve free servings of Economic Crunch ice cream, to joining in a "linguistic activism" campaign to demand that dictionaries list *s'mores* as a word. And then there were the flavor introductions, combining fun and social activism: besides S'mores, there was Cherry Garcia, Wavy Gravy, Brazilian Rainforest Crunch, the Full VerMonty, and Blueberry (introduced to create a market for blueberries grown by a particular tribe of Native Americans in Maine).

After New York, Ben & Jerry's moved back up the coast to take in Connecticut and Rhode Island. Ben negotiated with distributors in these areas, and created TV advertisements called "Cheap," which were ten-second spots that featured Ben and Jerry on a "talking ice cream lid," saying "Hi, I'm Ben!" and "Hi! I'm Jerry! We may not have enough money for a thirty-second TV spot, but we sure make some of the best ice cream you've ever tasted!" (Lager, 1994, p. 87). They also employed their special events van there. A team of people would emerge from the van and walk into office buildings with bags over their shoulders filled with ice cream. They would hand out pints, spoons, and coupons that listed the store locations at which the product was available. Predictably, the success of sales in these markets led to the need to increase production – hence the new factory in Vermont and the public stock offering.

The *Other* Narrative

- As with B & J's, the images that BP uses to capture and promote its ideas

have naturally affected its organizational culture. This has implications for scaling up.

- Unlike B & J's, BP went geographically wide in its first out-of-state forays – to the west coast, rather than adjoining states. The result was that BP's available resources were stretched further, and its first host cultures less familiar than they otherwise might have been.

Scaling Up a Culture

In 1984, Ben & Jerry's had sales of more than \$4 million, a 120% increase over the previous year. In 1985, the company's sales exceeded \$9 million, an increase of 143% over the previous year. And in 1986, sales climbed to just under \$20 million, more than a 100% jump. When a company grows faster than 100% a year, Joel Spolsky (2000) argues, "it is simply impossible for mentors to transmit corporate values to new hires." Where these values are crucial to product quality, then the organization either has to slow growth or figure out a way to beat the odds through cultural power. According to Lager, the only thing the company ever did deliberately to reduce its rate of growth was to limit expansion initially to New England and New York. "By going 'deep' before we went 'wide,'" he writes, "we were actually ensuring our success in the biggest and most important markets in the country" (p. 154).

However, the company built a strong corporate culture – one that from the perspective of ordinary business practice was countercultural. It depended on the idea of "linked prosperity." This meant, Lager (1994) explains, that "as the company grew and prospered, the benefits would accrue not just to shareholders, but also to employees and the community. Each constituency's interests were intertwined with the others" (p. 126). Thus Ben & Jerry's established a five-to-one salary ratio, whereby no one could be paid more than five times what the lowest paid staff member was paid. As Ben put it, this did not mean that it could not offer high salaries to top people, but that it then had to raise all bottom salaries correspondingly. To link outside prosperity to inside prosperity, the company also established the Ben & Jerry's Foundation, and instituted the practice of donating 7.5% of its pre-tax income through the foundation to non-profit organizations that foster social change. And the corporation itself became politically active. In 1990, it protested New Hampshire's Seabrook nuclear power plant with a Boston billboard that read "Seabrook: Keep our customers alive and licking." That same year, it printed a "Support Farm Aid" panel on 8 million pint containers. Later, it introduced its new line of smooth, no chunks ice cream flavors with an advertising campaign that featured, among others, Spike Lee, Daniel Berrigan, Pete Seeger, and Bobby Seale.

The new manufacturing plant in Waterbury, Vermont, had been built to accommodate growth, but a result of its vastness was that employees were suddenly spread out. Because size added complexity, the employees also worked in a more departmentalized way. "The up side," writes Lager (1994), "was that more work was getting done. The down side was that as people became more task-oriented, they began

to lose their connection to the whole of the organization” (p. 143). To compensate, the company began shutting down production one day a month to bring everybody together. The meetings enabled management to communicate about the company (flavors, sales, etc.), and offer information on future plans. The meetings served also as forums to discuss issues and ideas raised by staff, and to give line-level employees a voice in strategy and operations development. Through celebrations and other special events, the meeting also passed on the antic culture of the company – the one that had started in the Burlington scoop shop in order to entertain people waiting on line, but had then become a combination operating philosophy and marketing strategy - about being down-home, spunky, inventive, resourceful, fun. Here it also became a means of building esprit, and of holding onto valuable employees.

Spolsky (2000) says that the Amazon.coms of the world – needing to get big fast enough to dominate an open market that will otherwise be gobbled up by someone else – always have to substitute cash for time. They buy corporate loyalty rather than cultivate it. They write off their mistakes with big checks, rather than try to prevent them by growing the right cultural and training environment. By contrast, the Ben & Jerrys of the world – the slow-growth organics operating in competitive markets – can’t afford any of this. In an important sense, their culture *is* their product. They risk losing everything if they grow faster than they can promulgate this culture.

Still, culture alone is not enough to solve all the human resource challenges of a company growing fast, albeit at an organic rate. As it grew, Lager explains, Ben & Jerry’s increasingly needed to fill management positions by recruiting outsiders rather than just grooming insiders. The complexity of its scaled-up operations was one reason. Another was to gain the benefit of external perspectives.

The *Other* Narrative

- Like B & J’s, BP has felt the tug between efficiency and culture as it has grown in scale – and a consequent threat to its identity.
- BP continues to struggle with the question of whether “outsiders” – especially those who have never worked in a Big Picture school – can lead or coach those who do.

The Big Shift

Meanwhile, in the early 1990’s the company’s growth policy had become a source of tension between Lager who was still CEO, and Ben, who was still closely involved in management issues. Lager calls it an “unresolved debate.” He says that Ben believed that if the company got too big, “it risked becoming just another bureaucratic corporation, no different from any other.” For his part, Lager thought that this fear created a “mythic horizon, beyond which we never looked” – one that precluded sensible long-range planning (pp. 152-153).

Eventually, the debate ended with both men stepping down, and also with the adoption of a mission statement that seemed to resolve some of the differences at stake. Beyond dedicating Ben & Jerry's to the making of "finest quality ice cream" in "innovative flavors" using Vermont dairy products, the mission statement acknowledges the "new corporate concept of linked prosperity" – linking the economic and the social. The economic side involves increasing benefits to stockholders and to employees, while the social side involves running the business in ways that improve quality of life locally, nationally, and internationally.

Ben's departure made for a huge organizational transition in two respects. First, it meant that the company had to become less intuitive in its product development and marketing strategy. Ben had served as the "official taster" on ice cream development, and also the creative force behind the company's marketing. "He had great instincts about what would and wouldn't work," Lager (1994) writes, and Ben & Jerry's relied on these instincts nearly exclusively, never doing market research or test marketing of products. "If Ben thought it was a good idea. . . [Ben & Jerry's] would do it" (pp. 149-50). Meanwhile, what Lager calls Ben's "fanatical commitment to producing a high-quality product" (p. 148) had long been the company's principal vehicle of quality control. He "was a taskmaster and a perfectionist who held everyone to incredibly high standards. He rarely passed out praise and was always focused on what was wrong" (p. 150). One day in 1987, when Ben was walking through the plant, he came upon freezer doors that weren't closing properly. He became livid. How could an organization committed to quality ignore a problem that so directly affected its product? The term "freezer door" thereafter became the phrase to describe systems or procedures not up to standard. However, under Ben's control, the standard remained intuitive and aphoristic. It was tied to his vision of a company whose generosity, spirit, and positive attitude causes everybody to pull together for the common good.

Although the company launched the much noticed "Yo, I'm your CEO" contest in 1994 to replace Lager – attracting 22,000 entrants who explained in 100 words or less why they should be the new CEO – the replacement CEO was actually located by a search firm.

This CEO lasted two years, and accomplished manufacturing efficiencies, according to the company's website. He was followed by one who expanded marketing strategies. Over the next several years, the organization developed formal decision making processes, long-range planning and budgeting systems, an orientation program for new employees, and an assessment system to evaluate franchise operations – none of which it had had before. It also expanded into many international markets, and abandoned its 5-1 salary limit - in order, it said, to attract the caliber of professional managers it needed. By 1999, Ben & Jerry's had net sales of nearly \$240 million.

That was also the year that the company announced that it had received "indications of interest" from potential buyers, and that it was considering the offers.

The *Other* Narrative

- BP has also introduced new systems to manage itself at scale, and is currently undergoing an organizational transition designed over time to substitute standard operating procedures for intuition (at least to some degree). But the precise degree remains a matter of contention.
- The BP story seems now on the verge of some plot turn also – though hardly like the one that B & J’s underwent at this point.

The End or a New Beginning

As the *New York Times* put it in its lead on the story: “A poignant cry is rising from many a Vermonter’s heart these days, a plaint for local purity in the face of cold cash and the forces of globalization: ‘Say it ain’t so, Ben and Jerry’” (Goldberg, 1999, p. 18). Governor Howard Dean protested the possible sale, calling Ben & Jerry’s Vermont’s signature corporation. He was particularly concerned about the economic impact on the state’s dairy farms, and the possible loss of the state’s premier tourist site, the Ben & Jerry’s manufacturing plant. Among other protestors was a street theater group demonstrating outside the Burlington shop, suggesting new flavors “like Chubby Bureaucrat, Funky Money, and Two-faced Swirl.” A web site, www.savebenjerry.com, warned that “gigantic multinational companies are trying to take advantage of Ben & Jerry’s undervalued stock price” (Goldberg, 1999, p. 18).

Ben and Jerry themselves were mostly silent in the face of the protests, except that Ben issued a statement saying that he hoped to resolve the tension between his fiduciary obligation as a member of the Ben & Jerry’s Board to return adequate value to shareholders, and the company’s commitment to progressive values. But the website was right. What was going on behind the scenes was prospecting by multinationals for undervalued stock. From another perspective, this was another episode of an old dilemma in the company’s history – a predictable dilemma of scaling up: how much to depend on others when it comes to resources needed for the job, versus how much to go it alone.

Already this same dilemma had led the company to the once unthinkable business decision of letting Haagen Dazs be one of its major distributors. Now the dilemma was threatening a takeover by a major multinational. But the fiduciary obligation that Ben spoke of was real and legally binding. As Vermont’s Congressman Bernie Sanders put it with indignation, “The directors of a company could actually be sued because they are responsive to their employees, to local farmers in our state, and to the local economy.” The Vermont legislature had passed a law known informally as the Ben & Jerry’s law which declared that a company could consider other factors besides profit in considering a buy-out offer. However, the law was untrustworthy for being untested in the courts (Goldberg, 1999, p. 18).

Ben tried to organize a plan that would have divided the company fairly equally among himself, a venture capital firm that describes itself as socially responsible, and an Anglo-Dutch firm called Unilever, whose subsidiaries include Good Humor and Breyer's ice cream companies. In the end, this deal was eclipsed by one that Unilever proffered on its own. This beat the other offer by as much as \$10 a share – and at a price considerably above the trading price (Hays, 2000). Ben & Jerry's accepted it.

Ben, who made about \$39 million on the deal, was apparently impressed by the fact that one of the Unilever co-chairmen arrived at negotiations with a knapsack on his back, and that he talked about Unilever's sustainable agriculture programs. The Unilever offer included an agreement to maintain a separate Ben & Jerry's board, one-time \$5 million payments to both the Ben & Jerry's Foundation and Ben & Jerry's employees, a commitment at least in the short term not to reduce jobs or change the way the ice cream is made, continuation at least for the short-term of the 7.5% pre-tax charitable contribution, and the prospect of Ben & Jerry's concept of "linked prosperity" influencing the practices of the global Unilever with its \$44 billion annual sales.

"While I would have preferred for Ben & Jerry's to remain independent," Ben said at the announcement, "I'm excited about this next chapter." Then he quoted lines from a Grateful Dead song: "Once in a while you get shown the light in the strangest of places" (Hays, 2000). His allusion was to the possibility that Unilever might buy into "linked prosperity." Meanwhile, both the influence *and* survival of Ben & Jerry's inside Unilever depend on the long-term strength and marketability of the branding that Ben and Jerry gave it. Looking back, it seems clear that this was the only real control the founders ever had.

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Scaling Up the Big Picture

Essay 4

**from a study funded by an anonymous foundation
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Big Picture, Local Story

How does a successful designer of high schools for one place take the design to other places? Consider the case of the Big Picture Company (BP), a non-profit educational innovator. It designed a different kind of vocational high school for the State of Rhode Island. Later, as the result of the design's success there, BP received funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to install it in places far from Rhode Island. As of September 2004, there will be 21 Big Picture schools in 7 states, located in nearly every region of the country.

The first Big Picture School is called the Met – short for the Metropolitan Career and Technical Academy. It is a tightly networked collection of six campuses, each located minutes from the BP offices in downtown Providence. The first campus opened in 1995 in a corridor of the Rhode Island Department of Education, where it still resides. BP hired the architect who designed the other five campuses, and it oversaw the construction of these campuses on behalf of the state. BP staff, in collaboration with Met teachers and principals, and under the leadership of BP founders and Co-directors Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor (functioning also as the Met “superintendents”) designed a unique curriculum for these unique spaces. It is one focused on the cultivation of interest, the support of exploration, the development of responsibility, and the affirmation of family and community. Its major features are *Learning Through Internship* (LTI) – in which a student works closely two full days a week with a mentor in a workplace setting - and *Advisory* - in which an advisor oversees the student's pursuit of an *Individualized Learning Plan*, and within which a group of 14 peers work to establish a supportive learning community. Deborah Meier has written approvingly that what may seem radical about this Big Picture school design is actually “the oldest and most traditional idea around: Let kids learn mostly in the settings in which real people do interesting work,” then add a part-time community of peers to help them make sense of what they experience (Littky, 2004, p. vii).

Whether one sees the Big Picture school design as radical or profoundly traditional, it is undeniably different from the ordinary American high school. In the first of our four essays on “scaling up” the Big Picture school design, we wrote about the difference that this difference makes. One consequence of the Met's being so different from other high schools in Rhode Island is that BP has had to work hard on the politics of its development, expansion, and longevity. Today, the fact of its difference seems “forgiven” there, and the Met is widely regarded as an educational asset of greater Providence. But what happens when the design travels elsewhere? This is the question we take up in the following essay. One answer we offer is that “forgiveness” of difference does not travel nearly so well as the design itself, even with good strategy at work - materials, training, coaching, and so on. That is because the politics of adopting a design is fundamentally a local politics, and has to be played out as such. Other communities' endorsements go only so far. Elliot Washor framed the challenge well by comparing it wistfully to – of all things – building abbeys in ancient Ireland. They needed to be “off the beaten path,” he explained, to survive the wars and the looting, and

to protect their books and inventions for longevity. The problem, as he knows, is that contemporary school designers generally need to stay “on the beaten path” for the sake of seeming relevant and for building influence. One cannot blame them, though, for feeling occasionally that they would rather tend their books and inventions undisturbed.

Challenges of Scaling Up New School Designs

In our first two essays, we named what we take to be the seven challenges of scaling up new school designs, and illustrated five of them with data gathered from our study of the BP experience and from our reading in the literature of scaling up educational and other innovations. Our third essay explored the 6th challenge, what we term the challenge of obtaining and managing resources sufficient to scale. Now in this final essay, we explore the seventh challenge – and one of the most difficult: negotiating the politics of local adoption.

Seven Challenges

8. Balancing fidelity and adaptation
9. Teaching and learning the design
10. Instilling shared ownership of the design
11. Communicating effectively across contexts
12. Using experience in new settings to improve the design
13. Obtaining and managing the resources sufficient to scale
14. Negotiating the politics of local adoption

It is important to acknowledge that this enumeration of challenges separates phenomena that the school designer experiences in sometimes dizzying multiplicity. It takes an act of theorizing to distinguish in a particular instance any one of the challenges we name from most of the rest. The business of our essays is to engage in such theorizing so as to assist practice. One can think of these challenges as a set of lenses. Faced with an impending case of “implementation failure,” a designer or an intermediary or a school leader might ask, for example, whether the problem involves a failure to teach and learn the design, a gap in resources, a political issue, or some particular combination of these. Asking this question early enough may enable him or her to devise a rescue strategy well targeted to the actual dimensions of the problem. The lens metaphor is appropriate because our work means to encourage reformers to notice phenomena they might otherwise not notice.

In practice, there is no order to the challenges. Politics comes first as well as last. So does the challenge of teaching and learning the design, and of communications, and so on. But we put politics last in our list in order to emphasize a fact about scaling up new school designs that is often overlooked. This is because it seems at the outset so

threatening. The fact is there are limits to the reach of rational planning, thoughtful designing, and careful resourcing. Again, Elliot Washor captures it well in an ironic observation. “When I go to the schools, I’m shocked by how good they are. If we didn’t have the system stuff to deal with, we’d be fine.” This is the understandable longing for an apolitical context. On top of having to find resources, develop materials, train people, create a coaching model, network schools, and contract with local entities, you mean I have to put up with politics too?

Despite their occasional exasperation with the fate of having to deal with more politics than expected, however, Littky and Washor along with many other new school designers at work today ultimately come to regard local politics as a source of hope rather than of cynicism or despair. That is because local politics are the signs of their ideas being taken seriously, the signs of a real school being born. We suggested in our first essay that scaling *up* new school designs ultimately comes to scaling them *down* – that is, getting the details right in a particular place. Because schooling is one of society’s most fundamentally political acts, negotiating successfully among stakeholders’ diverse interests requires patient and messy work on the ground.

What follows are four stories *from* the ground, stories of real schools being born. Each documents different political tensions arisen from the particularities of local circumstances. Though the stories are unique, the tensions are typical of those that arise in many other local circumstances – as we know from our reading in the school reform literature. They include the following:

- The political burdens of being different
- The burden that reform histories impose on newcomers
- The complications that ensue from different interpretations of the design on the part of people operating at different levels of implementation
- The suspicions that system insiders tend to have about outsiders’ motives and theories
- The difficulties outsiders encounter when they try to understand inside culture.
- The problems of reconciling a new school design with state and local policy dictates
- The conflicts likely to arise between designers and intermediaries

The stories are not cases in the ordinary sense – meant to capture a wide range of complexity. Instead they zoom in to particular complexities. Thus they deliberately ignore much else happening at the time. And speaking of time, these stories are snapshots in past time. They do not portray the schools as they are today. Their usefulness is merely in their portrayal of some of the ordinary tensions of being born, and in the ideas they may spark of how to deal with these tensions. Anyone tempted to infer the identity of the schools should beware that we have taken pains to disguise these identities by changing what we take to be superficial details.

We punctuate the four stories with observations of what we call *challenges within* the overall challenge of negotiating the politics of local adoption – two to four per story. Arguably these *challenges within* are applicable beyond the four stories. We imagine, for example, that with the help of some re-phrasing and a few more story details drawn from our data, we might have associated any of the *challenges within* to any of the four stories. Indeed, as the reader will doubtlessly notice, these *challenges within* tend to repeat certain themes. In any case, we believe that the strategies we advocate for dealing with them are useful across a wide array of political circumstance. We derive them from an analysis of our data overall, and from our reading in the literature on scaling up innovation within and beyond the field of education.

We present these strategies in two formats. First, we end each story with what we call a commentary, and we embed the strategies there. In the commentaries, we climb out of the flow of the narrative onto a theoretical platform built just above the fray – one based on a conception of organizational change proposed by Chris Argyris and Donald Schon (1996). Their conception has guided our entire inquiry – as we claimed it would in the introduction to our first essay. On the platform they supply, we make observations concerning what the stories' key political actors seem to need strategically and what those supporting them should be prepared to offer.

Then, in a brief concluding section of the essay, we reprise these observations in the form of strategic precepts. We keep the precepts direct, simple, un-freighted by narrative detail, and - we hope - useful across a wide array of political circumstances.

2.

Negotiating the Politics of Local Adoption: Four Stories with Commentary

1. **The Politics of Difference**

Context

This mid-size, mid-continent city has an ambitious reform agenda. At the top of it is an externally funded initiative to replace a number of failing high schools with what the superintendent calls “condo schools,” or independently functioning small high schools. As he puts it, “Building size should not dictate size of schools, which is an educational question.” The initiative, launched in 2003, was crafted to respond to a concerted effort by leaders of the city’s Black and Latino communities to gain better educational opportunities for their youth, in high schools located within their own neighborhoods. Absent the opportunity to apply for Gates funding, the initiative might have taken some other form, but the city’s Mayor (who appoints the Superintendent) especially found political resonance in the “condo” idea. “Common sense tells you,” she said at a press conference announcing the initiative, “that a small high school will foster stronger relationships between students and faculty.” Based on this “common sense,” she committed the city to move fast.

This meant dealing fast with a set of difficult tasks. For example, the failing schools had to be closed in ways that minimized disruption in the education of students attending them, and helped the affected families feel hopeful rather than demoralized. Also appropriate designs had to be chosen for the condo schools, and the students from the closed schools and their families had to be helped to choose wisely among the alternatives. This is a city used to neighborhood high schools, and unused to an educational “marketplace.” However, the Superintendent promised “a variety of models and strategies,” and the Mayor promised that “the specialized focus of a small high school will better engage young teenagers.” They explicitly said they wanted difference. They said they wanted to do more than distribute the students and teachers from the failing schools into a set of identical “houses.” That had been tried in this city at least once before, without much benefit.

To undertake these difficult tasks, the district opened an Office of Small High Schools. The office was charged with investigating design options, with inviting selected designers to bring their designs to the city on a five-year contract. The charge was a huge departure from ordinary business here. This was a city used to designing its own reforms, and used to exercising tight and continuous central control. The Office of Small High Schools was also charged with supporting the designers in their efforts to fit the designs to the city, and to the large school buildings they would share with others.

challenge within

Some cities today seem to be undergoing a “constitutional” change in how they define public schooling – offering charters and contracts to designers, inviting students and

parents to participate in an educational “marketplace,” even distinguishing between a school and a school *building*. The people most affected by such changes, however – including administrators, teachers, parents, and students themselves – may not behave as higher-ups intend that they should.

Met at the Buckeye

When Janelle Greene began laying the groundwork for her Big Picture “condo” school within the former Buckeye High School building, her mind was focused especially on staff and student recruitment, on LTI prospects in the city generally and the neighborhood in particular, and on figuring out how to operate on the city’s relatively low per-pupil expenditure. This was during what BP calls the TYBO year (for The Year Before Opening), when a new principal’s salary is paid partly by BP. At the end of her first year as principal, however, Greene told us that she wished that during TYBO she had placed more emphasis on “building relationships.” To us, her phrase signifies the set of unanticipated political negotiations she faced over the course of her school’s first year. All of them were consequences of the Mayor’s promise to move fast.

Greene’s school, called the Buckeye Met, shares the four-story Buckeye Multiplex (including its cafeteria, library, gym, and other common spaces) with two other schools – a K-5, and a middle school. Politically, Greene told us, the neighborhood surrounding Buckeye is “in the throes of gentrification,” and she believes that the designs for the three schools were chosen with this in mind – to appeal to different social class interests.

Of course, negotiating social class differences among neighbors within a single educational building can be as difficult as doing the same within a single residential community (Gootman, 2004). For example, the Met’s middle-school neighbor is a school that emphasizes a highly structured curriculum and strict behavioral guidelines. The contrast with the Met’s emphasis on individualized programs and projects, and learning in the community often seems stark within what Greene calls the “crunch of shared space.” This other school’s principal asked Greene to maintain “greater control” over the Met students within the common space. For example, she objected to their “clustered way of walking to the cafeteria.” Greene countered with an explanation that while the Big Picture philosophy urges student to adapt their behaviors to the different demands of different environments, it also respects them as individuals learning to function as adults in the world. “They can’t learn how to interact in a mixed environment if we structure it so much that they have no practice.” Greene’s account of the conversation acknowledges her neighbor’s interest, even as she assertively explains her own.

Meanwhile, difference has required political negotiation with parties outside the building too. The local City Council Member, Greene told us, “is very leery of the Buckeye Met, because she doesn’t want a bunch of European people, as she would say, coming in and practicing their new-wave ideas on poor African-American students.”

And this councilwoman is very important in the neighborhood: “like your mini-president, your area president for several neighborhoods.”

The fact that Greene is herself African-American has likely sensitized her to the councilwoman’s challenge, and may also have caused this potentially powerful critic to speak privately before going public with her criticism. “She jumped on me,” Greene explained, “when I said kids needed to do projects that help the community. She said, ‘How are they going to help the community? They can’t help the community, they have enough problems. There is too much on a child to think they are carrying the community on their shoulders.’”

“But I didn’t mean it in that way at all,” Greene told us, “so I had to quickly try to help her understand. It is a give-back to the community. I just don’t take from my community, but I take and I have something to give, and it doesn’t have to be in a big way.”

Did she understand? we asked. “No,” Greene answered. “She left not understanding, even though I explained it at least two different ways.” But Greene resolved to follow up, to invite the woman to student exhibitions and other school events as the Buckeye Met evolves. “You have to kind of watch her,” Greene said – letting the councilwoman stand in for a large variety of stakeholders. “You have to keep explaining.”

Nor did the local councilwoman prove to be the only person outside the building to whom Greene needed continually to explain her school, and with whom she needed to negotiate a welcome for the school’s differences. Despite the Superintendent’s invitation of difference, and the Mayor’s espoused confidence in the educational power of difference, Greene found herself during the school’s first year continually negotiating difference with many school district officials. These included some assigned to the Office of Small High School Development.

One point of contention with the district involved its commitment to a literacy curriculum for all high school students, emphasizing mastery of different genres of text. This curriculum pre-dated the small high schools initiative by about six months – both pitched as efforts to improve high schools. The district imported the curriculum from another city where it had reportedly been effective in boosting adolescents’ reading and writing skills, and in improving their reading and other test scores.

“I thought BP had made it clear,” Greene told us, “that this is not the kind of school that has content specialty. But now the system is saying, ‘Oh my God, these kids haven’t been given the opportunity to develop their literacy. They need the Genres Course.’ Where is the word *course* even coming from? The Big Picture design doesn’t include courses.”

challenge within

When an innovation is introduced into any complex system of practice – for example, an urban school district – its new designs and practices are typically layered upon the designs and practices of earlier generations of innovations. The result is that the latest innovation may have to jostle for room among incongruent predecessors.

Greene felt that the district had exceeded the bounds of what she took to be its agreement with BP when it appointed a literacy teacher for Met Buckeye. But she decided to yield on the point.

“The literacy teacher is working out,” she told us later. “The good news is that she is flexible.” Once hired, the teacher sensibly accepted Greene as her principal, and the two negotiated an understanding. On the one hand, they decided, the district needs a certain level of curricular compliance on literacy – and the literacy teacher has to satisfy her district supervisor that she is indeed a literacy teacher. On the other hand, Greene needs to stay faithful to Big Picture principles – not least because visitors from Providence will expect as much.

“But the literacy teacher is doing *that* part,” Green told us, referring to several elements of the Genres Curriculum, “and then afterwards she is connecting with the project work that the students are doing. So that’s not a bad thing.”

What Greene feels *is* a bad thing, however, is the attention that the district tends to pay to only certain content areas, especially literacy and math. “I know where the push is,” she says, referring to federal and state testing requirements. Yet in the year-end review of the school’s outcomes, “they didn’t even raise an eyebrow about social studies. It never came up. People will say to you that they don’t just care about only reading and math, but if that is all you ever talk about, then I know that is all you care about.”

For Greene, “social studies” seems much more than a traditional content area in the high school curriculum. It refers to a relationship between her students and the larger social environment that is at the heart of the Big Picture curriculum. This is the difference that her school is all about, as far as Greene is concerned, and what disturbs her is the fact that it is not among the differences that the district seems to take note of. Meanwhile, her larger concern is that this district that seems to invite difference may have little real appreciation of it. One small school here may be equivalent to every other small school here. Smallness may matter, but not the ideas that invest *this* way of being small as distinct from *that* way of being small. In such circumstances, Green wonders, can she find sufficient support for the school to continue its political negotiations?

“The system really doesn’t know what to do with us,” Greene told us, “They really don’t. They don’t understand what type of supports we need, what type of leadership we need, what type of time line we need. They don’t know.”

Commentary

There is a difference between how change really works within a complex system like an urban school district, and how many people think that it works. Many people think that intention, commitment, and planning can more or less easily overcome confusion, ambivalence, and resistance. Indeed, the emphasis on a linear conception of change among school reformers – a clean cycle of *design-test-market-and scale up* - has perhaps never been more pronounced than it is today. This is partly the result of the urgency that many Americans feel about the need for school reform, especially in cities.

However, urgency about changing and underestimating what change entails is a bad combination. “The politics of adoption” - a phrase we use throughout this essay - is not a contradiction in terms. A generation of research suggests that educational change is actually and necessarily messy, non-linear, recursive, adaptive, and – yes – political (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Fullan, 1991, 2001; Muncey & McQuillan, 1996; Bryk, et al., 1998; Hatch, 2000; Argyris, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). And the deeper the change adopted, the more politics involved

Some cities today seem to be undergoing a “constitutional” change in how they define public schooling – offering charters and contracts to designers, inviting students and parents to participate in an educational “marketplace,” even distinguishing between a school and a school building. The people most affected by such changes, however – including administrators, teachers, parents, and students themselves – may not behave as higher-ups intend that they should.

Anyone who finds herself on the political frontlines of a Buckeye project should expect some degree of disconnect between the superintendent’s intentions and ideas about how a complex of school “condos” will function, and the actual reactions and practices of people in and among the condos – even if the superintendent and other higher-ups do not. Knowing what to expect gives a person in this situation a great conceptual and emotional advantage. The first helps her understand the need to act, and the second gives her courage to act.

How can she learn what to expect? Well, those preparing her for the work might engage her in an analysis and reading of case histories of school reform – ones that especially highlight the politics involved. There are many to choose from – for example, Muncey and McQuillan, 1996; Merseth, 1997; Lusi, 1997; Barnes, 2002. Moreover, beyond those already written down, there are the oral accounts that veteran reformers might provide. An organization like BP – with its connections to generations of reformers, and its communications capacities (video-conferencing, on-line chat rooms, and annual face-to-face meetings) - is well equipped to provide such opportunities. And, indeed, on many occasions it has. In general, however – as is true of many contemporary reform organizations – it tends to think of itself as participating in a different category of reform from reform programs that have preceded it.

The purpose of such storytelling is, of course, not to discourage political actors but to fortify them. So the storytelling needs to be mixed with well facilitated

conversation about the stories. What might the political actor in this story have done differently at this juncture or that? In other words, those “reading” the story need to assist each other in making inferences. Nor are stories and inferences enough. In order to apply the inferences to their own unique circumstances and to use them as a basis for action, the readers need a theory of how to account for what happens in the story. By the light of a theory, readers with their own political work to do can make a reasonable transfer of insight from another person’s story about how to do this political work (Scholes, 1985; Schon and Rein, 1994).

One powerful theory comes from the organizational analysis of Argyris and Schon (1974, 1978, 1996). In an effort to inform the work of the Annenberg Challenge, a late 1990s large-scale school reform effort, Schon and McDonald (1998) explained the Argyris and Schon conception of reform as follows. Every reform has three facets, associated respectively with espousal, design, and use. Together, they constitute its *theory of action*. The first involves the reform’s intention “as revealed or implied in speeches, press releases, interviews of key actors, program documents, and the like.” The second involves the reform’s intention as implied by program structures and strategies. And the third involves the reform’s intention as evident in what its participants actually do within these structures and in pursuing these strategies.

Each of these facets of an overall theory of action may lack coherence. For a variety of reasons, an initiative may espouse disconnected or even contradictory theories, or it may embed them in designs or in use. Or even where each facet seems coherent taken by itself, all three facets may not line up with each other. . . . [Meanwhile] when an initiative is up and running, the facets of its theory of action co-exist. . . . but the parties to the initiative may not be aware of the presence and influence of all three facets, or of the differences among them and what the differences signify (Schon and McDonald, p. 12).

Among the variety of reasons that may cause a reform to espouse, design for, or do incoherent and disconnected things is the history of reforms that have preceded it locally. This is well expressed in this story’s second *challenge within*:

When an innovation is introduced into any complex system of practice – for example, an urban school district – its new designs and practices are typically layered upon the designs and practices of earlier generations of innovations. The result is that the latest innovation may have to jostle for room among its predecessors, including ones that seem incongruent.

Jostling well means acting wherever and whenever possible to create coherence and connection in the face of incoherence and disconnection. This requires in turn a toolkit of political tools. For example, to take advantage of her first precious months as outsider on the inside – before she fully gels into insider pure and simple – Greene needs to be able to engage in what Hall and Hord (1987) call “one-legged” conferencing. The phrase suggests casualness, but the casual conferencing one-on-one has serious intentions: to gauge concerns, to test out an idea, to assess where things stand, to move a process

forward (McDonald, 1989). And when she becomes insider, she needs to know how to negotiate. Negotiation is perhaps the most valuable tool in the toolkit of someone hoping to create coherence and connection. So Greene ought to have been explicitly taught and coached to ferret out another party's basic interests in a tense conflict, and in the process to acknowledge her own basic interests in an assertive but non-confrontational way. She ought to have been coached also in the facilitation of other people's negotiations, and advised to use her negotiation skills to gain political leverage. Janelle Greene could become the "go to" person at the Buckeye Multiplex for anyone who needs help in defusing tensions. If this were to happen, Buckeye Met would likely benefit, because Greene's skills would attach themselves to the school in the minds of her condo neighbors and district colleagues. "There's a school," people would come to say, "where kids learn how to resolve disputes."

The story tells us nothing about Greene's mastery of one-legged conferencing – though we can aver that her Big Picture TYBO training taught the technique by other names, and gave her practice through her shadowing experiences at the Met. The story does hint, however, at Greene's capacity to undertake negotiation - in the account of her dispute with the principal of the "highly structured" middle school neighbor at Buckeye. And in its account of her interactions with the local councilwoman, it suggests her facility with yet another crucial tool – the one that she terms watchful explanation. "You have to keep explaining," Greene says – again and again – to everyone with an interest at stake, to everyone who will listen. Explanation offers the best chance of helping others perceive incongruence among historical layers of innovation. Once perceived, these can be addressed.

Near the end of the story, Greene complains, "The system really doesn't know what to do with us. They really don't. They don't understand what type of supports we need, what type of leadership we need, what type of time line we need. They don't know."

So, we would suggest, she should keep explaining it to them, again and again.

2. Caught in the Middle

Context

The Delmanto School District serves 50,000 students, K-12, who live in a sprawling city of a western state. Despite low per-pupil expenditures in Delmanto – lower than BP regards as the necessary threshold for proper funding of a Big Picture school – the district was one of the first sites that BP “prospected.” One reason was that Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor had a relationship with then-Superintendent of Schools Willy Grant, who told them that he wanted to “shake up” the city’s high schools. Another reason was that Grant had secured external funding to do the shaking. Without knowing much about the design itself – but trusting the designers, and attracted to their idea about student passion as the driver of secondary education, Grant committed to opening two Big Picture schools as district-operated charter schools.

Meanwhile, Grant also committed to turning the city’s most notoriously failing high school – Delmanto Central High School - into six new schools-within-a-school. Here too he planned to use a charter design, though not a district-operated one. He planned to grant the charter to a not-for-profit and faith-based youth development effort called Hope Risen. The founder and funder of Hope Risen, George Moffat, is a charismatic graduate of Central, who went on to make a fortune in the entertainment industry, then moved back to his old neighborhood to help others gain choices. Hope Risen sponsors many activities for youth, including sports clubs, summer camps, and neighborhood after-school centers.

The use of charters as a major reform tool was among the practices that continually put Superintendent Grant at odds with the city’s teachers union, and the ensuing labor problems were among the reasons that he and the School Board decided to part ways with an early retirement agreement. This happened at about the same time that the first Big Picture school opened in the district.

Jane Houseman was chosen to be the principal of the Delmanto Big Picture High School. The district had initially put forward another candidate for the job, but BP found him unsuitable. It offered to recruit a substitute, and found Houseman in Chicago. She was teaching in a successful charter high school there, eager to help start a new one, and willing to relocate more than a thousand miles to a very different place.

By the time Houseman arrived in Delmanto for her TYBO work of scouting locations, wooing parents and students, and negotiating a strange new politics, Houseman found Grant gone and the new Superintendent, Grace Smith, just getting acquainted with the district’s high school reform plan. Houseman also found herself working with two men whose view of her school-to-be differed considerably. Scott Prendergast, Director of Small Schools, viewed all the schools in his charge as unique environments in need of development assistance. Gerry Rigby, Deputy Superintendent and administrator of small-high-school development grants from both the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

and the Carnegie Corporation, saw these small schools as odd if nonetheless interesting members of a larger class of district secondary schools.

Houseman learned quickly that more than personality was involved in this difference – that the pinch she felt and had to deal with derived from her school’s ambiguous status. Of course, during her first year, the school was no more than a concept. But even as a concept, it was neither “regular,” nor wholly irregular. It was a district charter, and both words of the phrase counted – or otherwise seemed to cancel each other out.

Being a District Charter

When we spoke with Houseman near the end of the Delmanto Big Picture School’s first year of operation, she reflected on its beginnings through the prism of what might be called its status ambiguity. Being a district charter, she said, means functioning within two systems of oversight – one concerned with charter policies, the other with district policies, each generating paperwork and management meetings. “It means,” she added, “that negotiation happens every day, every hour. It means constant attempts to build good relationships.” And these relationships must be built in the face of the fact that “the district hasn’t figured out what to do with us.”

Early on, Houseman decided to rely on Prendergast as the school’s “ombudsman” – though his somewhat contentious relationship with Rigby ensured that some number of his interventions would prove inconclusive at best. The choice signified an identification with the “charter” side of the “district charter” label. Still, Houseman played up the “district” side of her school’s status on occasion too. For example, she relished a good visit from Superintendent Smith. “The new superintendent loves us now,” Houseman told us following the visit. “She did a walk-through and was pleased. There is a sense of welcome here, and the Superintendent got that when she came in the door.”

There is another Big Picture school within driving distance of Houseman’s that dealt with the same ambiguity by effectively denying its charter status in any practical sense. It opted, wisely it seems in its particular circumstances, to regard itself as a small, alternative district school, with no particular expectation of relief from district policies and regulations, though with full expectation of equitable district support. Houseman went the other way for reasons that include the history of her school’s development, the size and culture of her district, the political dynamics of the city as a whole, and probably her personality.

challenge within

New schools inherit the confusions of the place where they are located, which derive in part from the contradictions embedded in local reform history, and between one person’s interpretation of this history and another’s.

Charter Politics

One of the first things that Houseman had to do upon her arrival in Delmanto was to find a building to house her planned school. She found herself attracted to the Rocky Mount neighborhood of the city. It is a tough and gritty place, beset by gangs and drugs, but it is also spirited, multiracial and multi-ethnic, and in Houseman's judgment, hopeful. Moreover, it has relatively good public transportation lines – an important asset in a Big Picture school site. Rocky Mount also happens to be the neighborhood where George Moffat lives, where most of his Hope Risen youth programs are based, and where he and his colleagues are busy transforming the failing Delmanto Central High School into a charter school of six schools-within-a-school.

At first it looked as if the new Big Picture school would occupy space on the campus of Rocky Mount Community College. Indeed, Deputy Superintendent Rigby had made a “hand-shake deal” with the College President to house the new school there at a nominal rent. But the deal unraveled when the College's Faculty Senate balked at giving up the space. Houseman sensed that something was up when her Community College connections simply stopped communicating with her – just while she was in the middle of trying to recruit the new school's first students, and of course answering parents' and students' questions about where the new school would be located.

By then, Houseman had done a lot of networking in the city, following Dennis Littky's advice to affiliate for the unforeseen benefit that affiliations can bring. She had met Moffat early on, and cultivated a relationship. She knew that he was influential at City Hall, connected with the city's business community and the corporate community beyond, well regarded by the city's African-American community, and also by faith-based and other community activists.

Houseman also knew that she and he would inevitably come to be associated in people's minds just because they were both involved in high school development and charter schooling. Thus she needed to have a good sense of the man and his plans. This sense might prove helpful if she found herself having to head off a perception by the teachers union, for example, that her school – like his - was planning to open as a non-union charter school. She also thought that his perspective on what it means to be a charter school might be helpful to her as she began the task of negotiating her own school's charter status. She had heard that his negotiations with the district had been contentious and protracted.

challenge within

New schools develop within a thicket of possible political affiliations. Some are potentially advantageous, others potentially dangerous. However, it is difficult to distinguish one from the other in advance.

By *affiliation*, we mean a consciously political association – one intended to add power through a relationship. Doug Ross (2004) usefully points out that good will is the weakest form of political power. What is wanted is the other’s genuine investment – in this case, in the fate of a Big Picture school. This makes for affiliation.

For his part, Moffat also sensed a possible advantage of affiliation with his lesser-known colleague in new school design. When he heard that she had lost her school site at the Community College, he offered an alternative site. He owned a small building that Hope Risen had been using for an after-school program. But it was vacant now – the program having recently relocated to the elementary school that most of its participants attended. Would Houseman be interested in taking over the vacant site? He could give the district a free lease on the building for two years. By the end of the lease, her school would likely have grown out of the space, but she would have had the two years to search for a permanent home. For Houseman, the deal seemed irresistible, but the district took a long time to come around. At the time it was negotiating with Moffat on the details of his charter at Delmanto Central, and the negotiations were difficult.

When we first visited Houseman’s school in its first year of operation, we had difficulty figuring out where to go. The only name on the building at the address we were given said “Hope Risen.”

Later, we learned, however, that the lease on the building had not after all gone to the district free of charge, but at what seemed to Houseman a hefty \$80,000 a year. By the time the district responded to Moffat’s original offer, he had changed his mind. But by then it was too late to find another site.

Playing the Charter Card

When Houseman began to negotiate the terms of her own school’s charter, she felt in an odd position. Here she was a new district administrator, hired by the suddenly retired Superintendent, Willy Grant. Her job was to start a school that Grant had hoped would “shake up” the City’s other schools. Now there was a new Superintendent, Grace Smith, and Houseman was expected to negotiate with her the terms by which all of this might unfold – or not. What if Smith did not choose to start her term by trying to “shake up” other schools? This might be a sensible political move given her predecessor’s fate. Of course, there were the foundation grants to consider. These had been given to the district to support charter conversion, and they obviously required follow-through. But Smith might be able to follow through in a different way than her predecessor would have. Indeed, she showed some early signs of taking such an approach. For example, Grant had planned four stand-alone new district charters, but had arranged for only three school designs by the time he left. He decided one would be a Big Picture school, the second a Genesis school (a military-focused high school), and the third a New Tech High (a technology-infused design). Smith got to choose the fourth design, and opted for the America’s Choice design with its heavy emphasis on the district’s role.

Still, Houseman continued to turn the dial deliberately toward the charter side of her school's identity. Drawing on her experience teaching in a charter school, she embraced the task of negotiating her new school's charter by accounting for the "freedoms" that she felt made her former school successful. Then she developed a strategy with one of the other district charter principals to persuade the district and the teachers union to grant these "freedoms." The strategy involved making serious plans to become independent charter schools – with a 501c parent organization as fiscal agent. They assumed that both the district and the union wanted them to stay district schools, but would not cede much regulatory authority without their strong threat to walk. At the 11th hour, they got most of what they wanted: (1) freedom to diverge from the district's scheduling system and calendar – though the schools are still constrained by state policies with respect to instructional days; (2) budgeting and spending freedom – within the fixed state allotment for charter schools; (3) freedom from the "bumping" provision of the district's collective bargaining agreement, protecting the district charter teachers from senior teachers elsewhere in the district who might choose to transfer in; (4) curriculum and instructional freedom – as consistent with the schools' designs; and (5) freedom to appoint their own Advisory Boards.

challenge within

Politics is always about leverage, and new schools negotiating the politics of local adoption have to figure out where they can gain some.

Houseman made sure that her Advisory Board was loaded with community clout. She wanted to ensure that it functioned as a de facto Board of Directors. Its members include a policy analyst at an important nearby educational think tank, who brings fiscal skills to the Board; the CEO of LEAD Delmanto (Linking Education and Academic Development), who happens to be a major connector in the city; a former Delmanto principal and Director of Personnel, whom Houseman calls "my principal coach"; the head of a law firm who practices education law and "does a lot of union grievance stuff," as Houseman put it; the associate editor of a business journal, who has been helpful in grant writing; the development officer of a social service not-for-profit who Houseman said "helps me think about how to use my Board members well"; and the former provost of a state college who has encouraged Houseman to "figure out how to translate what you do into the [state college] admissions system."

Now Houseman is looking for space again. The Hope Risen building is inadequate in certain respects – particularly relative to its cost. In advance of Houseman's first meeting on the subject with Superintendent Smith, her Board told her, "Say these words: 'The Advisory Board believes that Delmanto Big Picture School needs a permanent home – whether in an elementary school, or on its own.'" Indeed, Houseman said exactly these words, "and when she did," by Houseman's own account, "the Superintendent went to her computer and e-mailed the district CFO – 'Why does Houseman not have a site yet?'"

Commentary

Here we start with history again:

New schools inherit the confusions of the place where they are located, which derive in part from the contradictions embedded in local reform history, and between one person's interpretation of this history and another's.

And again, Argyris and Schon's conception of a theory of action applies. Over time, someone in Houseman's role – caught in the middle of an institutional ambiguity that is an artifact of local reform history – must act to reduce the ambiguity, or else risk a deep threat to her school's identity and survival. Again, she must do what she can to make the theory of action guiding her situation as coherent as possible –even against the tug of historical contradiction.

How does a political actor – particularly one operating at a middle level – do this? Houseman's story illustrates one possible move. It involves perceiving opportunity rather than threat in the next *challenge within*:

New schools develop within a thicket of possible political affiliations. Some are potentially advantageous, others potentially dangerous. However, it is difficult to distinguish one from the other in advance.

With a new superintendent showing early signs that she thinks the *district* side of the title “district charter” weighs more heavily than the other side in the local political calculus – Houseman might well have been inclined to dodge one of the affiliations she ends up embracing. But she seems to know that nearly all affiliations can be manipulated to advantage, given the right awareness, attention, and moves. And she seems drawn – for reasons we disclose below - to the affiliations that will highlight her school's difference. One cannot tell from this story alone whether the affiliation Houseman cultivated with Moffat, the high-profile charter school developer, turned out finally to be a favorable or unfavorable one with respect to the development of the Delmanto Big Picture High School. In this respect, the reader is in the same position as Houseman was in at the time. No one can foretell the future. However, the political actor is in the job of trying to make the future. Although the deal Moffat initially offers Houseman's school turned out not to be so good financially as it first seemed, Houseman's strong and conscious affiliation with Hope Risen – resulting even in the ambiguous signage that caused some people to wonder whether Houseman's school was actually Moffat's – seems in retrospect to have been the right move. As the story puts it, she deliberately decided to turn the dial toward charter even as her superintendent seemed to be suggesting that she might better turn it the other way. In the process, she gained leverage and used the leverage.

Politics is always about leverage, and new schools negotiating the politics of local adoption have to figure out where they can gain some.

Why did she think to do it? One answer is that her Big Picture TYBO training and coaching prepared her to do it. It emphasized the need for a Big Picture school to embrace its difference, and to cultivate powerful allies in the community who are attracted to the difference, and whose support might protect the school against inevitable efforts from people like Superintendent Smith to wear down its difference. A second answer, as the story reveals, is that Houseman had another network besides the Big Picture network to draw support from, and this one also told her to go the way she did, and advised her on some concrete steps to take. She had worked in a charter school. She was in touch with its founder and director who helped her understand the fundamental “freedoms” – as she put it – of charter schooling, and the value of a powerful (even if – in her case - merely advisory) board.

Willy Grant’s and Jane Houseman’s commitments make the “constitutional” implications of this story pronounced. Of course, Janelle Greene had to deal with the consequences of “constitutional” change also, but she did not have to make a choice as Jane Houseman does between one constitution and another. Houseman offers a good model for the circumstances: by all means choose. The Argyris and Schon conception of what is at stake requires the action of people like Houseman who are willing to define the theory of action – even when that seems risky. My school is different, she says, and this requires an organizational status that respects difference.

3. False Moves

Context

The prospects seemed good for a Big Picture start-up in this mid-Atlantic city. The city's reform history had prepared the way, as James Hutton put it, a scholar who has long tracked school reform here. First there is a long-standing acknowledgment here of the value of individual school difference, counteracting the urban norm of regarding individual schools as mere outposts of a district bureaucracy or of a mayoral reform strategy. Encouragement of school difference is a sine qua non for Big Picture schooling. Since the 1990's too, the city has dedicated many resources to building "civic capacity" for school reform, launching many partnerships between individual schools and non-profit organizations. Some of these partnerships have involved new designs for schooling – a tendency that became pervasive toward the end of the 1990's when federal legislation and several foundations explicitly encouraged schools to adopt new school designs fashioned by independent school designers. Along the way, parents, the teachers' union, and district officials became used to the idea that system outsiders can be a source of good ideas and support for schools.

However, the city's reform history contains contradictions – as reform histories usually do. The focus on school difference and design partnerships has contended over time with an emphasis on central control. The latter takes two forms. First there is the long tradition here of accountability-focused school reform, involving the use of high-stakes testing, school report cards, reconstitution of failing schools, strict grade retention policies, and citywide curricula. And there is also the recent use of centrally driven instructional capacity-building efforts, and leadership development initiatives. As Hutton put it, "You still have all these local initiatives and charters and small schools, and all of the accountability. . . . [Then] layered on top of that, is a set of new system-wide initiatives on curriculum development, instructional improvement, and human resource development. You might argue that somewhere along the line that's going to rub up against [innovative designers] who have really great ideas."

challenge within

Local political environments for new school design are composed partly of the different theories of reform their histories have layered on. To the outsider's eye, local accommodations of history may seem incongruous and counterproductive. Yet they are inescapably part of the environment.

Enter the Big Picture

The Year Before Opening – or TYBO – is a crucial period in Big Picture school development and in BP scale-up theory. It is when a new principal is recruited and

trained, a facility secured, advisors and other staff hired, parents and students recruited and prepared. It is when the principal learns the design and is initiated into the network of other Big Picture school leaders. A key element of TYBO also is the time the principal spends in Providence, shadowing a Met principal, observing the design in action, and talking with students, advisors, mentors, and parents. Much political work back home has been done by then. For example, BP leaders have met city and school system leaders, public presentations have been made, expectations expressed, memoranda of agreement devised and signed. However much political work remains.

Start-up is messy. Contact, conversation, and agreement are complicated by efforts to articulate and understand difference. In this case, there is the difference between a Big Picture school and other local high schools – big or small. Even in a city tolerant of school difference, difficulties in understanding the Big Picture design difference can be considerable. Next is the difference between how the new locale operates – product of policies, procedures, cultures, politics, tacit assumptions, and history - and how Rhode Island operates (which remains BP’s principal frame of reference, given the Providence Met’s status as a state-operated school).

It is not that Rhode Island is inherently a more hospitable environment for Big Picture schooling than most others. The year before its opening, the Met had easily as many challenges as the school we are discussing here, and the politics of managing them was the same in a general sense – demanding, for example, an intense amount of local networking, the cultivation of powerful friends, the excavation of relevant histories, and so on. But difference matters too: city and state politics; personalities; management-labor histories; and customs of negotiation (for example, spelling things out versus taking things for granted).

challenge within

The complications of difference are compounded in many places – particularly in cities used to dealing nearly exclusively with home-grown professionals - by a tendency to take tacit local knowledge for granted. “You mean you didn’t know that’s how we do things? Well, why didn’t you ask?” In such circumstances, it can take a long time to figure out local politics, and new school designers and start-up principals tend not to have lots of time available.

BP’s entree into this particular city involved meetings between BP’s co-founders and officials of the school district including the superintendent. It also involved negotiations concerning a memorandum of understanding with the district (MOU), and it involved several unexpected political issues. One concerned where the school should be located.

Principal Louise Ortiz anticipated opening her new school in the Silver Lake neighborhood on the city’s northwest side. This is where she herself grew up, and where

she taught for seven years in the bilingual Ciudad Elementary School, dedicated to integrating academics with Spanish Caribbean art and culture. Ortiz's attraction to BP was tied from the beginning to a sense of the contribution she might make as a Big Picture school principal to this specific neighborhood, given her extensive knowledge of the place. Indeed, she had come to BP's attention based on the reputation she had gained among certain of the city's reform activists as a deeply community-minded Ciudad teacher. She imagined locating her high school near the Ciudad School, and forming a feeder pattern with it. To this end, she spent months talking about Big Picture schooling with the neighborhood block club presidents, officials of the local community development corporation, and with owners and workers of local shops. She assumed reasonably that her knowledge of place – plus her ability to teach local people about Big Picture schooling - would be critical to creating a successful neighborhood school which was different from the norm of American high schooling, and dependent on parents and workplace mentors. Moreover, she imagined that both the district's and BP's interest in her as a principal-in-waiting was based especially on her capacity for pulling this off, and not just on more general qualifications – such as her being a talented, bilingual educator of Spanish Caribbean ancestry.

But the politics of place are often thicker than they seem. After months of political work in Silver Lake, Louise Ortiz discovered a politics beyond the interests of the parents, shopkeepers, and politicians she had been addressing. Within the context of this other politics, it did not matter that her school was to be a Big Picture school, or that she was perfect for Silver Lake. The other politics was insistent: her school could not be located in Silver Lake because Silver Lake had already been given another new high school by the Mayor. This was in response to a major protest on the part of some parents. They had protested the lack of good high school options in the Silver Lake community, and the fact that two previous high school building projects in the city had gone to white middle-class neighborhoods. The Mayor had dealt with this political threat. He had delivered. Now it was another community's turn to get a new high school. Indeed, the Superintendent had already promised Ortiz's school to the Councilman representing a predominantly Mexican-American community on the other side of town. The fact that the school would come with a Latino principal – even if she knew nothing about the community – seemed a plus within this other politics.

The shift of political level and place caught Ortiz by surprise. Partly, as she acknowledged to us, this was because she was out of touch with the politics of the larger city and school district. BP had hired a local consultant well versed in the politics of the city's school reform to help her and BP in their negotiations, but his help seemed distant from her political concerns. These were focused on Silver Lake. Indeed, Ortiz had invested so much in Silver Lake that it was difficult to give it up readily. Her resistance came to the attention of the Superintendent, who expressed his annoyance directly to BP's leaders.

Urban school systems can be unforgiving of those they perceive as politically naïve or difficult. Deputy Superintendent Susan Jameson told us later, "The system is a big business. You need to spend time in the system, know people. It's a question of

who's got the power and how to negotiate it." Assistant Superintendent for Operations Nancy Thomas put more blame on BP than on Ortiz: "They should have spent more time penetrating. There wasn't enough 'pre' and they wound up short on intelligent, intense local support."

Meanwhile, Elliot Washor complained to us that even presumably powerful insiders in this city often have a hard time getting things done. A "bureaucracy thick with people and process" is how he describes the district, and full also of adverse reactions to the very new schools that its leadership is promoting.

challenge within

The local political terrain is thick. Still, the school designer must be prepared to penetrate it. This takes time, skills on the ground, and multiple levels of local knowledge.

Status Negotiations

The new Big Picture School opened the following year in the neighborhood the Mayor and Superintendent had chosen, with Louise Ortiz as principal. It opened as a regular district high school. Susan Jameson had urged BP to make it a charter school instead. The city had several charters to award at the time the school opened. Jameson told us that she knew the school would need a higher than ordinary level of autonomy to get established well, and that only charter status could provide this. But going charter would have meant receiving fewer operating dollars, and having to raise private funds to cover capital costs. Ortiz had no expertise in this area – and in any case, was quite busy with the other demands of starting up. Nor was BP in a position to devote central staff resources to local fundraising. Moreover, it had long been ambivalent about charter status, fearing that it might limit the design's influence. Meanwhile, the local political consultant whom BP engaged fed this concern. "Most of the charter schools here are for white kids and rich kids," he told us later. "But we wanted the Big Picture school to be more than a boutique school. It's completely re-thinking high school – if it can't be part of the system as it's doing that, what's the point?"

Caught between conflicting advice, BP and Ortiz chose regular status. Still, reflecting the city's long experience with school difference, the new school opened with a relatively elaborate memorandum of agreement in place. For example, the MOU specified outcomes: "BP's services shall result in high-performing, small high schools with high graduation rates, high college attendance rates, high [test] scores, high [test] growth, high student attendance, low dropout rates, and low mobility rates as defined in the agreement." It also specified some inputs, including the number of staff positions in each of a school's first four years, and an "estimated" operating budget for years 1 and 4. Finally, elements of the MOU promised a level of operational authority consistent with

Big Picture difference – for example, with respect to curriculum and professional development activities.

Nancy Thomas told us, however, that the MOU was “a Board report, not a real contract,” even though, she acknowledged, BP might have considered it more binding than she or other district insiders had when they drew it up. “I think Elliot Washor thought he could set up and be left alone. . . We could have done that, but it’s too late now.” Indeed, the City does have a number of what it calls contract schools – where it foregoes ordinary oversight in exchange for an elaborate specification of inputs and outcomes (Hill, Campbell & Harvey, 2000). But just as the political consultant had discouraged BP from going for charter status, he had discouraged contract status too. “A contract school? Nobody knows what those are. It’s bad news when nobody knows what you are.”

Misunderstanding

Shortly after Ortiz opened her Big Picture school, the district launched a citywide initiative to improve math and science instruction. By the light of this initiative, the new school seemed wanting. “She hasn’t hired a math and science teacher yet,” Susan Jameson complained to us. “In order for the kids to receive credit for the school year, they need to have math and science.” Meanwhile, the district had failed to notice the problem until January, and took still longer to post the vacancies. For Ortiz, this January crisis seemed emblematic of the city’s failure to understand the Big Picture school design. What a Big Picture school needs, in her view, are good generalists to serve as advisors, not subject matter specialists.

But Jameson disagreed. Yes, the MOU grants certain opportunities for curricular difference to the Big Picture school, but it also clearly specifies that the district’s goals must be met. “It’s a question of where Ortiz’s allegiance is,” Jameson told us. “To Big Picture or to the public school system?”

In fact, by then Ortiz had begun to explore yet another allegiance. “Now, I stay hidden,” she told us. “I’ve retreated into the school - which [politically] might be the wrong thing to do.”

challenge within

A school’s status is a local construction resting on political understanding. Charters, contracts, and memoranda of agreement mean different things in different places, and cannot substitute for political understanding.

Commentary

The protagonist and chief political actor in this story is again the principal, and the principal must again confront a complex and historically conditioned theory of action.

Local political environments for new school design are composed partly of the different theories of reform their histories have layered on. To the outsider's eye, local accommodations of history may seem incongruous and counterproductive. Yet they are inescapably part of the environment.

As the story suggests, the principal, Louise Ortiz, is not operating completely on her own. BP Co-Director Elliot Washor is also deeply involved, flying into the city on numerous occasions to explain the Big Picture vision and difference, and to negotiate the MOU. And both he and Ortiz also have the benefit of the local and part-time consultant's advice. On the other hand, BP does not have an advance team of start-up specialists, and has tended to focus its coaches' work on the design implementation issues of starting up rather than on the political ones. Moreover, it has tended to scale up its design in places far from its original political base in Rhode Island, which means that the political work of its otherwise skillful political actors – people like Washor – is inevitably vulnerable to the miscues central to this story. It is also vulnerable to a habit of big-city districts to deflect criticism by saying that “outsiders don't understand us.”

The complications of difference are compounded in many places – particularly in cities used to dealing nearly exclusively with home-grown professionals - by a tendency to take tacit local knowledge for granted. “You mean you didn't know that's how we do things? Well, why didn't you ask?” In such circumstances, it can take a long time to figure out local politics, and new school designers and start-up principals tend not to have lots of time available.

Meanwhile, BP's theory of action puts great emphasis on the principal's role – not just as school leader, but also as school developer and political advance operator. In Rhode Island, the first principals of the Met were the BP Co-Directors, Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor, and they did all the considerable advance work of establishing this different school in a relatively conservative educational environment – and where they were newcomers. At the same time, however, they had the advantage of being resident fellows of the Annenberg Institute at Brown University under the directorship of Ted Sizer – he well connected to the Commissioner of Education and other important state officials. They still had to do lots of political connecting, but they did not have to do it cold. Moreover, these connections helped them secure state financial support for the development of the Met, which enabled them in turn to hire a staff to design it and get it off the ground.

Louise Ortiz is in so many ways in a different situation, yet she is every bit as much on the spot. The irony in the story is that she is well prepared and willing to negotiate the politics of adoption in Silver Lake, but she is forced to operate within a larger political frame.

The local political terrain can be thick. Still, the school designer must be prepared to penetrate it. This takes time, skills on the ground, and multiple levels of local knowledge.

Ortiz cannot stretch herself quite far enough to manage this *challenge within*, and at the time this story took place, BP had too few resources on the ground to supplement her efforts. The result is a gap in political engagement.

A school's status is a local construction resting on political understanding. Charters, contracts, and memoranda of agreement mean different things in different places, and cannot substitute for political understanding.

Political understanding depends in turn on political engagement – at different levels, and among different players, all focused on making the theory of action coherent.

4. Intermediary Politics

Context

The southwest city we call Merton has a large Hispanic population with a 70% high school drop-out rate. This statistic is an important background factor in the story that follows. Another is the state's participation in a private-public partnership for school reform – called Partners for Change, or just “Partners” for short. This late 1980's effort invested heavily in the professional development of teachers, relying for the most part on what experts today would call weak models of professional development – for example, after-school or day-long workshops taught by outside consultants, focused on topics not tightly tied to curriculum or instructional priorities. The apparent failure of Partners to make much difference – especially in reducing the achievement gap between White and Hispanic students – has assumed the status of an object lesson in the local political psyche. This is partly because Partners had a high profile – with the Governor visibly involved, many dollars spent, and many teachers counted as participants. It is also because Partners and its sponsors invested little in evaluation, and was therefore hard put to argue its own case. Finally, it is also partly because the decline of Partners coincided so neatly with the rise of a competing approach to school reform – one that eventually gained a lot of traction nationally, but got a head start here. By the mid-1990's, a policy consensus had emerged in this state concerning the value of integrating three strategies: the use of high-stakes assessments keyed to standards and curriculum frameworks; the encouragement of charter schooling and new school designs within the context of an “educational marketplace”; and outcomes-focused evaluation of schools, including measures disaggregated by race. A decade later, the wisdom of this approach seems a given to many reformers here - to an extent that is rarer elsewhere.

challenge within

Local environments vary in terms of whether they have a prevalent and coherent theory of action for school reform. To the extent that they do, new school designers must expect that their work will be evaluated by its lights.

BP was attracted here because of one of the state's three strategic emphases – namely the one concerned with chartering new school designs. In Jordan Nagle's view, however, BP overlooked the entanglement of this strategic emphasis with the other two. Nagle is the Director of the Small Schools Initiative (SSI). Funded by grants from local as well as national foundations, SSI supports charter schools throughout the state. The support includes start-up assistance in the areas of charter application, fundraising, hiring, and budgeting; and it also includes ongoing technical support in the form of leadership coaching, curriculum and instructional development, and evaluation.

Ironically, BP Co-Directors Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor had been introduced to Nagle years before by the Executive Director of Partners for Change. None of the

three men were then enthusiasts of the Partners for Change approach. This does not mean, however, that they are in full agreement today on an alternative approach.

When Littky and Washor heard that Nagle was searching for good school designs to implement here – ones that particularly targeted students at risk of dropping out of high school, they got in touch. The result was that Nagle served as broker in BP’s effort to get the Merton Public Schools to grant a charter to Desert Met, the state’s first Big Picture school, and now one of SSI’s client schools.

Both Nagle and the man hired to be the Desert Met’s first principal, George Rhodes, recounted for us the details of Big Picture’s local political debut. Nagle told us that “the School Board did not really want to deal with this – whether a Big Picture school should come to Merton. Basically their attitude was that we have our own problems and we’re not into what you’re into. In fact, the new superintendent’s mandate was to be very streamlined in terms of curriculum, policy, etc. The last thing he wanted was some weird little school. But Merton was still willing to be charter-friendly – has to be, because charters are popular politically. So it wouldn’t sabotage, it just wouldn’t be supportive. But Big Picture didn’t know much about all this.”

For his part, Rhodes recalled the tough questions the Board put to him. This was his first principalship, and he was new to school board politics. Meanwhile, he was also still getting used to the Big Picture design. Board members asked him how the school’s curriculum would connect to the state’s standards and curriculum framework? In the process, one commented that the design seemed to “fly in the face of standards.” At the time, Rhodes felt that some of the antagonism might have been directed more at Nagle than at Big Picture – a continuation of earlier battles between, on the one hand, one of the state’s largest school boards and most reluctant grantor of charters, and, on the other hand, one of the state’s most important charter enthusiasts. In any case, Rhodes felt nearly overwhelmed, and very grateful for the presence of Elliot Washor - who had flown in from Providence as a kind of expert witness.

Comment: what happened is that the board member said, “In the book, [Eliot Levine’s book] ‘The Met collides head on with standards’ – in what way do you collide?”.

But to Nagle’s more politically tuned ears, the expert’s testimony spelled trouble:

Outsiders like Elliot would have no way to know this, but SSI had been hammering this city about the numbers. We’d been saying we need to see disaggregated cohort data. So when Elliot is an expert witness, and one member of the Board asks whether the Desert Met kids will do well on the state assessment, and whether the kids will graduate and go on to college, Elliot said, “Absolutely.”

Comment: I would say more fully: “There was a discussion about graduation rates and Elliot and Jeff spoke at length about the Met Providence’s success with students going to college.”

You have to understand that language is a hot-button issue around here. People have become savvy and conscientious about the language they use in talking about school effects. If you say that 100% of the kids stay in and go to college – and that’s what Elliot implied, then people around here are going to be skeptical – “Really?” they’ll say, “100%?”




challenge within

Local politics have nuances that can easily elude an outside designer.

In his SSI role, Nagle supports charter schools with many different school designs. All of them propose alternatives to mainstream public schools, he told us, but “some are like Starbucks – more easily inserted than others.” Big Picture is not among these. But this is not a fault, he added. Big Picture is a fine design, but it needs more on-the-ground help to grow. One of the things that SSI does – as an intermediary organization – is what Nagle calls “*translation* - for school board members, funders, and others.” He offers an example from the same Merton School Board meeting. At one point Washor was asked about the curriculum, and he used the expression “One kid at a time.” But Nagle remembers that the Board Member pushed, “No, tell me about the classes,” whereupon Washor answered, “We don’t have classes.” SSI is now experienced, Nagle says, in explaining to people in Merton and elsewhere in the state that the Big Picture schools “call these *advisories*, not *classes*.”

Comment: Elliot never made the above comment. However, if you see my notes, neither Jeff nor Elliot was able to provide a clear enough answer about classes and standards that satisfied many on the board. One board member acknowledged that she had met with people from the Met but still needed “more clarity”. Others tried to understand the way that the Met Providence dealt with standards. Their vague answers somehow made them look like they were evading the question.

In fact, SSI does more than translate, and this *more* is at the heart of the story here. Its work in general derives from the consensus we mentioned above concerning strategies for school reform. Like many others who have practiced school reform in this state over the course of the last decade, Nagle is convinced of the utility of a three-pronged approach: standards and curriculum, marketplace, and evaluation. The approach has a strong rational appeal in this state and elsewhere. Set strong expectations; provide flexibility for inventive schools to meet these expectations; then ensure that they do. The problem, others would argue – and the BP co-founders are among these others – is that this approach is *too* rational, that it ignores the indeterminacy of good school development. As Dennis Littky (2004) puts it in his book about the beliefs underlying the Big Picture design, it is crucial in school development to ask, “What will it look like when the school has been functioning for years?” (p.188). His question presumes patience. It also recalls his partner Washor’s longing for an apolitical context: t if *they* would just leave new schools alone? Just leave them for awhile to the organic unfolding; suspend rational haste.

On the other hand, it is hard to argue against haste in the context of a 70% Hispanic drop-out rate, and in the presence of a consensus that there is a rational process of school development that works. One of the things that SSI does for its schools is to provide formative evaluation. Recall that this is within a context that defines evaluation as one of the three prongs of successful reform. Nagle describes the process as follows:

We ask how the school is doing in terms of some benchmarks that we’ve established. This involves interviews, some surveys. It’s intended to be an internal, formative evaluation. But it does put some pressure on, and that pressure has been interpreted at times as being “Are they with us or against us?”

In fact, I heard from the people at a west coast event that Dennis and Elliot had asked people there about us – and the quote I heard was “What is going on in Merton – Is Jordan our friend or not?” But our perspective is that this school – and the other schools we work with - are going to get killed if they don’t pay attention to the things that we can bring out now in a safe way for them. They need the push-pull of a critical friend. Elliot is supposed to provide this for all the BP schools, but he can’t do that – partly because he just can’t get around enough, and also because he doesn’t know the local conditions – the same ones that will just kill them if they’re not careful.

At the end of its second month of operation, SSI’s formative evaluator of Desert Met, James Collins, offered a considerable amount of encouraging feedback:

One must take into account that of the 62 students enrolled at Desert Met, only 24 have passed the state’s qualifying exam for high school. The rest have not even taken the exam. Many lack the credits. Several attended school less than 40 days last year. Many were discipline problems in their previous schools. Many were on the verge of being transferred, expelled, or dropped out. Some are active in gangs. Several remain on probation. Traditional school structures fail children like this, which is why SSI has supported the Big Picture model here.

Collins then goes on to recount the reactions of these students to their experience at Desert Met:

“If you would like observe me for awhile, you’d see I changed a lot. Because I do my work, and last year I didn’t want to come to school and now I do. Oh, I love this school.”

“When I first came here, we went to a park. I was like, “We’re at a park? Aren’t we supposed to be at school, sitting down, doing work? [But] this is a different kind of school. This is a school where you work on what you want to learn and what you want to be when you grow up. And you follow your dreams and they help you do that. I think I will be here until graduation because I think this is going to be a good experience for me.”

“If I wasn’t at this school, I’d be dropping out.”

Collins acknowledges that it is evidence of a good school design to elicit this kind of attachment so early – and among students so unused to attachment. It is the one-kid-at-a-time philosophy, he says. Littky or Washor would agree, and then argue that its effects cannot be rushed. Effects come from the art of a long process, they would say, which begins with attachment. But Collins is in a hurry. What this school needs now, he writes at the end of its second month, is articulation with the state’s standards and curriculum frameworks, and also more resolution with respect to its own design. For example, he says, the school claims that Learning through Internship (LTI) can substitute for classes in terms of the state’s curriculum demands, but the school is slow to insist that

every student have an LTI, and even where LTIs are up and running, the advisors fail to inform the LTI mentors what the demands of the state's curriculum framework are.

Negotiating

Desert Met's principal George Rhodes has had to negotiate the differences between Big Picture and SSI. One partner gives him a design, a curriculum, a network, and an inspirational rhetoric that works well among students who might otherwise give up hope. The other provides a lifeline to funders, policymakers, and local community leaders. It gives him formative feedback using a framework based on the criteria on which his school will be judged when it comes time to renew its charter. And it insists that he pay attention to what is at stake: not just keeping Hispanic kids in school – though this is crucial – but ensuring that they graduate with the skills and knowledge they need to improve their prospects in the world. Collins' reports put a voice to this need – as, for example, when he quotes one of Desert Met's students: "If I stay on this road, I'm going to be doing something different than my sisters are doing. I mean, yeah, it's benefiting them to be housewives in Mexico, but it's not what I want to be."

Big Picture insists, on the other hand, that he think hard about what this student means when she says she's *on this road*. It will take a while for her to develop enough sense of belonging and then self-concept to acknowledge that the road necessarily involves taking and passing the state's high-stakes graduation tests. Don't rush it, Dennis Littky would say. "Nationally," he writes, "nine out of ten states with the highest dropout rates have graduation tests, while none of the ten states with the highest graduation rates have such a policy" (Littky, 2004, p. 175).

In the end, Rhodes told us he had concluded, "I have more at stake with SSI and less so with Big Picture." Still, he tried to strike a balance. The result was a degree of curricular adaptation at Desert Met by the end of its first year that set it apart from other Big Picture schools – including, for example, direct instruction in math skills and writing. But the school continued to exhibit resolute loyalty to the Big Picture ideals, especially the practices of "one kid at a time."

challenge within

The challenge of negotiating the politics of local adoption enfolds the dynamics of another challenge, namely figuring out on a continuous basis what is too much fidelity to the design, and what is too little.

Commentary

This story joins the ranks of the other three in attending to local reform history and the residue of theory and design that accumulates in its wake. It is this residue and the tacit knowledge it contains that produce the story's second *challenge within*.

Local politics have nuances that can easily elude an outside designer.

Every reform initiative attempting to scale up experiences this gap early in the process, and either devises a strategy to address it or suffers significant political failure. The strategy might involve regional teams or centers that are directed centrally but responsible for understanding and handling regional politics. Or it might, as in this story, involve finding a local partner. Here the partnership is with an intermediary organization – a kind of broker for new school development. Several such intermediaries are active now in various cities and states. They are often funded by foundations that support small school development, and that know from experience the odds facing small schools going it alone. Among these intermediaries are New Visions for Public Schools in New York City, the Small Schools Project in Washington State, and Jobs for the Future in Boston.

Intermediaries vary in terms of how intrusive their own theory of action is with respect to the brokering they do. So New Visions imposes very little direction on the schools' theories of action – leaving that entirely to the school district and to outside designers. By contrast, Jobs for the Future is more prescriptive because of its interest in school-to-work connections. SSI is prescriptive too because of its interpretation of what the local political environment demands. Meanwhile, all intermediaries make it their business to understand and deal successfully with local political environments, but some environments are more demanding than others.

Local environments vary in terms of whether they have a prevalent and coherent theory of action for school reform. To the extent that they do, new school designers must expect that their work will be evaluated by its light.

Principal George Rhodes has a different set of political choices than do the principals in the other stories. They are in relatively fluid situations where it seems possible to press for a coherent theory of action which can accommodate their schools' difference. This is not easy to do, but the kind of moves that Ortiz made in Silver Lake, or Houseman made in appointing her Board, or Greene made in interacting with her condo neighbors suggest the way. By contrast, Rhodes faces a coherent theory of action already in place – one that BP dislikes, but SSI supports. How can Rhodes handle this *challenge within?*

The challenge of negotiating the politics of local adoption enfolds the dynamics of another challenge, namely figuring out on a continuous basis what is too much fidelity to the design, and what is too little.

On the one hand, Rhodes can work on accommodating the prevailing theory of action. This risks hurting his relationship with BP, but is likely to preserve and even enhance his relationship with SSI. It seems from the story to be the direction in which he is headed. So he introduces some direct instruction in science and math, and follows evaluator Collins' advice in general to align what he can of the Big Picture design with

the state standards. This may be the safest route toward ensuring that his charter will be renewed, though much may depend in this regard on the state of the politics two years hence between SSI and the Merton School Board. This may also be the safest route with respect to protecting Desert Met's association with local funders and other regional leaders, as well as its relationships with other charter schools in the state.

On the other hand, Rhodes can confront the prevailing theory of action, and choose to make his school the ideological outlier – even at the cost of rupturing his relationship with SSI. A good reason to make this choice would be if he felt (a) that the prevalent theory of action and the Big Picture design were inherently incompatible; and or (b) if he felt that confrontation might make his school and its design more influential. It happens that BP Co-Director Dennis Littky is an old hand at influential confrontation. His willingness to make a stand on principle demonstrated at Thayer High School in New Hampshire what can be gained from confrontation. See, for example, Susan Kammeraad-Campbell's 1989 book, and the NBC movie made from the book called *A Town Torn Apart*.

What can we imagine might be the basis of the confrontation, however? What argument might Rhodes and his BP ally make in the face of an apparently prevalent and widely compelling counter-argument? Certainly, the argument that good schools take a long time to grow and that stakeholders should be patient – however true this may be – is not a winnable political argument in this context. The ghost of Partners for Change and the enormity of the achievement gap militate against it. But these same ghosts and this same enormity can be interpreted in a completely different way – as the economist and educational author Richard Rothstein (2004) has recently suggested. He argues that initiatives like Partners for Change did not fail just because they put too little emphasis on curriculum and accountability, but because they did not put enough emphasis on dealing with issues that schools can address but are seldom designed to address – all of them predictable consequences on average of low social-class status. They include poor health and nutrition, less access to rich out-of-school learning environments, and fewer opportunities to engage in substantive ways with adults functioning in professional roles.

Moreover, Rothstein argues, these initiatives failed – as will their contemporary successors because they put too much faith in school reform. Contemporary reformers claim that that they can do better than Partners for Change in helping schools to overcome the achievement gap by exercising strong leadership, by aligning policies and curricula, by engaging in accountable teaching and learning practices (for example, high-stakes testing), and by infusing what is often called *vision* (as captured, for example in the phrases “all children can learn,” and “no excuses”). To this strategic list, the state where Merton is located adds two others: by creating small schools and by chartering them. However, achievement gaps of the size that exist in this state, Rothstein asserts, cannot be wiped out by schools and school reformers alone. To expect otherwise is to engage in an historical delusion, he says, comparable to believing, for example, that macroeconomic policy can raise median household income 40 percentile points up a distribution in just a few years.

So what does Rothstein suggest?

Eliminating the social class differences in student outcomes requires eliminating the impact of social class on children in American society. It requires abandoning the illusion that school reform alone can save us from having to make the difficult economic and political decisions that the goal of equality inevitably entails (p. 149).

He is not the first to make this argument. Christopher Jencks and his colleagues (1972) made it a generation ago. It was not a winning political argument then, and it may well not be one now. However, we are now at the end of long policy chain based on what was then the winning argument. It claimed that the success of a small number of outlier schools in overcoming the achievement gap shows that all schools can do the same. It is the claim behind the federal law known as No Child Left Behind. If it proves to be an inadequate claim at this late and powerful stage of effort, then the perception of its inadequacy might make for new politics. Under such circumstances – when there is at least a reasonable hope that some major political shift is in the offing – then confrontation can make political sense.

Meanwhile, throughout his book, Rothstein reminds the reader that he is *not* saying schools can do nothing, and that he *is* saying that achievement gaps are merely measures of central tendency. In other words, they say nothing about what one kid can do, or about what a school can do one kid at a time.

3.

Conclusion

Challenge: Negotiating the Politics of Local adoption

The four stories help us to define some terms:

- *Politics* means the dynamics of competition among groups and individuals with power to determine the fate of a school.²¹
- *Negotiating* means building relationships sufficient to understand what interests these groups and individuals represent, and dealing directly with the problem of satisfying these interests. It also means clarifying and asserting the interests of the school.
- *Local* signifies those aspects of the political dynamics that insiders already know, but outsiders have to learn.
- *Adoption* always involves adaptation. Part of what is at stake in this challenge is optimal adaptation – enough to create local ownership without sacrificing design integrity.

Strategies

Many people have a stake in the successful local adoption of the Big Picture school design – including, of course, local officials, intermediary organizations, charter holders, parents, and students themselves. In framing the following list of strategies, however, we view the overall challenge of negotiating the politics of local adoption (with its many *challenges within*) from the perspective of the designer. We include in this category not only BP – its co-directors, school coaches, and other staff – but also the school’s principal. Within BP’s theory of action, the principal is not only the front-line political actor, but also the front-line designer – the one who has to figure out in the end how much adaptation to permit.

At the same time, however, we insist that the designer cannot successfully operate alone on the politics of local adoption. Multiple levels of local political knowledge are crucial, and gaining this advantage almost always requires a local operation or a local partnership. Having a local partnership *does* add another level of local politics to deal with – as one of our stories suggests. However, we believe that its value exceeds its cost in this respect.

We group the strategies into two groups – what we call phase 1 and phase 2. The first has especially to do with starting-up: scouting, making the first connections, seeking the first commitments, “sealing the deal” as BP puts it. The second has to do with all the

²¹ Based on a definition by Ross (2004).

political negotiation that must follow. The distinction is only a matter of emphasis, however, since all the strategies are useful in both phases.

Phase 1

- Expect that local politics will work to distort your intentions and your designs.
- Find out about this kind of distortion in other situations, and learn how people in your position managed to counteract it.
- Find a theory of change that helps you make sense of both distortion and of how to deal with it.
- Take advantage of your initial status as an outsider on the inside to learn the local politics from people who know it.
- Map out the groups who have the power to help you or hurt you and then determine what power resources you can marshal and connect to yourself. They can protect you and allow you to take action (Ross, 2004).
- Reach a political understanding – as understanding is defined in the local culture. Make this the basis of contractual negotiation.
- In negotiating a contract, seek to pin down as many details as possible, while leaving maximal room for design changes and for start-up and growing pains.

Phase 2

- Expect incoherence in the policies that bear on your work. Act wherever possible to reduce the incoherence.
- Look continually for opportunities to do whatever you can to make a place for your school and its different design in the political context.
- Know how to resolve conflicts by assessing and addressing parties' basic interests. Practice the skill whenever and wherever you can.
- Keep explaining your school again and again: how it works, and what it values. Learn to do this in under thirty seconds. Say why it matters to the nation as well as the community.
- Affiliate, affiliate – but know that you must work hard to make each affiliation a source of strength and advantage
- Remember that politics is all about who has leverage and is willing to use it. Get some, and use it.

- Understand that no design is adopted without adaptation. Go for optimal adaptation - one that protects the school and enables it to gain influence, but also maintains the design's integrity.
- Above all, stay engaged politically.

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