

1-1-2010

In Pursuit Of Sustained Achievement: A Case Study Of One At-Risk School's Efforts To Change Behaviors

Carol A. Sorvig
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Sorvig, Carol A., "In Pursuit Of Sustained Achievement: A Case Study Of One At-Risk School's Efforts To Change Behaviors" (2010).
Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 618.
<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/618>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

IN PURSUIT OF SUSTAINED ACHIEVEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF ONE AT-
RISK SCHOOL'S EFFORTS TO CHANGE BEHAVIORS

A Dissertation presented to
the Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver

In partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Carol A. Sorvig

June 2010

Advisor: Dr. Elinor Katz

© Copyright by Carol A. Sorvig, 2010

All rights reserved

Author: Carol A. Sorvig

Title: IN PURSUIT OF SUSTAINED ACHIEVEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF ONE AT-RISK SCHOOL'S EFFORTS TO CHANGE BEHAVIORS

Advisor: Elinor Katz Ph.D.

Degree Date: June 2010

Abstract

Sustained achievement remains out of reach for most Title I schools. While there are many programs and examples of schools touting improved performance, there are precious few that are able to maintain that improved performance over time. This case study examined the characteristics of changes made at one Colorado Title I elementary school that did see improved growth for a period of four years. Two administrators, five teachers and two classified staff members were interviewed. Two of the staff members were also parents at the school. This study utilized a qualitative methodology to examine the changes made that lead to sustained improvement. Observations of classroom instruction, collaborative meetings and interviews were conducted to collect data. Elliot Eisner's qualitative method of educational criticism and connoisseurship was selected to organize and classify the data.

Through in-depth interviews these staff members identified and examined the changes implemented over the last four years that contributed to the sustained achievement at Amazing Elementary School. They examined structural changes, delineation of instructional focus, a targeted curriculum, training and hiring of staff. This study is relevant to all schools, most especially those facing higher than normal poverty rates and challenges associated with diverse populations.

Conclusions reached are as follows: the common qualities found among the groups was an unwavering focus on student growth, strong acknowledgement and appreciation of staff efforts, connecting peers with purpose, effective communication between staff, parents and students and on-going professional collaboration. All of these areas build and contribute to the effectiveness of one another. It was not the implementation of any one factor that attributed to the success of Amazing Elementary School, but rather it was the persistence of many factors that when combined together fashioned a well-orchestrated symphony of sustained improvement.

School Districts need to work to allow challenged schools to remove obstacles preventing them from creating similar environments. Schools need to structure their environments to promote greater collaborative time for teachers in order to better analyze the needs of students and develop structures and lessons to meet these needs. Teachers need to improve their skills at analyzing data and they need better more efficient ways at assessing students' learning. Pre-service teachers need to participate in improved residency programs that allow them greater opportunities for side-by-side coaching and mentoring from master teachers.

Finally, this case study has provided practical advice on how to better address the needs of students in title I school for district administrators, school administrators, and teachers.

Acknowledgements

Few things in life are more demanding than the attainment of a PH.D. and maintaining the home and work balance. I think I shall never endure the stress and demands required of the completion of this dissertation, the needs of a family with 4 children and the needs of running challenging school with high needs.

While it has been a long, very long journey, one that has taken me nearly a decade and half, it is with great admiration for those before me, that I finally understand the learning is in the journey and final product is merely a small piece of the final end result. I seem to do things the long, more difficult way, but in doing so I am the benefactor of much learning and hope much wisdom.

I have several people I wish to thank. First, and foremost I wish to acknowledge my husband, who has always supported my efforts, even when it meant living in a dirty house, feeding and caring for the kids. Secondly, I wish to acknowledge my oldest son, for he has taught me the most about learning, perseverance and the power of persistence. Erik, child who was so cheated by the educational system; thank you for helping me study for my written comps. You inspire me every day and I love you so. I cannot to see what great things await you.

Lastly, it is with great gratitude, respect and admiration that I acknowledge the faith and wisdom Dr. Elinor Katz has demonstrated in me over these many years. Her calm guidance and firm convictions have been my constant companion while on this journey. I am forever in your debt for the many, many lessons learned.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Overview of Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
The Problem.....	3
Purpose of Study.....	4
Importance of Study.....	4
Research Questions.....	5
Main question.....	5
Sub-questions.....	5
Overview of Design and Methods	6
Organization of the Study	8
Definition of Terms.....	8
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature	11
Overview of Chapter.....	11
Early Education in the United States	13
Current State of Schools Serving Students of Color and Poverty	16
Challenges Students of Color and Poverty Experience in Achieving in the American Public Schools.....	17
Elements That Must Exist for Students of Color and Poverty to Succeed	19
Schools That Have Succeeded in Sustaining Increased Achievement	25
Change Theory.....	28
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	44
Introduction.....	45
Role of the Researcher	47
Context of Study	50
The Setting.....	51
Demographics	52
Data Collection	54
Sample Selection.....	56
Data Analysis.....	56
Ethical Issues	57
Anticipated Limitations	58
Chapter Four: Data Collection	59
Overview.....	59
Subject Selection/Description.....	62
School Description.....	63
Dibels (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy).....	74
MAPs (Measurement of Academic Progress).....	78
Participants.....	82
Linda H.	83

Tina B.....	86
Teacher Descriptions	87
Diane M.	87
Melissa G.	88
Tammy W.	90
Anne V.	91
Susan P.	91
Classified Staff Descriptions.....	92
Mary R.	92
Sandra L.	93
Observations	94
Summary	96
Chapter Five: Results and Findings	97
Eisner’s Five Structural Dimensions	97
Administrator summaries of five dimensions.....	101
Teacher summaries of educational dimensions	108
Classified and parent summaries of educational dimensions	114
Summation of the Five Dimensions.....	120
Chapter Six: Summary of Study	125
Introduction.....	125
Research Questions Addressed	125
Main question.....	125
Sub-questions.....	125
Major finding	137
Chapter Seven: Conclusions	141
Implications.....	141
Recommendations.....	143
District Administration	143
Principals.....	146
Parents.....	148
Suggestions for Future Studies	149
Reflection	151
References.....	153
Appendix A.....	159
Appendix B.....	161
Appendix C	163

Appendix D..... 165

List of Tables

Table 1	<i>Components of Effective Programs That Narrow the Achievement Gap</i>	24
Table 2	<i>Timeline for Data Collection</i>	47
Table 3	<i>CSAP Results From 2000-2007</i>	53
Table 4	<i>2007 CSAP results for Amazing Elementary School by Content Area with Comparisons to District and State Results</i>	53
Table 5	<i>Research Questions and Evaluation Indicators</i>	55
Table 6	<i>IB Learner Profiles and Attitudes</i>	71
Table 7	<i>Descriptive Data of Participants at Amazing Elementary School (two participants served as staff members and parents at Amazing Elementary School)</i>	82

Chapter One: Overview of Study

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

A Free bird leaps on the back of the wind
and floats downstream till the current ends
and dips his wing in the orange sun rays and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks down his narrow cage
can seldom see through his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill
of things unknown but longed for still
and his tune is heard on the distant hill
for the caged bird sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on the dawn-bright lawn and he names the sky his own.

But the caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tired so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill
of things unknown but longed for still
and his tune is heard on the distant hill
for the caged bird sings of freedom.

(Angelou, 1970)

Introduction

According to Encarta's dictionary meaning of the noun "School", it means any place or period of activity regarded as providing knowledge or experience. When the word school is mentioned we conjure up an image based on our own past experiences.

We assume that when using this common term, we all share very similar experiences. However, the very opposite is true. The word school can often depict very different experiences, emotions and learning; for school is not always an equitable experience for students in the United States.

Maya Angelou wrote the poem “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” in reference to the freedoms denied to slaves and in successive years all African Americans forced to live without the many privileges white people enjoyed. Today the same denial of rights continues to exist within our education system. Many students continue to be trapped in systems that fail to adequately address their needs. Ms. Angelou compares a bird that is free to dream and hope for a bright future with that of a bird that has much to give, but is trapped and therefore denied the opportunities to grow, spread its wings and soar.

The same devastation is occurring within our schools. Students of color continue to have their needs go unaddressed. Kati Haycock, Director of Educational Trust, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping districts and states develop and put into place strategies to close the gaps for poor children and children of color, believes in assuring that these children get at least their fair share of the best teachers and on securing an accountability system that doesn’t allow schools to mask the underachievement of minority and poor students by averaging it into overall achievement (Haycock, 2001 p.5).

Districts and schools with high numbers of poor and minority children fight an up-hill battle to adequately educate these students. Their needs are great, but their gifts, talents and potential are limitless. They lie untapped due to the neglectful nature of our system and the subtle and not so subtle bigotry of society. When students come to school

ill prepared for the rigors of education, teachers are often faced with the daunting task of teaching not only the standard curriculum, but also many other skills these students lack. Faced with teaching double and sometimes triple what advantaged youth require, teachers become frustrated, over-whelmed and burned-out. Yet, poor and minority children need the same rigors as advantaged youth. We have failed to adequately address this dilemma. Children of color and poor children still achieve at a lower rate than that of their white peers. Very few districts and schools have managed to address this issue with sustained success. Why is this? We know what to do, we know our poor children and children of color are just as capable and yet they score far below white children and drop out at an alarming rate (Haycock 2001, Reeves 2004, Darling-Hammond 1990).

The Problem

According to the 90/90/90 studies conducted between 1994 and 1998, “While the impact of poverty clearly has not been eliminated, the prevailing hypothesis that poverty and ethnic minority status are invariably linked to low student achievement does not conform to the data (Accountability in Action, Reeves, 2004 p.187).

As principal of a Title I school in which 84% of the student body qualifies for free and reduced lunches, 87% of the students are of minorities and 50% are second language learners it has longed pained me at the inadequacies of our education system in meeting their needs. While my district attempts to address the under-achievement of poor students and students of color we fail to recognize that equal does not mean equitable. If we are to address the needs of students coming into our schools who are less prepared than that of other students, we must be willing to provide them with more resources to

compensate for their lack of skills. While Title I funds were essentially meant to level out a playing field for these students it has severe limitations and does not begin to address the needs of these students. Resources must look different as does programming and personnel. I believe these students are quite capable of performing as high and at rigorous levels as that of white students, if the right resources and approaches were implemented.

This study will seek to examine what sacrifices and courage is necessary in order to do the right thing; to serve the under-served and allow them the freedom to “make the sky their own.”

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine one school’s efforts at increasing student achievement and maintaining it over time and to observe the elements necessary for successful implementation and sustainability of structures and strategies.

Furthermore, data was gathered to view all aspects that are impacted by a successful program that has increased achievement at a high- risk school with many challenges. Specifically, the researcher was interested in determining what behaviors and attitudes must be present in the staff, administration and parents in order to accommodate this sustained achievement. This information will be necessary if replication is desired by others wishing to sustain achievement in schools with students of poverty and of color.

Importance of Study

This study has significance for many individuals and organizations, on many different levels. As I explored the challenges of other colleagues, students, parents,

schools, and districts I am frustrated that very few organizations are having success with sustaining achievement in high poverty and minority population schools. Whole districts, states and indeed the country are struggling with this growing issue. Our minority and poverty populations are increasing at such rapid rates bringing with them unique challenges that most schools are ill prepared to address, let alone over-come. It is a shared common dilemma (Haycock, 2001b, Reeves, 2004, Schmoker, 2006).

Personally, as an elementary school principal with a high degree of minorities and students of poverty I learned how I can better serve my students' needs. Through examining what one school has been able to accomplish, I was able to bring forth implementable strategies that can, not only aid in improving student achievement, but can also shed some hope on this frustrating issue. The results of this study have far-reaching implications from the local level to the National and Global level.

Research Questions

Main question.

What behaviors existed by administrator, teachers and parents in order to increase student achievement and sustain continued growth over time in an at-risk school setting?

Sub-questions.

1. What changes or phases occurred in order to reach improved achievement?
2. What obstacles were over-come?
3. What methods/strategies/structures were implemented to over-come these obstacles?

4. What were the elements that need to exist to create a more effective learning environment that produces continued increases in student achievement?
5. What areas, such as; culture, climate, leadership structures and professional development, have been affected by these changes?

Overview of Design and Methods

A need exists to examine the way in which we address challenges facing educators who teach students of color and poverty. Right now there are very few schools and/or districts that are successful at closing the achievement gap. All of the large districts in metropolitan areas are struggling with high dropout rates, mostly found in the minority populations, rates common in the 40's and 50 percent range. This is, as a culminating result of the inability to meet students' of poverty and color needs. A case study approach to examining this issue would allow the researcher to "obtain a holistic picture of the subject of study with emphasis on portraying the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them and relevant others" (Creswell, 2003 p. 200).

This study included an on-going and continual participant observation of one school's journey in first identifying what is needed to address the lack of achievement and then determining what is necessary to maintain that, as well as in-depth interviewing, observations, examining of documents, surveys and student data.

A full description of the environment and the transformation process was presented. All of this is examined in an attempt to make sense of and present a clear picture of what can be done to address low and unsustained achievement.

Creswell's suggestions for verification have been implemented utilizing the following methods:

1. Triangulation of data- Data was collected through multiple sources to include interviews, observations and document analysis;
2. Member checking- The informants serve as a check throughout the analysis process. An ongoing dialogue regarding my interpretations of the informant's reality and meanings will ensure the true value of the data;
3. Repeated observations at the research site- Regular and repeated observations of similar phenomena and settings occurred on-site over a nine month period of time.
4. Peer examination- an advisor and committee served as peer examiners;
5. Participatory modes of research- The informants were involved in some phases of this study,
6. Clarification of researcher bias- At the outset of this study the researcher bias will be articulated in writing in the dissertation proposal under the heading "Researcher's Role" (Creswell, 2003).

For this study three forms of evidence were examined. First, interviews were conducted to examine teachers, principals, and parents, perspectives on strategies implemented to increase student achievement. Second, observations of collaborative work structures, and strategies implemented that addressed low performance rates was recorded and analyzed. Third, a document analysis was conducted on products created by Amazing Elementary School. (Kruger & Casey, 2000).

Lastly, examination of student data revealed the impact of the structures and strategies implemented to address closing the student achievement gap. “Meanings and interpretations are negotiated with human data sources because it is the subjects’ realities that the researcher attempts to reconstruct” (Creswell 2003 p.199).

Organization of the Study

The dissertation is in seven chapters. Chapter one introduced the purpose of the research (to examine the strategies implemented in one school to increase student achievement over time.) Chapter two presented an overview of the literature in the areas of history/purpose of American Educational System, multi-cultural education, school improvement efforts, and student achievement gaps. Chapter three outlined the methodology, the context and setting of the study, sampling procedures, ethical issues and anticipated limitations. Chapter four presented an overview of the data collection, examination and analysis of data collected from Amazing Elementary School from students, staff, and parents, and descriptions of the participants and site is presented. Chapter five summarized and discusses the results of the data. Chapter six provided answers to the research questions and summarizes major findings. Finally, chapter seven discusses the implications, conclusions and recommendations of the study. Lastly, in chapter seven further suggestions for follow-up research were offered.

Definition of Terms

90/90/90 Schools—These are school in which 90 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, 90 percent were members of ethnic minorities, and 90 percent met or exceeded state academic standards, (Reeves, 2004).

Achievement Gap—The achievement gap is a persistent, pervasive and significant disparity in educational achievement and attainment among groups of students as determined by a standardized measure. When analyzed according to race and ethnicity, achievement disparities negatively impact educational outcomes for poor children and children of color on a consistent basis. (Closing the Achievement Gap Section, Division of School North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, pg. 2, 1998)

Acculturation—change in the cultural behavior and thinking of an individual or group through contact with another culture, (Encarta Dictionary, 1999).

Assimilation—“a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories , sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them into a common life”, (Gordon, 1964).

Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) is designed to provide a picture of how students in the state of Colorado are progressing toward meeting academic standards, and how schools are doing to ensure learning success of students (For more information, refer to http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/documents/csap/usa_index.html).

Dibels (Dynamic Indicators of basic early literacy skills) assessment used to predict how well a student is acquiring reading skills.

MAPs (Measurement of Academic Progress)—Outcome growth measurement developed by the Northwest Educational Assessment.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 reauthorizes the Elementary Secondary Education Act and incorporates increased accountability for States, school districts, and schools; greater choice for parents and students, particularly those attending low-performing schools; more flexibility for States and local educational agencies (LEAs) in the use of Federal education dollars; and a stronger emphasis on reading, especially for our youngest children (For more information, refer to <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/execsumm.html>).

PBS—Positive Behavior Support System (Positive behavior reinforcement program implemented through the Colorado Department of Education)

Recipient Groups—Sub groups or populations identified within a school or district.

Sustainability—Maintained over time for a period of three or more years (Fullan, 2008).

Students of Poverty—“to the extent to which a student does without resources, (Payne, 1996).

Students of Color—Any group of students other than the Caucasian population based on ethnicity, (Payne, 1996).

Title I schools—Federally identified schools whose student population meets the criteria of 40% or more of Free and Reduced Lunch funding, (NCLB report, 2001).

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up?
Like a raisin in the sun?

(Langston Hughes, 1943)

Overview of Chapter

The term “sustainability” can be found everywhere in our culture today. It is a buzzword found in many areas of society from agriculture, energy, architecture and now education. The concept of sustainability is appealing on many levels. We are a nation of waste and inefficiency. However, recently we have come to realize that we cannot maintain a mind set of consume, consume, consume without regard to future consequences. Districts, states and ultimately our federal government cannot afford to continue on a road of band-aid treatments to address schools failing to show gains.

It is for this reason that we need to determine what it takes to create increased achievement and then keep that achievement moving with up-ward momentum. To do less is to act recklessly and selfishly. Not achieving sustainability, results in a loss of revenue. Why? Because there is an ever elusive need to continuously try new programs or new restructures in hopes of finding that one magic answer that will create improvement. All the while, what has been tried in the past is forgotten and abandoned. This is a monumental cost to students, staff, districts and taxpayers. At some point there will come an end to the resources at our disposal. While there is an abundance of

research on what is required to increase achievement in schools of poverty, there can be found fewer examples of schools that have been able to retain this achievement over time. Finding sustainable elements benefits everyone, none the least is the children we are ultimately responsible for.

The purpose of this study was to explore the obstacles preventing schools with students of color and poverty from maintaining achievement at the same rates as those of their counterparts in non-at-risk schools. One local school has begun to show that students of color and poverty can learn, posting results that indicate increased achievement continuously over a four-year period. Their story was explored.

A history of education and the original purpose for the institution of education in the United States will be discussed, as well as early efforts to identify causes of lower achievement amongst various groups of students. A discussion of the current state of schools in poverty and serving students at-risk and of color will be offered.

Problems in the delivery of our educational system were examined and identified, followed by recommendations from experts in the field of multi-cultural education, diversity and poverty. The general approach to diversity in education has been through assimilation into the public system, equal opportunity and homogenization; however, this approach is flawed and does not address some unique needs of various recipient groups. Gilberto Conchas, believes true assimilation occurs when two cultures actually adopt traits unique to one another's culture, there is a sharing of traits, traditions and beliefs, (Conchas, 2006). An examination of these unique features were explored.

In addition, an examination of programs that are making progress in meeting the needs of students of poverty and color in an effort to bridge the achievement gap were given with the focus on common themes needed to address the closing of the achievement gap.

Finally, it is necessary if examining the process of one school's change efforts, to have a foundation of how change occurs. Several theories were explored for insight into this complicated and messy endeavor.

Early Education in the United States

What was the original purpose for establishing an educational system in the United States? Our forefathers had great vision and insight as they sought to establish a democracy that would serve the future of our society. It was important to them to provide for a future for their children; one that guaranteed certain freedoms, as they knew only too well the importance and privilege these freedoms contained. Hence, the original purpose of the American Education System was to preserve, defend and ensure the future of democracy. It was conceived and implemented by Thomas Jefferson and other white, upper middle class males who were the leaders of the time.

During the first fifty years of our nation there was little, if any opposition to the notion of schooling. There was however, opposition to the "structure of state control financing and to the attempt to gather all groups into a system with a common curriculum; and that the tension between loyalist tradition and centralizing innovation was the main dynamic in the drama of school reform after 1830", (Kaestle, 1983). So,

while most citizens agreed on the need and importance for the education of a society they did not agree on how this schooling should look and take shape.

In a prize-winning essay written in 1797, Samuel Harrison Smith, a Washington newspaper editor, listed five reasons for the acquisition of knowledge in the United States:

1. An enlightened nation is always most tenacious of its rights.
2. It is not in the interest of such a society to perpetuate error.
3. In a republic the sources of happiness are open to all without injuring any.
4. If happiness be made at all to depend on the improvement of mind and the collision of mind with mind, the happiness of an individual will greatly depend upon the general diffusion of knowledge...
5. Under a republic...man feels as strong a bias to improvement as under a despotism he feels an impulse to ignorance and depression, (Samuel Harrison Smith, 1797).

The idea of mass education was not opposed for several reasons. First, there was no formal nobility and no powerful church hierarchy such as had existed in England. Second, Americans did not fear a literate society and as a matter of fact embraced such a concept. Thirdly, Americans did not view the relationship between literacy and rebellion as a negative factor. After all Americans had rebelled against England and without education our country's forefathers would not have accomplished such a feat.

While the elite could attend private schools, charitable schools began to spring up to educate the increasing influx of immigrants. By creating a network of charity schools

philanthropists laid the foundation for free systems of the mid-nineteenth century American cities, (Kaestle, 1983). These charity schools were established to address social stability, but were in no way similar to the schools the elite could afford. So, it would seem that from our Nation's very earliest inception the idea of providing differently to different groups of people was the norm, in content, delivery and structure. In 1896 the Supreme Court ruled in Plessey vs. Ferguson to accept segregation for black people as long as it was equal to those open to white people. "The dual society, at least in public education, seems in general to be unquestioned"(Kozol, 1991 p.4). Now the separate, but equal applies to the "haves and have nots". It all comes down to self-fulfillment verses sacrifice for the greater good. Here and now verses more wide spread sustainable implications for future generations.

It took until 1954 for the courts to reverse this ruling in Brown verses the Board of Education, based on the refusal to allow 10 year old Linda Brown into an all white elementary school in Topeka, Kansas, the court found that segregated education was unconstitutional because it was "inherently unequal" (Kozol, 1991). This was the catalyst for the civil right movement. How ironic this ruling was some fifty-four years ago, nothing much has changed except to put in writing that segregating students does not allow for an equal education. An equal education does not exist today for many students of color and poverty and in many ways they remain segregated not by a law, but by a subtle social conscious that will not allow the funding and policies to meet the needs of our most deserving students.

Current State of Schools Serving Students of Color and Poverty

Jonathan Kozol, writes of experiences in visiting schools in Chicago, New York, Boston, East St. Louis and Baltimore in the late 1980's and 1990, "What startled me most...was the remarkable degree of racial segregation that persisted almost everywhere" (Kozol 1991 p. 2). What is even more alarming is the degree to which influential citizens seemed oblivious, showing little inclination to address the matter. How can such an educated society allow for the dismal conditions, ineffective delivery of instruction, poor curriculum, and lack of resources to exist anywhere there are children in need of education, especially after the institution of our American schools began some two-hundred and thirty-two years ago? And yet it exists in almost every school system in all fifty states.

For example; when a school district finds itself growing and in need of new school sites, who moves to these areas and benefits from many of the amenities? It is not usually the poor and minority populations and therefore they continue to be subject to the buildings that are of lesser quality, less materials, and usually instruction delivered by teachers with fewer skills for teaching our minority and less affluent population. And so the domino effect continues as a self-fulfilling prophecy. The affluent continue to receive the best and continue to make great gains while the less advantaged continue to receive less and make less gains.

Challenges Students of Color and Poverty Experience in Achieving in the American Public Schools

An interesting phenomenon exists in the American public school setting for groups that are other than white. The American public school setting is an interesting study in dichotomy. It seeks to both assimilate and discriminate against recipient groups entering in the public school setting. Public schools teach immigrants to assimilate to the language and social norms while discriminating in multiple ways in order to preserve the division of social classes. There exists a subtle underlying contradiction that allows immigrant groups to assimilate to the extent that they master the English language and acquire the socially acceptable behaviors sufficiently to function within the American white culture. Schools provide for this, however, they do not allow immigrant groups or students of color to assimilate fully. By denying these groups full social integration into the American society schools significantly handicap minority groups in succeeding fully in the American public school setting and therefore in the majority society. In this manner, the American public schools, as an instrument of society, discriminates against minority group members, by ensuring that they are not likely to be assimilated into the broader majority society in the United States, (Conchas, 2006).

In the 40 years since Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968 in Memphis some conditions have improved. The dream Dr. King had of color and white students learning together continues to be elusive. A recent CBS poll found that while 56% of white people felt race relations were better than they were 40 years ago, only 42% of people of color felt race relations were better. Why the discrepancy? While there

are many more opportunities afforded to people of color now than were 40 years prior there remains significant causes for the feeling of inequity. In the South, most black students no longer attend completely segregated schools, but in the central cities in the North, white flight left many schools as or more segregated than they were 50 years ago (New York Times, 2004). White flight is the main feature that continues to demonstrate that we are not a nation that sees ourselves as equal. As people of color move into a neighborhood, the white population flees. This phenomenon produces schools that are segregated. As students of color and poverty fill these schools they still are isolated from white students. They continue to see themselves as separate and inferior. We also know that teachers flee these schools and migrate to schools where the challenges are sometimes less. “The struggle to lessen the gap in the realm of ideas is far more essential than early mastery of the multiplication tables (although the latter won’t do any harm either); essential not only for the economic health of the nation, but imperative for its civic future. We are not predisposed to believe the startling proposition that we are all created equal” (Meier, 1995 p. 2).

Upon further examination it is interesting to note that students of color or minorities fall into two distinct sub-groups. John Ogbu, (1986) has done extensive research on the academic failure of racial minorities. He finds that groups that voluntarily immigrated to the United States, groups such as Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Cuban Americans, Filipino Americans and West Indians, came of their own free will, perceive and react to the American schooling experience in a much more positive and receptive way.

Conversely, involuntary minorities; minority groups that were integrated into the American society through slavery, conquest or colonization perceive the American schooling experience in a much more negative way. Students in this category tend not to work as hard in school. They resist assimilation because they realize they will never have the same opportunities as Caucasians. It is no wonder there exists a high level of pessimism towards schooling due to each groups' unique historical and social experiences. "Ogbu refers to these groups as "caste-like" because their incorporation often resulted in social and economic subordination. For instance, African Americans were enslaved through force, and Chicanos were incorporated through conquest (Conchas, 2006).

There are also differences in success within individual groups. A study conducted by Soares-Orozco (1995) found that recent Mexican immigrants had a strong desire to succeed in the academic setting, while second generation Latino students developed an oppositional attitude toward achieving in school. Similar findings were discovered among Asian minorities, even though they are a voluntary minority. It seems that there exists a racial stratification within each group based on date of immigration.

Elements That Must Exist for Students of Color and Poverty to Succeed

John Ogbu and colleagues have attempted to understand why racial minority groups have failed to achieve in the academic setting during the last three decades. As cultural ecologists they believe that in order for involuntary minorities to achieve they must take on a "White persona" in order to succeed. In other words students of color must act "white" in order to succeed, hence school success equals acting white providing

the strong relationship between assimilation and school success (Ogbu, 1986). This may be one factor that contributes to a student's ability to achieve success academically, however one factor seems to be the most important and influential component determining a student's ability to perform well and achieve academic success.

The one consistent factor that seems to trump all other factors in affecting student achievement, no matter what other impacting variables exist is **teacher quality**. While there is a high correlation between student success in achievement and poverty, there exists an even greater correlation to student achievement success and quality teaching no matter what the background of the student. This has been studied widely by many experts in the field, including Linda Darling Hammond from Stanford University and Kati Haycock of the Educational Trust Foundation. The unfortunate fact is that most schools and districts do little to ensure that the students with the greatest needs receive the most skilled teachers. "No matter how much we improve the quality of teachers, we allocate this precious resource in a perverse manner, giving the most effective teachers to economically advantaged students and denying those teachers to impoverished students (Reeves, 2006). Robert Ingersoll (2003) also supports this by reminding us; the more likely a school is to contain high poverty students, the less likely it is to contain high-quality teachers.

Doug Reeves (2008) has done extensive research in schools with 90 percent ethnic minority, 90 percent are on free or reduced lunches and at least 90 percent are successful on standardized achievement tests. (More recent studies observe schools with 100/100/100 characteristics.) While many schools struggle with minority achievement, it

is a fact that there are schools across the nation that have managed to attain high results against all odds. Reeves has identified five characteristics that 90/90/90 schools share:

1. Focus on achievement
2. A clear curriculum must be in place
3. Frequent assessments and multiple opportunities for students to show improvements
4. A focus on writing in all areas
5. External scoring of student work must be in place (Accountability in Action, Reeves, 2004 p. 187).

So what does *Focus on Achievement* look like? It is a constant on-going effort to celebrate and publicize throughout the school and community the successes that are being achieved. It is demonstrated through graphs, charts, pictures, and displays found in classrooms, hallways, offices, newsletters, websites, local meeting places, etc. This high academic performance is rewarded with praise and feedback. Reeves, recommends that there be no more than five areas of focus within a school and that students who are unable to meet the high standards are placed on an academic intervention plan with as much as three hours a day in intervention until they are ready to meet the standards (Reeves, 2000).

A clear curriculum focuses on only a few areas; such as mathematics, language arts, and reading. Cross-content instruction is present. The result is that scores increase, not just in a single area, but also in all areas. If reading and writing skills are emphasized in social studies the content is learned and reading and writing skills become more proficient as well.

When **frequent assessments** are given to students teachers can determine if instruction is effective or not and what adjustments need to be made. Formative assessments are not formalized, but are used to gauge student learning which informs teacher instruction. When students do poorly on a given assessment they should be given multiple opportunities to succeed. This should not be viewed as a failure, as excuses for inadequate teaching, or as an indication to move on. Rather this is the time for students to receive more time to reach the level of proficiency desired. “Student learning is the goal, not student grading,” (Reeves, 2000). Regular student assessment of progress is made by the teacher and reported to the child. The student is then encouraged to make improvement in the following weeks. It is vital and important to note that the concept of “get it right the first time” on assessments is flawed in that when students know that teacher feedback provides no other opportunities to succeed they frequently take this feedback and stuff it into their desks, back packs or trash cans. Students with little motivation are happy with D’s and F’s in this scenario. After all, there is nothing they can do about the deficient performance any way. However, the consequence in frequent assessment with multiple opportunities for success is not a bad grade and discouragement, but opportunities to re-learn, improved performance and the respect for teacher feedback. This model looks much more akin to active coaching and less like a punitive routine in which there is no reprieve and is seen as a continual regime and message of hopelessness.

Interestingly, the most common characteristic found among these schools is **regular assessment of student writing**. A single rubric is created for all genres. While

research shows that creative writing tends to have higher levels of achievements, more emphasis needs to be paid to the genre of informative and narrative writing. Weekly assessment should be made with opportunities for feedback and improvement.

Writing should be found across all content areas including mathematics, science and social studies. Eighty percent of the 135 elementary schools improved in science as well as writing from 1997 to 1998, (Reeves, 2008). No changes in the science curriculum were made during this time and few apparent modifications in teaching methods as well. The association between writing and other academic areas was striking. **Writing is thinking** on paper. It allows us to perfect our sense of order, organization, sequence, transitions and much more; so it does make sense that writing would allow students to practice processing information which is needed in all content areas and life in general.

External Scoring allows schools to create a common assessment practice. It allows teachers to maintain alignment with the curriculum, assessment practices and expectations. By exchanging student work samples teachers can create a norm for expectations of proficiency and an understanding of the rubric.

Reeves also recommends that schools implement a model for success that includes:

1. On-going and focused professional development
2. Modeling of effective teaching and assessment practices
3. On-going professional collaboration
4. Effective communication between school staff, parents and students
5. Visible tracking of student progress on a frequent and regular basis

He also advocates for multiple types of assessments, noting that there is a place for standardized assessments, teacher developed assessments, performance based assessments, as well as other forms of student-produced work, (Reeves, 2000).

Table 1

Components of Effective Programs That Narrow the Achievement Gap

Found in most schools	Found in Effective Schools
State norm testing	Multiple and on-going assessment with a shared rubric known to all
Professional development days	On-going collaboration and modeling based on research (structured peer coaching)
Teaching all standards	Teaching focused standards that lead to improvement in all areas
Minimal writing exposure	Extensive writing practice in all areas using a single common rubric
Student works for grades	Student work leads to improved achievement
Teacher grading and assessment	Teacher grades based on shared assessment
Teaching strategies found in most schools	Teaching strategies found in effective schools
Student learning is hindered	All students learn with improvement model
Content areas independent of each other	Strong instruction in one area benefits all other areas
Teaching done in isolation	Teaching collaboratively has great payoffs for students and for staff (peer coaching)
Reading is an isolated subject	Reading skills taught and practiced through all content areas
Writing is a skill	Writing is an on-going assessment practice
Teach the entire curriculum	Determine with collaboration the most important teaching that must occur
Question/Answer are part of the grade	Question/Answer is an assessment and a provocative way of engaging students
Tests necessary for objective grading	Multiple and frequent assessments are necessary to identify student needs
Reading/answer questions	Reciprocal reading model evident

Found in most schools	Found in Effective Schools
Teach the way they were taught	Research says that multiple models of teaching are necessary
Teaching is a secret	Teachers provide clear expectations for students
Classroom order is most important	Classroom order is necessary and must use multiple strategies to maintain order
Teacher is the most important quality	Teacher is the most important quality
Parent notification periodically	Parent notification regularly

(Reeves, 2008 p. 1)

Schools That Have Succeeded in Sustaining Increased Achievement

Reeves has located schools all over the country that are posting increased student achievement results utilizing these components; schools found with the 90/90/90 characteristics can be found in the following states: Alaska, Arizona, California, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin and Washington.

In Wayne Township in Indianapolis City School District there are many schools of poverty that regularly score as well or better than the non-poverty schools. While some districts are proving this can happen across the district there are some situations where this does not occur district wide, but can be observed in some schools on some student performance assessments, but not others, as is the case for Cobb County in Atlanta, Georgia (Reeves, 2006).

More recently his research has taken him to Norfolk, Virginia public schools; where he has found that schools there were making significant sustained gains by assessing students' knowledge daily and posting these results publicly, (Reeves, 2008).

While Reeves has set out to prove successfully that economic and academic deprivation clearly affects student achievement, demographic characteristics do not determine academic performance. This was first observed in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin schools. The research included four years worth of data from 1995-1998. School data included elementary, middle and high schools. More than 228 schools and 130,000 students were included in the study.

Mead Valley School is one of the school's in Reeves 90/09/90 studies. More than 95% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunches, more than 70% are English Language Learners. It is one of the poorest areas in the country located in Riverside, California. It is an area high in crime and drug abuse. The environment is debilitated and depressing. Many homes lack proper plumbing and other utilities. Children often go hungry. "Yet in this environment this school has managed to maintain a level of academic excellence that transcends student demographics, transitions in teaching staff, and changes in school leadership (Reeves, 2007 p.86-87).

The difference between Mead Valley and other Title I schools creating sustained achievement is that they do not engage in the practice of focusing on students that with a little bit of prodding and intensive interventions would attain a proficiency level. Instead their practice is to commit to all students. This culture of commitment extends to all students at all levels regardless of need. The entire staff is committed to the achievement of all students. Complacency does not exist for any student.

This kind of commitment requires a certain kind of person and specific practices implemented. The first practice implemented was to create uniformity. In doing so, the

school created common language and common assessments thereby cutting down on variations in teacher expectation. The internal created assessments are developed to be consistently more rigorous than the state assessment used to judge their school's performance.

Secondly, Mead Valley sets aside three hours solely devoted to literacy each day. Additionally, students practice writing each and every day. While there was initial resistance to this and in giving up of the arts and crafts curriculum, teachers are seeing the commitment to this dedicated three hours of literacy everyday are paying off.

Thirdly, there is a dedication to collaborative time with peers. Every Wednesday, students are dismissed at 12:30 and teachers meet for two hours to focus on student achievement, content and teaching strategies that will meet these needs. The norms for the meeting are clear and specific. Teachers focus on all available data including; test scores, teacher observation, identifying students in need of interventions and faculty discussing the most effective teaching practices. Next, clear achievement targets are set for every grade level and every student in the entire school. Examples include:

- At the end of the year, every kindergartener will be able to write three sentences.
- At the end of the year, every 3rd grader will be able to write three paragraphs.
- At the end of the year, every 5th grader will be able to write five paragraphs.

Next, the school works hard to build emotional confidence in students and staff. Regular celebrations are built in to recognize accomplishments and mile stones towards meeting targets. A constant message of this is in place where students can achieve and

grow. There must be a relentless culture of enthusiasm and confidence. This must be reflected in conversations daily by faculty, students, and administration.

Lastly, the school does not tolerate substandard instruction. Teachers are terminated or transferred that do not convey and implement expectations. Effective instruction is recognized and celebrated, however ineffective instruction should be eliminated when necessary (Reeves, 2007). A culture of commitment is the bottom line and in order to implement this kind of practice a transformation will need to occur. Change can be complicated, confusing time and labor-intensive. However, change is necessary to create sustained achievement in our Title I schools.

Change Theory

There are many obstacles to overcome in implementing any new program. Change is confounded by many complex elements. Margaret Wheatley, researcher in the field of business management has studied the idea that there are many similarities between the changes that occur in science and nature and the changes that occur within organizations and systems. She has come to believe that, “this is not a world where order and change, autonomy and control were not the great opposites that we had thought them to be, (Wheatley, 2006, p.4). She saw many parallels in the universe to organizational structures and changes happening within systems. She observed, “chaos contained order; of information as an essential, nourishing element; of systems that fell apart so they could reorganize themselves; and of invisible influences that permeate space and affect change at a distance, (Wheatley, 2006, p. 4). It is often this very sense of change and the confusion found in “what used to work isn’t working to solve problems presently” that

causes us great distress and frustration. "...of being mired in the habit of solutions that once worked yet that are now totally inappropriate, of having rug after rug pulled from beneath us, whether by a corporate merger, reorganization, downsizing(budget reductions/realignments) or personal disorientation, (Wheatley, 2006, p.6).

In education we are constantly being faced with year-to-year variables that influence our ability to be effective. Changes in personnel, budget allocation, size of classrooms, changes in curriculum, changes in curricular materials, technology, union and district policies, needs deficits in students, etc. And so our ability to address these ever changing assaults on our effectiveness cannot always be solved by the same old resolutions. However, if we are to achieve our desired results, Margaret Wheatley suggests that we "embrace our despair as a step on the road to wisdom, encouraging us to sit in the unfamiliar seat of not knowing and open ourselves to radically new ideas.

John P. Katter has studied the complexities involved in leading change and what steps are involved in leading effective change, (Kotter, 1996). According to his research there are eight steps to transforming change with an organization in order to be effective in the change process.

These steps are:

- Establishing a Sense of Urgency
- Creating the Guiding Coalition
- Developing a Vision and Strategy
- Communicating the Change Vision
- Empowering Employees for the Broad-Based Action

- Generating Short-Term Wins
- Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change
- Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture (Kotter, 1996 p. 21).

Creating a sense of urgency is essential in order to move individuals inside of the organization into action to change the status quo. Complacency is the biggest enemy in preventing individuals from changing their behavior. Complacency occurs for many reasons. When individuals perceive the status of the current state of affairs as efficient and effective then, change can be thwarted.

Individuals are often most moved into action to create change when a crisis exist. When no crisis is apparent or evident then individuals within an organization fall into a sense of complacency. A crisis can take on the look of many different forms. It can range from the loss of achievement, loss of resources to loss of leadership, etc. It is most often a motivating factor that drives individuals into changing current practices in order to address the crisis.

Another obstacle preventing change from taking hold is something Kotter refers to as “Happy Talk”, (Kotter, 1996). “Happy Talk” is the practice of communicating data in a positive light without really ever addressing the negative or down side of current practices that prevent the organization from improving.

Another reason that individuals within an organization are often complacent about change is due to the appearance of a perceived affluence around them. When individuals see money spent without regard to economic crisis they feel as though the status quo is

meeting the needs of those they serve. Environmental factors often fly in the face of attempted change practices when they do not align with the change practices.

Complacency can also occur when standards are set too low. This seems apparent, however, it is not. Too many times objectives, goals or standards are either not aligned to the real needs of the organization or just are too low to really make the necessary improvements. Goals are often narrow and not functional towards meeting the needs of the organization. They need to be broad and all encompassing as well as aligned with the needs of the organization in order to produce continued growth.

One way to address complacency is to gain external feedback. Feedback from outside constituents may be more honest and objective than simply relying on only internal feedback. While some feedback may need to be screened for authenticity, some may actually be worth analyzing to truly determine the real functionality and effectiveness of the organization.

Many times this feedback is available, but just not shared with the members of the organization due to the fear of hurting someone's feelings or causing disagreements. The truth is kept hidden in return for maintaining the status quo, keeping individuals complacent and preventing real improvements.

Finally, complacency can continue due to past successes. When members of an organization have enjoyed additional attention and resources it creates an inflated ego affect. Individuals with big egos create an arrogant culture and this reinforces complacency. All of these factors when taken into account all act against the need for change.

While creating a sense of urgency to dissipate complacency is crucial the second step in Kotter's change model is equally important. Once a sense of urgency is established the organization needs a **guiding change coalition**. A group formed with the specific intent to implement change and guide it smoothing through the full transformation process. Members of the coalition must be chosen with specific intent and purpose. These individuals must be selected for intentional purpose with equal parts of positional power, expertise, credibility and leadership, (Kotter, 1996). It is sad, but true that if the often daunting task of creating the urgency is established and the organization as a whole is motivated to begin transforming, the transformation often fails due to lack of an effective team guiding the change process. This is why it is so imperative to choose the right team members who can build trust and a common goal for the organization. If the leader has chosen wisely, with the proper ingredients listed above then trust will be present. Without trust there will be no teamwork and no guiding change coalition and thus no transformation. When members are brought together from various departments or divisions of an organization to form a team, there often exists a natural sense of distrust, mostly due to lack of communication and knowledge. It will be essential to create a climate of trust by establishing norms and sharing information about one another. Mutual understanding and trust must be established to build a cohesive team. In the end the guiding change coalition must contain the right people, create trust and develop a common goal that appeal both to the head and the heart if they are to move the organization through the change effort.

Developing a vision and strategy, sounds easier and less time consuming than it really is. A vision is a statement to get people moving, it creates a picture of the future that is either implicit or explicit. It clarifies the general direction for the change, it motivates people to take the action in the right direction and it coordinates the actions of the members of the organization. An effective vision should be able convey what is desired in less than five minutes (Kotter, 1996). Essentially, an effective vision contains the following four characteristics:

1. Be ambitious enough to force people into change and out of their comfortable complacent routines.
2. Aims to be the best, with fewer resources to accomplish the task.
3. Take advantage of current best practices, trends and research.
4. Does not exploit anyone and thus has a high moral imperative, which appeals to individuals' sense of justice

“Developing a good vision is an exercise of both the head and the heart, it takes some time, it always involves a group of people, and it is tough to do well” (Kotter, 1996, p. 79).

Kotter insists that if there is a high degree of cynicism there is almost no chance of a successful transformation, often found in organizations is sarcasm; a resulting behavior of cynicism. Sarcasm defined means the opposite of what is intended with expressed intent at making fun of someone or something and usually expresses irritation (Encarta, 1999). Such behavior is detrimental to change. It is toxic in any organization, but most especially when a change effort is undertaken. When sarcasm and cynicism

surface it either needs to be addressed head on or members need to be removed if they cannot eliminate these sabotaging behaviors.

Once the vision has been created by the guiding change coalition it must be communicated to the organizational members. **Communicating the Change Vision** is most powerful when most of the members of the organization have a common understanding of its intent and direction. Inconsistency and under-communicating are often the most common problems preventing the organization from understanding the change vision.

Communicating effectively requires the absence of jargon, simplicity is most desirable. The use of metaphors, analogies, stories and examples can aid in communicating the vision quicker and clearer. Every opportunity to impart the vision should be accessed, this means use of multiple venues to spread the word. Naturally, this will require repetition as new information takes time to filter down and be digested. Leaders need to demonstrate behavior that reflects the vision. When there does appear to be inconsistencies in communication either by action or word it needs to be addressed and either changed or explained. Lastly, a forum of two-way communication must exist. Effective communication is not only imparting information, but it is listening very carefully and critically to those around and outside of the organization.

The next phase in the change process involves **empowering members of the organization for broad-based action** to occur. Margaret Wheatley believes that, “Those whom we fail to invite into the change process are the very people who will poison our process”, (Wheatley, 2005). Members of an organization often do not participate in

change efforts because they feel powerless. When leaders within the organization remove barriers preventing empowerment they unleash momentum from within the organization. Some of these barriers include formal structures that make it difficult to act, a lack of skills or training to implement new practices that are a part of the change process, information systems that make it difficult to act and lastly supervisors that do not **encourage** members to act on the vision.

Often members of organizations have ideas on how to enhance the operations within the organization. However, due to fear that their ideas would be unaccepted or unappreciated without the encouragement of the leader these ideas often go unheeded.

Leaders need to listen carefully to the creative ideas being generated and then “give permission” to explore these ideas. When employees have the support and encouragement of their supervisors their self-confidence can blossom allowing creativeness and critical problem solving to occur.

There are many barriers that prevent employees from being empowered. If the organization limits resources and responsibility for materials and services, individuals within the organization are less able to focus on the customer/constituents or students. Lack of resources preventing the implementation of creative solutions can kill ideas. In school districts this can look like districts’ policies and procedures preventing implementation or teacher union regulations that prevent best practices from occurring for students in favor of teacher protection.

If the employees are to be empowered and given additional responsibility then the layers of middle and lower level managers need to let them be and not second-guess and

criticize their efforts. If employees see their efforts as being sabotaged in any way they will not want to expend needless energy.

Additionally, if large executive groups at the administration office are constantly initiating costly programs then this will become costly opportunities lost. If money is spent in one area of the organization it detracts from other possibilities elsewhere within the organization.

Lastly, if an organization is to act with urgency it must ensure that all parties are not acting independently. If they act independently communication will be fragmented and thus slow communication and implementation.

An organization can do several things to tap into the enormous source of power within an organization by communicating a sensible vision to members of the organization, ensure all structures allow for members to be creative and empowered, provide necessary training, align information and personnel systems to the vision and confront supervisors who undermine and sabotage needed change, (Kotter, 2006).

It is never a good idea to be so overly zealous in one's transformation efforts that **Generating short term wins** is ignored. Generating short- term wins serve several purposes. First, they act as stair steps leading to the major change effort. Secondly, each generated win also informs the change coalition and others of the success and progress of the transformation effort. Tracking data and communicating regularly and consistently are crucial. Thirdly, providing milestones gives the organization something to look forward to while they are working toward the overall transformation. Fourth, individuals need reinforcement to continue the long haul needed to produce change and small

celebrations generate more energy to continue toward the next short term win. Fifth, it keeps Naysayers at bay and makes it difficult for them to obstruct further change efforts. Lastly, short term wins keep supervisors informed and provides evidence that the organization is on course with their change plan.

Most leaders of organizations do not plan short- term wins and this can be a major reason transformation efforts fail. A short- term win must be visible to all so everyone can determine for himself or herself if the results are real or not. It must be unambiguous; it must be so clear so that there is little argument over whether the results are indeed the short-term wins leading to the overall change goal. And lastly it must be clearly aligned to the accomplishment of the transformation effort. The point is to make sure that visible results lend sufficient credibility to the transformation effort, (Kotter, 1996).

The problem that often occurs with generating short term wins and acknowledging them, no matter how subtle or elaborate, members of the organization can misconstrue the celebration as a signal to decrease the sense of urgency. This is interpreted as permission to let up on the change efforts, hence a return to complacency. *Whenever you let up before a job is done, critical momentum can be lost and regression may follow*, (Kotter, 1996, p.133). Therefore, it is critical to **Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change** in order to keep the momentum going in the change effort.

The degree to which an organization is interdependent can seriously complicate and slow down the progress of change. An organization with less interdependency will be able to make its changes more quickly because it does not need to change as many

departments. When an organization is highly interdependent one department cannot change without affecting the other departments, therefore change will need to affect all areas. At some point it is necessary to examine necessary and non-necessary interdependency; eliminate unnecessary interdependencies making the change effort more manageable.

New change efforts need to be anchored into the culture in order to be sustainable.

Anchoring New Approaches to Change requires addressing the norms of behavior and shared values among the members of the organization. Kotter defines Norms of Behavior as behavior that persist because group members tend to behave in ways that teach these practices to new members, rewarding those who fit in with acceptance and accolades and sanctioning those who do not. He further defines shared values as important concerns and goals shared by most of the people in a group that tend to shape group behavior and that often persist over time even when group membership changes, (Kotter, 1996).

Culture is a powerful influence in the transformation effort and it cannot be ignored. If there are norms of behavior or values either explicit or implicit that will interfere with the transformation effort then they will need to be confronted. If new change practices are in conflict with the culture there will always be regression of the change effort. This is why it is so important to examine and address the culture in relationship to the transformation effort.

The change in norms and values will come at the end of a successful change effort not at the beginning. Anchoring change in a culture will depend on the results, once the data reports that the changes have succeeded it will be evidence to members of the

organization that the new changes are superior to the old ones. To anchor the changes in the culture will require a lot of talk. This part is never concluded. It is constant and ongoing in many different venues. One must be prepared for turnover, some members of the organization may need to be replaced in order for change to take anchor, or they may simply choose to leave, either way this is not always a bad thing. Decisions of succession and promotion need to be compatible with the change process in order to be anchored it in the culture. If not, the old culture will be reinstated.

While Kotter discusses the steps or phases leading to the implementation of effective change practices, Michael Fullan (2008) suggests that there are 6 necessary ingredients involved in effective change. He refers to these ingredients as secrets. He believes that the culture of the organization has to be closely examined and evaluated before the transformation process occurs to determine what behaviors exist that could potentially sabotage the transformation process. Fullan suggests that if the 6 ingredients are present they will act as a sort of check and balance system to prevent failure of the change process. Furthermore, he believes these 6 ingredients can be applied to all sectors of public and private organizational arenas.

First, organizations should **“Love their Employees”**. This does not mean you love your employees more than your costumers or in the school system sense more than the students or parents. But rather both constituents need to be included and appreciated on a continual and intentional basis.

Second, Fullan believes that organizations must make a concerted effort to **“connect peers with purpose”**. In the educational world this may be viewed as

professional learning communities. School organizations that realize the power is not in a top down your throat approach to change, but a system of input and inquiry from the members of the organization. The need exists to address a balance between too tight and too loose leadership practices. An organization that is too tight with sharp goals and high accountability will result in alienation and resentment from the members of the organization. One that is too loose with little collective focus may result in drift and inertia. And so the task is to provide a structure that guides, but allows for flexibility along the change process.

Secret number three is “**Capacity Building Prevails**”. While many great leaders know this to be true, few do little to address it. Building capacity within an organization allows for the sharing of responsibility and leadership roles. First, the leader must select individuals well suited for the tasks at hand and then they must invest in their development. It is crucial to provide encouragement and opportunities for practice of newly acquired skills.

Fullan recommends that great organizations provide mentor programs, trainings, and other forms of support in order to develop people and therefore a promise of continually developing the organization; a kind of sustainability for the future. This will support the notion that great leadership is determined more by what happens when a leader leaves than what happens while they are with the organization. If capacity has been effective the practices and procedures developed will continue with or without the leader present.

The fourth secret “**Learning is the Work**”; is 50% relentless consistency to the organizations’ goals and values and 50% willingness to change, (Fullan, 2008). He also stresses that the whole organization needs to be implementing consistently whatever is determined as best practices. Even if 70% are relentless there will still be a breakdown in effectiveness of the change process. However, while the consistency goes on the idea of continuous improvement sparks the need for change. There are always areas that need to be improved and refined. That constant seeking perfection is a drive that spurs effective organizations forward. A culture of continuous improvement must prevail. Habits of diligence, ingenuity and a fighting spirit that looks for what else needs to be done, are key characteristics.

A culture of continuous improvement involves identifying critical knowledge, transferring knowledge using job instruction and verifying learning and success. This is a continuous process and not something that stops once something is accomplished.

Secret number 5; “**Transparency Rules**”. A superintendent as well as all district administrators need to model with deliberateness the naked truth about the condition of the school district, what they plan to do and by when. They need to take responsibility for mistakes and not be afraid to apologize and learn from their errors. Transparency is assessing, communicating and acting on data pertaining to what, how and outcomes of the change effort, (Fullan, 2008). It also means to treat educators with dignity, and respect. Honoring them by sharing the truth in even in the face of pressure by punitive measures of the No Child Left Behind Act. It is not necessary to hear from the district administration on everything and concerning every matter, but it should be with regular

consistency on matters identified as deserving of the utmost of attention. Here often one needs to reframe from being judgmental. This idea also refers to transparency of data. Fullan explains that simply publishing data results can do more harm than good, but rather he recommends that a set of ground rules be employed in conjunction when data results are published:

1. Schools should be compared to themselves and the progress they have made.
2. Compare schools with similar neighboring schools.
3. Examine results relative to an absolute standard; how close are schools in achieving a target or 100% literacy.
4. Set attainable targets.
5. Build capacity by establishing best teaching practice to improve instruction and performance.
6. Remain cautious about drawing conclusions about results based only on a year's worth of data, but rather look at 3-year trends.
7. If schools are not making improvements they must devise an intervention plan, (Fullan, 2008 p.97 & 98).

Lastly, secret six is “**systems learn**” and when all five of the previous ingredients are mastered and implemented then the system as a whole will learn. One way systems learn is by focusing on developing many leaders, rather than relying on just a few key leaders. Secondly, organizations learn these leaders need to approach complexity with a combination of humility and faith (Fullan, 2008). It is to the organization's credit if no one real person is seen as the reason for success, but rather the organization is filled with leaders who get the job done well, together. It is impossible for no one person to be able

to predict the future problems and concerns and so there exists a need for interdependence. To accomplish this Pfeffer and Sutton (2006), recommend:

1. Leaders act as if they are in control, project confidence, and talk about the future (Visionary), even while recognizing and acknowledging the organizational realities and their own limitations. (Act and talk as if you are in control and project confidence).
2. Leaders may have a tendency to lose their behavioral inhibitions succumb to destructive forces due to the adulation they may receive. They need to avoid this and maintain an attitude of wisdom and a healthy dose of modesty. (Take credit and some blame when appropriate.)
3. Leaders must learn how and when to get out of the way and let others make contributions. (Talk about the future).
4. Perhaps the best way to describe a healthy system is one in which leaders act as architects of an organization system, culture team or community and establish the conditions and preconditions for others to succeed within the organization. (Be specific about the few things that matter and keep repeating them.)

With these principles condensed, leaders can create the conditions conducive to change

Chapter Three: Methodology

White Bird (K.T. Tunstall)

White Bird with a black tail
Eyes dark, face so pale
Do you know what your future holds
Over your side of the road

White Bird with a black tail
Look like an open sail
Made me look up from my shoes
To show me what you stand to lose

White Bird White Bird
With your face so pale
White Bird White Bird
Where'd you get that tail
White Bird White Bird
With a black tail

White feathers dipped in tar
It's hard to tell how old you are
Wondering how much you know
About all of us below

Half of you is heavenly
Showing off your purity
The rest of you is from the street
Like a line where they both meet

White Bird White Bird
With your face so pale
White Bird White Bird
Where'd you get that tail

White Bird White Bird
With your face so pale
White Bird White Bird
With a black tail

Introduction

White Bird depicts the innocence of our youth while inflicting the harshness of the realities of the real world upon them; damaging and hindering their spirit far before their time.

While the data will indicate how much students of color and poverty don't know; based on white middle class assessments; I am often stunned at how much they know of the street savvy real world. They are so young and yet the realities of their world are far beyond what their young years would indicate. Their ability to problem solve may not be academia related, but their ability to problem solve in the real world in order to survive can be astonishing.

While having lunch with ten fourth graders and discussing what they wished to pursue as a major when they went to college, all but one wanted to go to college to pursue a profession, we discussed a book they read called "Tight Times", a book about a father who loses his job and can't afford many of the opportunities for his child that more fortunate students take for granted, such as owning a puppy. The purpose of the selection was to build on inferencing skills in our students by using a model text our students could relate to. Right away when they read the part of the father coming home at noon, they inferred the father had lost his job. This was an everyday experience my students could relate to. Eight out of ten of these students were living with relatives and guardians other than their biological parents. The parents were incarcerated, living in Mexico or elsewhere and had given their children up to be raised by someone else. These are the

realities of students of color and poverty, so young, pure and innocent, yet full of too many adult experiences.

This study focused on what behaviors must exist in order to increase the achievement in a low performing, identified as an at-risk school. Specifically, the behaviors of the teachers, parents and administrators will be observed to identify what impact this has on increasing student achievement.

A qualitative research tradition was preferred for this type of study as it allows meanings and interpretations to be negotiated with human data sources because it is the subjects' realities that the researcher attempts to reconstruct (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988).

A case study methodology recorded the changes that took place over time to move Amazing Elementary School from a low achieving, stable school to an average performing, significantly improved school, with sustained growth for a period of four years. Case Study was well suited for this kind of research because it seeks to explore in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. The case was bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995).

The data collection took place over a period of an entire school year from September 2008- May 2009. The interview questions were field tested in another Title I school. The feedback from the field test was used to bring clarity, and adjust ordering of the questions for the interview format; this provided clearer purpose for the study.

Observations of various teams were conducted during September-December. Faculty meetings, committees and grade level teams were observed to glean information about team dynamics and behaviors exhibited that contributed to Amazing Elementary School's success. The interviews were conducted from February through May. March through May observations were conducted in classrooms to verify findings found in the interview setting.

Table 2

Timeline for Data Collection

Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May
Team Structure observations								
					Interviews conducted			
						Classroom Observations		

Role of the Researcher

My role as both a principal of a low performing at-risk school and researcher has prepared me in unique ways for this study. First, I naturally have a keen interest in schools with similar challenges to those of my school, which are experiencing sustained success. I wanted to find a school with similar challenges to my school that had experienced increased student achievement, but has also managed to retain this continued growth in achievement over time. It is very difficult to find At-Risk schools that are making gains and maintaining these gains for periods longer than two or three years. My own school has shown gains, however, not sustained gains and hence my desire to learn more about what it takes to keep the momentum going.

Secondly, my preparation in the Ph.D. Educational Administration program at the University of Denver, Morgridge School of Education Graduate Studies has prepared me

for the role of researcher to gather data and information for studying this subject. In addition, my 30 years in the education profession at all levels as a classroom teacher, special education teacher, staff development trainer, district mentor to new teachers and administrator have also prepared me for this endeavor.

Thirdly, during the 1995 school year I was afforded a unique opportunity and was awarded a Teacher Action Research Grant through my school district. Participants chose a subject to study, developed protocols to gather data, researched the topic, chose a site to study, developed a coding system for examining themes and patterns, made meaning from this and then wrote up the findings. It was very much like a shorter version of a dissertation. I was totally engrossed with this and found myself deeply involved, ignoring many of the everyday tasks that I probably should have been attending to. My topic was Multiple Intelligences. I discovered during this more simplistic endeavor my love of inquiry and data gathering. I seem to have a keen fondness for observing human behavior. I have always been curious and amazed by the behaviors of humans, no matter the subject area. I have often contemplated what drives these behaviors and why these specific behaviors were selected.

Lastly, I was intensely interested in this research to gain a deeper understanding of why Title I school struggled so and why there were so few Title I schools to select from who met my criteria. I was named a Title I principal in 2004/2005 and was both excited and anxious about the challenge ahead of me. I found in my first several years as a Title I principal I could affect positive changes in limited ways, but it was never sustainable. An example would be the year I was awarded a Reading Achievement Grant

from the Colorado Department of Education. I used the funds, which always have a pretty strict parameter of use, to hire a reading interventionist for my 2nd and 3rd grade teams. Both of these individuals became a full functioning member of each grade level; participating in planning sessions and discussions of assessment results. This person's duties included pull out intervention for students functioning in the top of the bottom quartile as well as push-in activities to assist with implementation of reading strategies during other content areas. During this year our 3rd grade made significant gain in reading and even made AYP.

Another example occurred when we were awarded another CDE grant for participating in an on-site audit. Upon completion of the audit and receiving the results of audit, we targeted ways we could improve our instruction in content areas. One way we accomplish this was to hire a math coach to work with our teachers on improving math instruction. As a result of this, our school made AYP in math that year.

However, all of these interventions have not yielded permanent results. They were temporary solutions to on-going concerns. Grants can provide a band-aid solution to deep and on-going struggles, however, when the money runs out so does the band-aid and the same struggles return. Often due to higher than normal and continuous turn over at Title I schools coaching on a temporary basis only serves to assist with the teachers at the site at the time and usually are not retained from year to year. The concept of coaches is an effective practice if teachers are retained in the school where the targeted coaching takes place and is needed.

So, after 4 years of struggling to move up and down the performance continuum I was growing frustrated at not finding sustainable ways to assist my school on improving. There was few Title I schools who are able to sustain growth beyond a 2 year time period. I was interested therefore in finding a Title I school that had the same principal for at least 4 years and had demonstrated sustained growth. Amazing Elementary School met my criteria for this.

So, as researcher I gathered data through observation, interviews, and reviewing of school and district documents. I acted as a participant/observer when appropriate, using my listening, observing and questioning skills in equal parts.

Context of Study

This research study examined the behaviors found in administrators, staff and parents at the Amazing School Community during the school years from 2003 through 2007 to determine what changes have occurred that have allowed Amazing School to continuously sustain and improve its high achievement based on CSAP results. Interview questions included thoughts about previous practices compared to more recent practices that may have impacted the increased student achievement. The Amazing School Community has just completed its fourth year in which student achievement continues to climb and show growth according to the state accountability report. Therefore, participants included in this study were faculty members who had been employed at the school for a period of 4 years or more. This would ensure inclusion of individuals who could compare practices and procedures in place prior to the structures implemented leading to increased achievement.

Douglas Reeves five characteristics found in schools with at least 90 percent free and reduced lunches, 90 percent minority and 90 percent achievement rate were used as guiding questions to examine behaviors demonstrated by teachers, administrators, and parents as well as, Fullan's six secrets to sustaining change (Fullan, 2008).

The Setting

Initially, the researcher was interested in observing schools of high poverty that were closing the achievement gap over **a sustained period of time**. However, that proved difficult to locate. Many schools are doing a lot to address the achievement gap. However, locally it is nearly impossible to find elementary schools at risk that are narrowing the achievement gap and keeping this gap narrow over time.

So, I set out to locate an elementary school with a high poverty and minority rate that had proven its change efforts affective according the Colorado Student Assessment Program, which rates schools both on performance and growth. Amazing Elementary School has been in existence since 1958. Previously it had posted a rating of low and stable improvement. Over a period of four consecutive years it gradually has improved to a rating of stable and average to average and significantly improved. It is a school that has about the same amount of students, population configuration and is located in a community similar to that of my school.

While there are many, many variables that contribute to the success or failure of a school one variable I wanted to eliminate was that of change in administration. So, while other schools can attribute their failures or successes to the a new or existing administration, I wanted to find a site that had the same principal during the whole time

of continued improvement, thereby removing that as one of the attributes. Amazing School has had the same administrator for the last five years.

Demographics

According to the Colorado Department of Education School Accountability Report Amazing School has an enrollment of 502 students serving grades K-5, (2006/2007 School Accountability Report). Amazing Elementary School offers a full-day tuition free kindergarten program. Eighty-two percent of the student population qualifies for free and reduced lunches. In accordance with Federal guidelines and *No Child Left Behind* qualification as Title I school requires that 40% or more of its population receives free and reduced Lunches.

The stability of the community is 92% currently, and has been declining every year for the last several years. The school has 30 full time teachers and three part time teachers. There are two administrators and 12 full time paraprofessionals, two part time para- professionals and a total of 60 staff in the building.

The community served by Amazing Elementary School is a lower middle class working community in an urban area of Denver, Colorado. The surrounding community supports mainly industrial type businesses and is a mixture of many cultures with Hispanic being the predominate population served at the school.

Amazing Elementary School has consistently increased its scores and performance rating since 2002/2003 school year. For our purposes we were examining change efforts implemented since that time.

Table 3

CSAP Results From 2000-2007

Year	Overall Academic Performance on State Assessment	Academic Growth of Students
2000/2001	Low	NA
2001/2002	Low	Stable
2002/2003	Low	Stable
2003/2004	Average	NA
2004/2005	Average	Significant Improvement
2005/2006	Average	Improvement
2006/2007	Average	Improvement

The Amazing Elementary School consistently scores higher on the state assessments than the rest of the comparable schools in the district and remained competitive with the rest of the state on performance results.

Table 4

2007 CSAP results for Amazing Elementary School by Content Area with Comparisons to District and State Results

Content Areas	Amazing Elementary School	District	State
Grades 3-5 Reading	68%	50%	68%
Grades 3-5 Writing	52%	37%	53%
Grades 3-5 Math	66%	49%	68%

Data Collection

Multiple data sources were used to answer the main question and five sub-guiding research questions.

Interviews were conducted to include one principal, a TOSA (teacher on special assignment) who carried out many duties similar to an assistant principal. Five teachers were interviewed and two classified staff members. Two of these staff members were also interviewed from a parent's perspective as they had children that attended the school.

Observations included collecting data at faculty meetings, grade level team meetings, data discussions and classroom observations. The researcher first observed whole group settings to collect types of behaviors that were prominent. Then interviews were conducted collecting individual perspectives on the school's functioning. Lastly, individual classroom observations were conducted to confirm information collected during the interviews. While students were not included as interviewees their perspectives are included as a composite of the observations. Hallway, cafeteria and classroom behaviors of students were noted in general and summarized.

Lastly, documents were reviewed to determine consistency of Amazing Elementary School's goals and intentions. These documents included the district's Grade Level Essential Targets, CSAP (Colorado Student Assessment Program), results for Amazing Elementary School, Amazing Elementary School's Accreditation Contract 2007-2008, Colorado Department of Education School Accountability Reports, 2000/2001 through 2006/2007 and staff weekly bulletins. Other less important documents included various artifacts created by the staff, i.e. SOAR's document for

student behavior, graphic organizers, MAPs (Measurement of Academic Progress) and Dibels (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) student profiles and graphs.

Analysis between observations, interviews and documents was conducted to determine themes and patterns confirming structures and behaviors in place that lead to the success of the school.

Table 5 outlines the research questions and their evaluation indicators.

Table 5

Research Questions and Evaluation Indicators

Research Questions	Indicators
1. What behaviors must exist by: a. Administrators b. Teachers c. Parents d. Students in order to increase student achievement and sustain continued growth over time in an at-risk school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teacher, administrator and parent Interview Results ▪ Observation of Team Structures and documentation by researcher ▪ Classroom instruction observations
2. What changes or phases occurred in order to reach improved achievement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interview results ▪ Observation and documentation by researcher ▪ Academic achievement results
3. What obstacles were over-come?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of documents ▪ Observation and documentation by researcher ▪ Interview results
4. What methods/strategies/structures were implemented to over-come these obstacles?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interview results ▪ Observation and documentation by researcher ▪ Review of data results
5. What are the elements that need to exist to create a more effective learning environment that produces continued increases in student achievement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview results ▪ Observation and documentation by researcher
6. What areas, (i.e. culture, climate, professional development, etc.) have been	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interview results ▪ Teaming Dynamics Observation and

Sample Selection

In order to protect anonymity a list of teachers at Amazing School will be generated by the secretary. The administrator will then highlight all of the staff present at the school since 2004. The researcher randomly selected 5-10 teachers and 5-10 parents to participate. Individuals were invited to attend a one on one private meeting with the researcher where the study will be explained. Those agreeing to participate were told that their real identities will be protected and fictitious names will be used in the final report and other references that may identify them will also be changed to protect their identities as well.

Parents, Teachers and Administrators were with provided letters of informed consent in both English and Spanish (Appendices C and D) prior to the interview. As well as being provided it in writing, it will be explained to them in their first language. They were asked if they have any questions prior to commencing with the interview. All of their questions were be answered by the researcher prior to the interview(s). It was made clear that at anytime they felt uncomfortable they may discontinue the interview or withdraw from the research project without fear of any repercussions. Each participant will be given a gift card to a local store as incentive and appreciation for their participation.

Data Analysis

Interpretation of the data began with the case study. Stake (1995) outlines five steps to understanding the information gathered. The first step, reviewing data under

various possible interpretations (Stake, 1995), was accomplished by triangulating the perspectives from the teachers, administrators, and parent constituencies. Outside viewpoints may also be considered, including the Amazing Elementary School District's Supervisors, The Colorado Department of Education and possible other sources. From these multiple sources, patterns of what worked at Amazing Elementary School will emerge, Stake's second step to understanding data (1995). Connections between changes in implementation practices and attitudes and behaviors will be identified. Conclusions about effective practices will be drawn and organized into an initial report that will be reviewed by several members of the Amazing Elementary School staff. If the staff members have differing recollections of how the processes occurred to produce the subsequent results and how events transpired, the data will be re-examined and confirmed to produce the final report.

Ethical Issues

As both researcher and administrator in a neighboring school district, it is possible that my work could cross paths in the future with those participating in the research study. It is also possible that through the interviews, observations and group discussions information may be revealed that was not previously obvious. This information may appear as positive or negative and could offend some members. Therefore, fictitious names were used to protect the identity of those participating. Also, the study results will be made available to those participating in the study and while they may be able to identify their own comments in the study the identity of all others will be protected to prevent future incrimination. .

Anticipated Limitations

While there are many schools with similar characteristics to those of Amazing Elementary School who are not achieving the same success, it should be noted that Amazing school is only one school, with a unique set of variables, challenges and supports. Finding exactly the same set of circumstances in any other school or district is unlikely. In fact, finding very many Title I schools within the state of Colorado that met the criteria of 4 years of sustained growth, while not changing leadership yielded very slim results.

While one might look for generalizations from the Amazing Elementary School study that can be applied to schools universally, this study was conducted at a set place and time, with a group of participants who are unique within and around the school. Following the change process at Amazing Elementary School gives the reader insight into this one case.

Prior Spring CSAP scores since 2001 were presented to show students' prior lack of success and then increased achievement beginning in 2003/2004 school year at Amazing Elementary School.

While the researcher made several attempts at contacting different parents, eventually the only parents responding and agreeing to the interviews were parents who also worked at the site. It is possible that these individuals present a slightly different view point of the school than non-school associated parents. Their input and feedback could be seen as a limitation to this study.

Chapter Four: Data Collection

The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Overview

A method was needed to collect interview data and organize it into a meaningful structure relative to the ways schools function. When Elliot Eisner's work was first encountered, it seemed odd to describe educational qualitative research in terms of a connoisseurship. However, upon further review, his explanation and reasoning in selecting this terminology emerged as a plausible means to describe an educational setting. Indeed, to criticize when analyzing the structures and functions of an organization could possibly hold much negativity, hence to use the term criticism conjures undesirable intentions. Connoisseur comes from the Latin meaning of *to know*. To really know one's subject matter and to be involved to such an extent that all of one's modalities are involved; to devour the entire experience and environment, is educational connoisseurship. This has been my goal and desire.

Elliot Eisner's five dimensions of school description were selected as a method to structure interview questions incorporating the concepts of Doug Reeves characteristics found in effective schools and the six ingredients necessary to sustain change according to Michael Fullan. A lens was required by which to examine the happenings at Amazing Elementary School and to fully analyze why it was achieving sustained success.

Elliot's five dimensions of schooling together present a picture of a school's ecology, (Eisner, 1988). The five dimensions include the intentional, the structural, the curricular, the pedagogical and the evaluative.

Questions under intentional relate to the goals or aims of the school. These goals are found in the behaviors that focus on what the school wants to accomplish and how it wants others to view them. These can be found in what is explicitly stated and written around the school, but it also refers to what is observed around the building and in classrooms. Many times the intentional dimension refers to values and beliefs.

The structural dimension refers to the organization of the school. How the school day is utilized. How blocks of time are organized. Who is responsible for what? It also includes how work is evaluated and what content is to be taught. All of which affect the ability of teachers to interact with students, other teachers and the ability to plan.

Curricular is the third dimension of schooling. This is an important part of any school and for any connoisseur of education to consider when examining the effectiveness of a school. A school's curriculum plays an important role in the effectiveness of engaging students and this is critical to achievement. Engaged students often have less discipline issues as well. While a curriculum may be written using the same format and intended expectations from grade level to grade level, it may be interpreted very differently by individual teachers. Whether there is fluidity from grade level to grade level is most often determined by the individual schools not by what is written in a curriculum manual. And while a curriculum is often determined by a

district's learning services department, how it is executed depends of upon a school's delivery system, philosophy, leadership and that individual teacher.

The Pedagogical Dimension is the fourth area of schooling considered when examining a school. This area examines the attitudes, beliefs, and philosophy and skill level of the teacher. The level of efficacy; faithfulness and fidelity to curriculum and instructional techniques, all dictated by the teacher. In addition to how the teacher interprets the curricula is how students learn. Learning is not limited by what the teacher teaches. Much learning takes place indirectly, indiscriminately and extraneously. Other factors are at play in determining what students learn, including other students and teachers. Students learn vicariously through just living in the educational environment. Curriculum resources and technology add to this learning equation. No two teachers will teach the same lesson the same way, partly due to how they view the curriculum, partly due to the configuration of the class, past training and experiences and student needs. Additionally, what naturally comes forth during each lesson's discussion brings about added dimensions and learning.

Teachers teach by example, by covert cues, by emphasizing some aspects of content more than others, by rewarding students directly and indirectly, by the animation and excitement they display in class, by the level of affection they provide to students, by the clarity of their explanations, and more, (Eisner, 1991).

Part of a lesson is always scripted and planned, part is spontaneous and unpredictable. Dewey says, "It is one of the greatest of educational fallacies to assume that children learn only what they are being taught at the time, (Dewey, 1938).

The final dimension is Evaluative. This area includes feedback, how and the way it is conveyed. It is also the reporting of progress to various individuals, and appraising

teacher and student work. It is more than test results, but inclusive of value judgments about the quality of situations, processes and objects, (Eisner, 1991). It occurs everywhere all day long. It can consist of formal, informal, diagnostic, formative and summative information. The evaluation process can occur as self-reflection or can be interpreted by others, but whatever method of evaluation a certain level of risk taking is always necessary by the student and appreciated by the teacher. Whatever the evaluation practices, they are among the most powerful forces influencing the priorities, culture and climate of a school, (Eisner, 1991).

Subject Selection/Description

Amazing Elementary School is amazing; it is rare that a highly impacted school with so many challenges can demonstrate improvement more than two years in a row without some decline. The school was selected using the Colorado State Accountability Reporting system. First, Title 1 schools were identified. Data was analyzed to determine which Title 1 schools; schools with 39% or more of free and reduced lunch populations had shown consistent gains over a minimum of four years time. Prior to 2010 the Colorado Department of Education assigns a Performance Rating of Unsatisfactory, Low, Average, High or Excellent based on how many students scored proficient or advanced on the Colorado Student Assessment Program. In addition a Growth Rating of Decline, Stable, Improved and Significantly Improved is assigned. This score indicates the degree to which the overall student body academic performance grew from year to year.

Amazing Elementary School was selected as determined by a baseline Academic Performance rating of Low in 2000/2001 improving steadily to a 2006/2007 Academic

Performance rating of Average with Improved Academic Growth. Additionally, according to the SARs report of 2006/2007 Amazing Elementary School met 30 out of 30 academic targets, where previously not all targets were met.

Prior to beginning the study the researcher presented the purpose and logistics of the study to the staff at large during a faculty meeting. The principal was then asked to identify staff members with four or more years of tenure at Amazing Elementary School and who could speak to the changes occurring at Amazing Elementary School. Twelve staff members were identified. Once these 12 staff members were identified an e-mail letter, with consent form and demographic sheet was sent to these individuals inviting them to participate in the study. As incentive a \$25.00 gift certificate was given to each participant who completed the interviews. Of these 12 candidates; two administrators, five teachers, two classified staff members and two parents are volunteered. Two of the staff members also served as parent perspectives. The parents were selected by obtaining names of individuals from the principal to be contacted. While the researcher did contact other parents only two were able to participate. The total number of participants then was 9 with two overlapping as employees and parents.

School Description

Ask anyone and they can describe a school, after all it is an experience common to almost everyone. However, there is more to a school than meets the eye. Its physical description is easy to identify and more common to our collective experience than perhaps the more intangible evidence of how a school operates day to day, it's collective philosophy of educating children and how it operates within defined parameters.

Every school has a soul, a personality, a climate and culture uniquely all its own. Amazing School is no different. As you begin approaching the entrance, you can't help but wonder what makes this school so special, so successful, so significant. If appearances are any indicators Amazing Elementary School's entrance gives nothing away. It is a plain, somewhat drab, 1959 red brick building. The architecture is out-dated; the building is in need of some attention. Off to the left of the entrance is a wall mounted marquee, it too is seemingly worn and weathered. There is nothing new, nothing bright in the lobby. A wobbly easel holds a sign informing parents of an upcoming event. Old display cases made of pine and glass hold antique looking plaques and items of recognition. The carpet is dull and worn. And yet there is an energy, a buzz, a determination, an intentional deliberateness with which the individuals move about the halls that draws the visitors attention away from the esthetic surroundings.

Amazing Elementary School serves 502 students preK-school – fifth grade. 78% of the population is of Hispanic ethnicity, 18.6% are white and 3.4% are of other ethnicities, (School Report Card for Amazing Elementary School, 2007/2008). Over 82% of Amazing Elementary School's population are eligible for free or reduced lunches, (2007 SARs report). 38.7% of the students are non-English proficient, 19.6% students are limited English proficient and 2.0% are Fluent in English, 39.7% students speak English as a first language, (School Report Card, 2007/2008). There are 33 full and part-time teachers, 14 full and part-time para-professionals, 1 administrator, 6 other certified staff, including teacher librarian, counselor and coaches and 6 additional full and part-time support staff, totaling 60 staff members. This does not include the teacher

candidates, various retired and volunteer staff. The result is an overall student to teacher ratio of 16.18 to 1. There are 6 half day sessions of kindergarten and four classes at each grade level. Special education and gifted and talented services are also provided.

The average years of teaching experience at Amazing Elementary School is ten years, as compared to 8 years of teaching experience in the district. It is reported that once teachers come to Amazing Elementary School they do not want to leave. Many teachers report working on weekends and during the summers with their fellow grade level team members to plan and prepare voluntarily because of the high sense of efficacy. And yet the sense of positive mental well-being does not appear to be lacking, even with so much time devoted to school work beyond the “normal” school day.

The office in the front of the building is off to the left of the main entrance. It is crowded with people, food and paraphernalia. Traffic isles are crowded. There are four entry ways leading off of the main office, one to a storage room, one to the Learning Coordinator’s office, another to the clinic and the final one to the principal’s office. Immediately off to the right of the office entry way is the common cubby mail slots found in all schools, the lingering antiquated form of e-mail delivery, each has a staff member’s name on it. Directly above this are boxes labeled with various group names; Partners in Education (the parent and community members support group), UCD partnership (University of Colorado at Denver Residency and Partnership with Amazing Elementary School) and others.

The UCD partnership is a key structural component of Amazing Elementary School, for it is from this unique partnership that more than half of the staff members

have been hired. The UCD residency program is a year- long internship program in which teacher candidates at the University of Colorado at Denver spend a full year working in collaboration with a trained mentor teacher. Teacher Candidates work four full days in the same classroom under the guidance of teacher leader who receives support through the University. The candidates essentially act as a second teacher and participate in all the same aspects as the regular classroom teachers. There are 8 teacher candidates at Amazing Elementary School the year this study was conducted. It is important to note that when interviewed Linda, the principal, reported that this program was unique to most teacher preparation programs in that teachers spent the entire year from beginning to end and had the opportunity, unlike most teacher preparation programs, to experience what it was like to open a school, establish a classroom community and provide closure with all the end of the year events, assessments and planning for the up-coming year. Linda, commented that the benefits in having a program in her school were many:

- It provided a greater ratio of teachers to students in order to accommodate greater demands of differentiation
- A more thorough way of indoctrinating future teachers to the complete culture, philosophy and practices of the school
- Essentially provided a year- long interview process to prospective interview candidates
- Allowed practicing teacher to elevate their own teaching practice as models to potential teachers and forces teacher leaders to always be practicing at an optimal level when they are constantly being observed.
- Kept current teachers appraised of current progressive teaching practices as part of its partnership with the university, (the give and take relationship of a true mentor/mentee affiliation)

This on-going partnership has been part of Amazing Elementary School's culture for several years. This partnership supports the notion of on-going learning as an integral part of Amazing Elementary School. It is this feeling of "everyone wants to know" that prevails throughout the building; in every meeting, in every conversation and in every classroom.

To the left of the office entry way is the space for the two secretaries separated from the entry way by a common counter. One can always find candy, baked goods, words of encouragement and smiles here. Parents are coming and going; signing students in, asking for assistance and clarification, enrolling students, etc. Three students are sitting against the wall between the clinic and the Learning Coordinator's office. They are waiting to see the principal; to read to her and receive their books; one student is waiting to be seen by the health aide.

Linda, the principal pops in and out of her office, acknowledging everyone. First, she attends to the two students who have come down to read to her and share their accomplishments. They are immediately rewarded with a book of their choice. Linda keeps a stock of several hundred books in her office. This is truly a passion and she celebrates with anyone else around within earshot of the great efforts accomplished by these two students.

Yes, I use books; they're very powerful in my school. Sometimes I'll use them for a new student, whose parents are registering him and he has to hang out while they do all the paperwork, and I invite him in my office and we're looking... all of the sudden we've had a 10 minute conversation about books, and he or she walks out with a book. So I don't necessarily use them for academic goals, but it's about academics. It's about a level of reading. Which I didn't have as child... (Linda)

The more than 500 students at Amazing Elementary School attend pre-school and kindergarten through 5th grade. The school's bilingual program is structured so each grade level has a classroom that teaches academics in English with Spanish support. When a student is identified as NEP (Non-English Proficient) they are placed into this classroom with an emphasis in developing language proficiencies. Once the students' score high enough on the CELA (Colorado English Language Acquisition Test) they are placed into all English- speaking classrooms.

Across the hallway from the office are windows opening out onto an outside courtyard. Dominating this outdoor courtyard are large colorful banners or posters. The courtyard is flanked by the windows of classrooms on two sides and the cafeteria on the third side. There is much movement in the hallways. Teachers and students are on the move. There is a quiet, optimistic, respectful hum in the hallways. Everyone encountered is greeted in a cheerful, welcoming way; as if they know you and you have been here all along. Many of the bulletin boards are covered with writing the students have completed as a result of an IB unit just concluded.

Amazing Elementary School was approved as an International Baccalaureate school two years prior. The district made the decision to pursue the IB application shortly after Linda became principal; approaching her with the idea as the first school in the district to under-take the rigorous process of application; challenging the notion that students of color and high poverty could manage the rigorous requirements of the IB program. This required the staff to align district curricular academic units in science and/or social studies with the 10 Learner Profiles and 12 Attitudes in the Primary Years

Program of the International Baccalaureate Program and is taught throughout the year, Kindergarten through 5th grade. This process took the better part of a year. The change was challenging and the time investment was great. Many teachers questioned this decision and the time commitment to re-doing all of their lesson plans to accommodate the Learner Profiles and Attitudes. During this change process, Linda was steadfast, supportive and encouraging, guiding the staff through the process, always positive that the move would pay-off. She was intentional and strategic, listening to their needs and providing time to plan and enforcement when necessary.

As a result of Amazing Elementary Schools' incorporation of the IB learner profiles and attitudes within their units and has elevated its expectations of what elementary learners are capable of. Despite the fact that many at first worried about the usual excuses and blaming that exists whenever students of color and poverty are given increased academic expectations; they won't do the homework, their parents won't support them, etc., Amazing Elementary fulfilled all the requirements to be approved as an International Baccalaureate School.

As part of the IB requirements students must maintain a student portfolio with a body of evidence demonstrating competency and comprehension of these profiles and attitudes. This evidence is mostly in the form of constructive responses, narratives and performance assessments; however, in kindergarten and first grade students may draw illustrations and label the drawings according to the profile or attitude being taught in conjunction with a unit.

The IB program also prescribes to a world-wide languages and inquiry approach. This makes perfect sense in a school as diverse at Amazing Elementary School. While nationally the majority of elementary schools participating in the primary years program of the International Baccalaureate program are not Title I affiliated schools, almost half of the schools in Colorado designated PYP schools are Title I schools. Challenging the notion that only privileged students may be capable of such a demanding curriculum. Amazing Elementary School feels that students that are not necessarily from privileged situations can benefit from the structured and very strategic delivery of how to think at a higher and deeper level. This underscores that building an understanding of the world around us will promote greater understanding of one another.

An example of this can be found in the following kindergarten lesson. The lesson being taught incorporated Dr. Seuss's Green Eggs and Ham story. The teachers took actual eggs and ham and colored them with green food dye. Students were focusing on the literary concept of making predictions as a strategy good reader's use. The IB learner profile being taught was being a risk-taker in your learning. Teachers had students write down a prediction about the green eggs and ham. The next day students completed a read aloud with the teachers and tried the ham and eggs, comparing tastes and appearance. Students were then asked to compare their predictions with the actual exercise. This is just one example of how the teachers at Amazing Elementary School have worked to develop units that incorporate both the IB concepts and their own required curricular standards.

Table 6

IB Learner Profiles and Attitudes

Profiles	Attitudes
Caring	Appreciation
Communicator	Respectful
Inquirer	Curious
Knowledgeable	Independent
Principled	Integrity
Thinker	Committed
Open-minded	Enthusiastic
Balanced	Creative
Risk-taker	Cooperation
Reflective	Tolerance
	Empathy
	Confidence

To support the development of these profiles and attitudes, students set goals, both academic and social. Students can determine a specific attainment of a score on their regular MAPs testing or earning a SOAR acknowledgement by demonstrating safety, opportunity to learn, achievement or respect. Once they achieve a goal they can go down to the principal’s office and select a free book to take home. There is much attention and celebration given when a student sets and meets a goal.

Once Amazing Elementary School became an International Baccalaureate School it set about determining what else needed to be in place. Two other areas reminded a concern, discipline and behavior and differentiating for individual needs. Through the support of Colorado Department of Education the Positive Behavior Support System became the next implemented program to address student behavior and discipline. The staff worked hard to develop a program of behavior expectations, specifically defining “What it looks like around the building”. The staff defined what behavior should look

like in the areas of safety, opportunity to learn, achievement and respect. Locations around the building, such as the classrooms, media center, hallways, cafeteria, playground, assemblies and bathrooms were described. This is posted and reinforced periodically around the school. Students can also earn recognition for demonstrating these behaviors.

The PBS (Positive Behavior Support) team worked to develop, train and implement this. All teachers are members of teams throughout the building. Other teams include; math, literacy, technology, Culture and Climate, ELL(English Language Learners) , PBS (Positive Behavior Support) , and RTI (Response to Intervention). Every member of a grade level is expected to participate on at least one team. Teams meet on Thursday or Friday mornings twice a month for 45 minutes. Teams use a method of professional learning communities approach to analyze data and determine what next steps need to be in place to address a given area, (DeFour, 2005). Teams then report out during faculty meetings every Tuesday mornings for 25 minutes to keep staff informed and trained as needed.

One area the school is particularly focused on this past year is developing their Response to Intervention process. A team of teachers, administrator, student advocate and parent meet every Friday to discuss interventions for students struggling. The RTI team developed a process and trained the staff to analyze student data, progress monitor students' performance and track data. Students receive interventions and are progress monitored. This progress is communicated to the parents and classroom teacher. A member from the RTI is reasonable for meeting with the teacher periodically to

determine if additional interventions are necessary or if the student is progressing well enough to be taken out of interventions. The RTI process uses a 3-tiered approach to responses to struggling students. The first tier is those students who are performing at grade level or above with normal classroom instruction. This is usually 80 percent of a given school's population and is known as the green zone. The second tier is those students performing at least one grade behind. This is the yellow zone and is usually ten percent of a given school's population. These students receive modified instruction within the classroom. This differentiation can take the form of extended reading groups, eager groups, ability grouping for math concepts, and push-in assistance for other content areas, etc. The most intensive of the tiers is the red zone tier. This usually comprises five to ten percent of any given population. Amazing Elementary School processed eighty students during the 2008/2009 school year, almost 15 percent of its population.

Students in the red zone not only receive first best instruction within the classroom and some differentiation within the classroom, but in addition may receive some pull out interventions as well. They are continuously monitored for progress and their progress is discussed routinely with the classroom teacher, those providing additional interventions, administration, student advocates, who is a licensed psychologist, school achievement coaches and parents.

Amazing Elementary School holds grade level data conversations every Wednesday. Each grade level meets during their planning time. The administrators meet with all grade level teachers to specifically discuss individual student progress. Monitoring of student progress is part of the fabric of Amazing Elementary School.

Reading and math data help to determine whether students are making progress toward the Grade Level Essential Targets. The school uses the Dibels (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) reading assessment and the MAPs (Measurement of Academic Progress) to monitor this growth. If students are making progress there is discussion around what worked to move this student. If a student is not progressing then discussion revolves around how to move a student. Linda maintains a folder with each student's scores from week to week to monitor this progress. Using the Dibels system students move from intensive to strategic to benchmark, which is consider grade level.

Dibels (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy).

Dibels was first developed out of the University of Minnesota in the 1970's and 80's. It was based on measurement procedures for the curriculum based measurement. These were created by Deno, Mirkin, Fuchs, and Shinn, (<https://dibels.uoregon.edu>). Like CBM, Dibels is designed to be economical and an efficient indicator of student's progress to achieving the specific goal of reading.

Since it was first developed in the 70's and 80's it has been researched and refined extensively for its reliability and validity of measures as well as sensitivity to student change by the University of Oregon. The authors of Dibels were motivated to improve the educational outcomes for all students, but most especially for students of poor and diverse backgrounds. Research is on-going to continue to seek improvements.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills assesses students in the following areas:

- **Phonological Awareness;** initial sounds fluency and phonemic segmentation fluency

- **Alphabetic Principle and Phonics;** nonsense word fluency and oral reading fluency
- **Accuracy and fluency;** oral reading fluency and retell
- **Comprehension;** oral reading fluency
- **Vocabulary/oral language;** word use fluency

The Dibels measures these indicators as predictors for early literacy readiness. It does not measure all possible indicators such as:

- Rhyming
- Alliteration
- Blending
- Segmentation

It is an “indicator” of a student’s progress toward the long term phonemic awareness outcome of segmenting words. This is known as a General Outcome Measure. This is when a student’s progress is measured toward achieving a particular outcome. It differs from other formative measurements that are referred to as Mastery Measurements. End of unit tests are examples of mastery measurements. Dibels is not a mastery measurement. It does not measure a set of skills or content mastered. A teacher teaches a defined set of skills and then assesses mastery of these skills. The teacher then progresses on to the next set of skills, teaches those, and then assesses accordingly. Both the type and difficulty change over time so comparison of results from one unit to the next is not appropriate. This type of testing measures “has the student learned the content taught”. However, general outcome measurements assess whether a student is making progress towards a long-term goal; the goal here being reading. The feedback it provides

to teachers is whether the teaching methods used to achieve the goal of reading are effective and appropriate.

Dibels is designed to represent a broader sequence of skills to be taught. It is not designed to assess every scaffolded reading skill. Assessments are brief; taking approximately 10 minutes for each individual student. They are easily scored and interpreted by teachers, students and parents. This is an important point. Results are shared with students who learn quickly how to read and explain results. Students set goals around the next level they wish to attain. True motivation for owning improvement is present. This allows teachers more time teaching and adjusting lessons for students' needs, not long period in data analysis.

The benchmark goals represent minimum levels of performance in order for a student to be considered on track toward becoming a reader. "They indicate the probability of achieving early literacy goals." (Dibels: <https://dibels.uoregon.edu>). For a result to be considered at benchmark 80-85% of the students in the sample at that score and at that time had to achieve the next reading goal. (For progression purposes). Therefore, the probability of that student needing additional support to achieve that reading benchmark goal is very low.

Dibels includes cut off scores where the odds of achieving subsequent literacy goals are indicated. A teacher can determine that if a student receives a score below the 80-85% indicator then it is unlikely the student will achieve unless additional instructional supports are put into place. Amazing Elementary School uses this data to determine extra reading intervention groups the student may need to achieve to the next

level. Assessments are given often for students below grade level and therefore the weekly meetings are always full of discussions about students' progress and what will be done to provide for these additional resources. Sometimes it means moving a student to another skill level group, sometimes it means that the student receives two or more guided reading groups. Other times it means developing an instructional strategy to target a deficient skill. The intensity of the instruction is elevated. Sometime looking at how the delivery of reading instruction is analyzed to find more effective ways for the student to learn the strategies. Visual, auditory and kinesthetic instruction may be in order.

Dibels assesses students in Kindergarten through 6th grade. However, Amazing Elementary School uses the data for 2nd-5th grade only. Dibels recommends testing at the beginning, middle and end of the year. But additional assessment can be given. The authors of Dibels; Roland H. Good, III and Ruth Kaminiski developed the assessment in 1996, (Kaminski, R. A. & Good, R. H., 1998).

The effective use of this assessment and the MAPs assessment are a corner stone of the effective changes that occurred at Amazing Elementary School. It is crucial to note that not only have they changed what assessments they are using to monitor student progress, but how they use this data is very different. The key is to use data as a formative tool to measure progress toward a goal and not as a traditional mastery assessment. This helps to track where students are on the learning continuum and provides vital information to teachers so they can adjust their delivery of instruction in order to keep moving students along the continuum of learning.

MAPs (Measurement of Academic Progress).

The MAPs assessment is also not a mastery assessment, but is a general outcome measure as well. It is a computer adaptive assessment that measures academic progress in reading, mathematics, language usage and science. Growth is measured to inform teaching and learning.

Assessments are aligned to state wide measures on the Colorado Student Assessment Program. This information is used to inform teaching, adjust instruction as necessary so students move along the learning continuum and are well-prepared to take the mastery assessment at the state level at the conclusion of the year. The Northwest Evaluation Association has developed this measurement system to align with whatever state assessment each district is required to take.

Teachers use the results to plan targeted instructional lessons to address deficits in learning. This information can also be used to address professional learning with a school and address themes and patterns found as underlying deficits in instruction. Assessments are given on-line so teachers are freed up. Results are immediate and do not require teachers take time to administer or evaluate.

The MAPs test allows a student of a particular grade level to take a test at that grade and difficulty level in any one of the four content areas. The student begins by answering a question at the difficulty level of that corresponding grade. If the student misses the question the next questions is automatically adjusted to be of less difficulty. If the student fails to correctly respond to that question then the next question is easier than the previous question. This continues until the computer finds the correct difficulty level

in which to evaluate the student. Each time the student is assessed the computer remembers the last level the student was assessed. It then proceeds to assess from the previous level achieved and works forward.

Results in each content area are given immediately at the conclusion of the test. Students can set goals and see their progression over-time. An over-all RIT score is provided plus information around each goal performance area. For example in reading students are assessed in:

- Word meaning
- Literal comprehension
- Interpretive comprehension
- Evaluative Comprehension
- Literacy Concepts

Teachers can then compare this to a continuum of learning tool that allows them to interpret results into concepts that the student is ready to learn. Reading results also come with Lexile scores so teachers can decide what reading group students should be placed into and what are appropriate “just right” book selections.

Features of the MAPs test include:

- Providing a challenging individualized test for every student
- Tests are dynamically constructed to give accurate and reliable information on each student
- Assessments are untimed. Students are permitted to take as much time as needed to complete a test as long as they are making progress.

- Tests are taken for internal accountability. The information provided is about students in the district, school and classroom. (External norms are provided by NWEA if requested.)
- MAPs measures growth and indicates students are progressing toward pre-determined goals. Data can be looked at historically and is consistent from season to season-grade level to grade level. This way growth can be measured through consistent measures overtime.
- Results are received immediately at the conclusion of the assessment. The results are easily understood and are not held as secretive, but shared for understanding and ownership with the student. Students receive a sum score.
- Students can be tested up to four times a year in reading, mathematics, and language usage. Science can be tested up to three times a year.
- MAPs allows for differentiation, so critically necessary in schools with great ranges in learning levels. Like that found in Amazing Elementary School and nearly all schools that struggle with providing instruction for economically and diverse populations.

How do we foster growth for all students when they are performing at various places along the curriculum scale? The answer can be found in “knowing” where each student is performing along that scale. The MAPs measures this. Teachers can then deliver instruction directly related to the performance of each child.

Along with a score a skill strand is provided that aligns with the score. Skills are grouped into three categories:

1. Skills and Concepts to Enhance
2. Skills and Concepts to Develop
3. Skills and Concepts to Introduce

These are based on a continuum of skills in reading, mathematics, language usage and science ranging from very low levels to very high levels. These are tests that

determine mastery; rather they are for monitoring progress and assist teachers with determining the instructional level of each student. This particular information is perfectly suited to the culture at Amazing Elementary School where teachers meet daily and weekly to determine flexible groups to meet students' needs. This too helps teachers to be strategic in their planning. (<http://legacysupport.nwea.org>).

Students are placed in small learning groups by content area and grade level for extensions or enrichment. They are taught directly based on feedback from the MAPs assessment which aligns to the state standards and assessment system. When students are re-assessed they may move into other more appropriate groupings.

MAPs provides what is considered typical growth scores for grades K-11th grade for beginning, middle and end of the year median and mean scores. This is available in all four content areas assessed.

These varied assessments provide the fodder for discussions at the data meetings. They provide information on student progress, needs and how to adjust instruction, as well as providing indicators of how students will perform on the state assessment. The effectiveness in selecting an assessment tool that provides all of this serves to benefit student learning and effective instruction.

As previously discussed in the literature review Reeves has found that among the most effective components in creating successful schools is that of frequent and on-going opportunities for assessment and the need for external scoring that is aligned with state standards. Amazing Elementary School has addressed this nicely and uses the feedback from these assessments to guide and adjust their instruction for individual students. It

also provides for differentiation to help address the continued growth of each individual student. Keeping all data discussions focused on student work products keeps data conversations authentic and applicable to the needs of the students. This is what sustains continued growth along the learning continuum.

Participants

Who are the individuals witness to and participating in the changes that produced increased achievement at Amazing Elementary School? Table 5 shows the details and frequency of attributes contributing to the makeup of the participants.

Table 7

Descriptive Data of Participants at Amazing Elementary School (two participants served as staff members and parents at Amazing Elementary School)

Category	Frequency
Gender	
Female	9
Male	0
Number of years in education	
1-5	1
6-10	2
11-15	2
More than 15	4
Years associated with amazing elementary	
4 years	2
6 years	2
7 or more years	5
Position/grade level	
Administrator	2
Classified Staff Member	2
Parent	2
Kindergarten Teacher	1
Fourth Grade Teacher	1
Intervention Specialist (K-3)	1
Special Education Teacher	1
Second Grade Teacher	1

An additional piece of descriptive data was prior experience. While all the participants were currently employed at Amazing Elementary School and had been for at least four years or more, most of the participants had worked in prior positions or prior schools before arriving at Amazing Elementary School.

- English Teacher for 14 years at middle school level
- UCD (University of Colorado at Denver) Site Coordinator
- Assistant Principal
- Instructional Coach
- Middle School Teacher
- Elementary Teacher Grades 3, 4 and 5
- Special Education Para
- After School Program employee
- Taught Math and Science in Vermont
- Taught grades K-3
- Taught grades 1,2 and 4

Linda H.

I am beset by the genuine graciousness with which I am received by Linda. Most of the principals I am familiar are stressed out and constantly cognizant of their limited time. Yet, from our very first meeting and all the subsequent meetings Linda never seemed distant, distracted or over-whelmed. She was truly the definition of being in the present moment on each occasion I observed.

Linda was hired in the 2003/2004 school year; this is her sixth year as principal at Amazing Elementary School. For the past five and half years, she has experienced many accomplishments leading to the success of this school. With 23 years of educational experience including 14 years as an English teacher at the middle school level, two years as a middle school assistant principal and a site coordinator for the teacher residency program through which Amazing Elementary School has a partnership, she was well prepared for her role to lead Amazing Elementary School.

One outstanding attribute observed and mentioned repeatedly in interviews is Linda's unwavering optimism and sense of drive. When asked where this comes from, she credited her mother with giving her this quality. "I just turn everything into a challenge, in a good way". (Linda)

Under Linda's leadership Amazing Elementary has received several recognitions and awards. In 2005 Amazing Elementary School applied for and was accepted as an International Baccalaureate School and in 2006 was named a High Flying School through the Georgia Southern University. High Flying School awards are selected by the College of Education at Georgia Southern University in collaboration with the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER). Award candidates must exhibit the following:

- High achievement (according to state accountability data);
- High poverty (at least 50 percent of students living at or below the poverty line);
- High minority (at least 50 percent of students are minority students);
- Community collaboration;
- Citizenship development (through extra-curricular activities);

- Democratic education (prepares students to be successful members of a democratic society). www.acsd14.k12.co.us/default.aspx

In 2007/2008 school year Linda was named a Wright Way Principal of the Year and also in 2007 Amazing Elementary School was named Title 1 Regional School of the Year by Colorado Department of Education.

Yet with all of this recognition and success Linda is exceedingly modest and gives all the credit for success to her staff. In the many grade level, data discussions and staff meetings observed she always gave credit to the schools' accomplishments to the staff, never once accepting any credit for the accomplishments. This modesty, this sense of determination and high degree of integrity is modeled and modeled over and over again in the many staff members I encountered at Amazing Elementary School. So strong is the commitment to achieve that it flows as a theme throughout the school. Found in the cadence of meetings, conversations around the halls, teacher lounge, even in the restrooms is the expectation that every student will improve, everyone will learn and grow.

Many credit Linda with the changes that have come about and brought with it the success for Amazing Elementary School.

So, it just makes you want to work harder for her. In reality, (the ways you feel appreciated) are too numerous to name, but it's really her, and her personality. She's very demanding, but in a very gentle, kind way". (Melissa).

With a healthy sense of humor and dose of cheerfulness she conquers all of the most negative situations. When facing a parent concern she listens attentively, smiling, nodding and taking notes. She asks what it is they want to have happen and defines the

parameters she can work within. She is demanding as her staff will tell you, but she is supportive and caring too.

When Linda was told about her test scores in 2008; all of which increased except in writing, she said, “I did what I do best, I called my teachers and said what we are going to do?” As a result of this the staff came up with many interventions. However, having been a former middle school English teacher Linda determined she would personally score all third, fourth and fifth grade writing assessments, meet with each student and set goals for improvement for each student. She then gave these results along with her notes in summation of the areas to focus on to all the classroom teachers.

Not only does this provide an example of Linda’s commitment, dedication and focus to her school’s needs, but it puts her directly in the trenches with the teachers working to solve problems. Staff observed her contributing in tangible ways to increase achievement. It also alleviated one burden of responsibility from the teachers. This contribution was small, but was huge in building trust.

Tina B.

The first time I meet Tina, Linda pulls her in to meet me. She is friendly, approachable, easy-going and cheerful. The district Amazing Elementary School resides in does not have positions dedicated to assistant principals at the elementary level. However, each school has a learning coordinator position that functions much like an assistant principal and is designated as a TOSA (Teacher on Special Assignment). Tina was the Learning Coordinator and acting principal and at the close of the 2008/2009 school year. Tina attends the data conversation meetings on Wednesday with Linda, is

in charge of assessment preparations, deals with student discipline, schedules, etc. This is her fourth year at Amazing Elementary School. Prior to her appointment at Amazing Elementary School she taught elementary grades 3rd -5th and was an instructional coach at the middle school for grades 6th - 8th. She has a total of 15 years of educational experience.

Tina is receptive and approachable. The teachers respond very well to her. Both she and Linda are good listeners and spend much of the data discussions listening to what the teachers are encountering and then problem-solving to find resolution. Tina often asks about assessment results and planning for incorporating timely assessments into the schedule.

During the course of the year this research was conducted Linda was re-assigned in the spring to a school whose principal had been dismissed. This school lacked some structures and it was hoped she could build in some structures to produce positive changes. As a result, Tina was promoted to acting Principal for the remainder of the year. At the conclusion of the school year Linda was promoted to Administrative Director over principals. Tina was promoted to principal at Amazing Elementary School for the 2009/2010 school year.

Teacher Descriptions

Diane M.

Diane is a spunky, dedicated kindergarten teacher. She has been teaching for 17 years, eight of those years have been at Amazing Elementary School. Prior to her

teaching at Amazing Elementary School she taught in Atlanta, Georgia and San Antonio, Texas. She doesn't have any kids of her own, but states,

...this is the first school I've ever worked in where I'd actually take my kids to the school, because there's at least one and several other teachers, per grade level, that I would love to have. When I taught in Atlanta, I ended up moving up with my kindergartners because there wasn't a first grade teacher I wanted to send them to. I don't feel that way here...

Melissa G.

It is 10:30 in the morning on a Wednesday. Linda and Tina are headed for their next data discussion meeting. Ten minutes after the second grade data discussion meeting begins an energetic redhead comes scurrying into the meeting. She quickly hands a diet coke to Linda and begins to sip on her own. She chimes in and begins to share with her grade level where her students have moved up according to the Dibels data. Linda asks why one student moved up. Melissa replies, "Because we don't allow him to get away with anything. We hold him accountable." They continue asking about specific students and what will be done with them. Some of the students at the strategic level are being given additional assistance by some retired teachers. Stephanie is now able to read a book and write a sentence about it. They continue discussing which group might be better for her and other students. Eventually, they move on to discussing students' progress in writing and math.

Melissa can only be described as a sparkplug; high energy and passionate. She cares deeply for her students, but often her high expectations and no non-sense demeanor come across as strict and uncaring. She describes herself as a teacher whom students at

first are frightened of, but later come to realize she wants them to learn and will push them to meet their potential.

Because what I appear to everybody else is that I'm a very mean and hateful teacher- if you ask the kids in my classroom, they're scared when they first walk in, because I'm the one that's always stopping them from running and stuff down the hall. And then after a while, they come in and say, I just adore you. So, I try to do a similar thing that Linda did, where you hold very high expectations, you are consistently fair, and you truly care about them. (Melissa)

She believes in rigor and will not make excuses or lay blame elsewhere. She also demands the same high quality from her peers and will speak up if someone does not have the same high expectations.

Melissa has taught for 7 years, all of which have been at Amazing Elementary School in second grade. She has worked for only one other principal besides Linda. She has served on various committees and is strong in her convictions about education. She has been on the IB, PBS, Math/Science teams within her school. Additionally, she has assisted at the district level in curriculum for math and science. Much of her contribution directly related to the development of the GLETS (Grade Level Essential Targets), which is the district's framework of standards for each content area. Melissa has two sons and admits that she really became a more effective teacher after her own children began school. She learned a lot from them on how to be a more effective teacher.

As I relate the story of the diet coke and being late the first time I met her she shares this with me further strengthening the notion of the kind of environment that exists at Amazing Elementary School.

Originally, I was a smoker, so I would take (my planning), so Linda one day said buy me a diet coke and I will buy yours—there's probably no telling how much

money over that seven years she was here, six and half, they're a dollar (each), used to be .79 cents, now they're \$1.25 and she'd buy 3-4 a day. (Melissa)

Linda found a way to meet Melissa's needs and still make sure she was a vital part of the critical data discussions. She realized how important Melissa's participation was and yet understood her conflict as a smoker. She finessed the situation to accommodate everyone and in doing so her employees are willing and able to deliver more efficiently the demands required at an at-risk school.

So, it's truly caring and holding high expectations. I think everybody wants to be better than they are. And when you find somebody who can push you to be better and a loving way, it makes you feel so good inside, and that's what she did. And that's what a good teacher does. (Melissa)

Tammy W.

Tammy is both a parent and a staff member at Amazing Elementary School. She is currently serving as the Learning Coordinator, but was also an intervention specialist and has taught grades Kindergarten through third grade. She has taught a total of 14 years, nine of them at Amazing Elementary School. This year she has a daughter in kindergarten. She has served as an RTI (Response to Intervention) team member and has been a leader of the Partners in Education Organization.

As I walk into her office she is assisting a fifth grader on finishing a writing project. He is working diligently to finish the writing assignment. She has only recently been assigned to the Learning Coordinator position after Tina was promoted to acting principal. She is gracious and makes me feel at home answering all of my questions the best she can with her rather limited experience in this position. She too is clear about the

focus of Amazing Elementary School. "...that all students have the potential to make good progress and continue to learn and get close to grade level..."

Anne V.

Anne is a special education teacher. She has been at Amazing Elementary School for 6 years. She has also taught 1st, 2nd, and 4th grade. She has a total of 16 years of experience. She is also a teacher leader having served on the Colorado Council for Learning Disabilities, District Level Trainer on assessment. She has co-facilitated book studies through the Metro Board of Cooperative Educational Services and Colorado Department of Education. Anne summarizes the attitudes of the teachers at Amazing Elementary School and the reason they have achieved successes to a focus on students. "If you come to Amazing School you'd better be ready to be student centered and willing to work with a team of people to do what's best for children." (Anne). There is little tolerance for whining, making excuses or blaming. "Students are the focus and I feel that as a parent too, really that my daughter is a focus of this school. I feel like that is our main focus and our drive." (Anne)

Susan P.

Susan may be petite, but she is tough and strong minded. Susan has been a fourth grade teacher at Amazing Elementary School for 28 years. These 28 years were not consecutively. At one point she left Amazing Elementary School to move out of state, when she came back she wanted to return to Amazing Elementary School and once she returned in 1983 she never wanted to leave. She has taught a total of 31 years. Susan is a leader in the building and offers much wisdom and experience to colleagues. She has

served on the climate committee, all vertical teams at one time or another. Susan has also served on various district level committees and was a University of Colorado site coordinator for a year. She too has strong fortitude and strength of character. She is adamant about her belief that all students can learn. Additionally, she has little tolerance for colleagues who do not pull their weight, make excuses or blame outside factors for lack of growth. During data conversations Susan may be the one to question practices for effectiveness, however she is just as quick to share successes she has had or ask for ideas to solve dilemmas. One senses a strong sense of ownership in Susan. She believes in her students and in her school. She works endless hours with students after school and with parents to help them understand academic concepts as well.

Classified Staff Descriptions

Mary R.

The gym is hot, muggy and boisterous. It is after four o'clock and the after school program is holding an end of the year celebration. Students are coming in and out carrying food, drinks and decorations. Music and loud laughter fill the air. The food smells permeate the air to lend a homey, friendly and inviting atmosphere. Youth and adults work together to set up the party.

Mary has been an aide for the program for a year. Prior to this she served in the kitchen and as a special education para-professional. Mary has been involved at Amazing Elementary school for four years. As a single mother of four sons, denied the benefit of a high school education, she has been challenged to model for her children the importance of education. Through the encouragement and support of Linda, making

connections for her through the GED program, Mary has elevated herself. With the help of her sons' encouragement and assistance from teachers at Amazing Elementary School she has found meaningful employment self- fulfillment and self-sufficiency.

She told me, Mary, because you don't have your GED, this is when I worked in the Kitchen, because you don't have to have your GED to work there, you won't be able to have your job, so I'm going to help you, you're going to get your GED, this'll get you started, and then once you get started we'll show HR that you started your GED and you'll be fine, but you need to finish. And guess what? I got one more test to do and I'm done. I'll tell you, they're all wonderful, they're all there. (Mary)

Mary's youngest son is in fifth grade at Amazing Elementary School and the oldest has graduated from the district high school. Several of her sons have gone through Amazing Elementary School. A couple of them have struggled, but Mary indicates there has always been tutoring and summer school to help her children.

Sandra L.

I am greeted by a very professional looking woman. She is all too happy to assist me. However, the clinic is like a revolving door with a constant flow of patients and staff members. Students are coming in for inhaler treatments, medication, etc. A couple of students come in from the play ground to get band aids. Sandra has been the health aide at Amazing Elementary School for the last nine years. She is responsible for students at all grade levels. Her clinic is colorful with a full wall devoted to pictures of staff members' children. She is cheerful and attentive. Prior to working at Amazing Elementary School she worked as a special education para for 10 years elsewhere in the district.

While being interviewed she takes a phone call from a parent concerned about her child. When the conversation heads toward a more academic nature, Sandra hands the phone over to the teacher who just happens to walk through. I am surprised to observe that she is all too willing to accommodate and provide clarification to the parent without any prior notice. They work together as a team to assist this parent.

Observations

Group/team observations commenced in September 2008 beginning with a faculty meeting and then progressing to individual grade level planning meetings, data discussions held every Wednesday with the administrators and then to content team meetings. Observations occurred approximately 3 times a month on average. Individual classroom observations began in February during and after the completion of the interviews. During the observations many student reactions, reflections and behaviors were included in the formulation of the findings. Students while not directly interviewed could not help, but be included as a significant contribution to this study. Students' comments while in line in the cafeteria or walking down the hall or responding during a class lesson were used to determine the effectiveness of many of the practices implemented at Amazing Elementary School.

Students' attitudes were noted when they came to the principal's office to receive a book for meeting a goal. Students sent to the office to complete work, for being off task during the classroom time were also observed. The students' demeanor and comments visiting the clinic while the researcher was interviewing the health aide were also noted.

What I gained from these many different kinds of observations was a commitment to collaboration, not just teacher to teacher, but teacher to student. Teachers were dedicated to collaborating with students about their achievement results and goals targeted to continue their growth.

There was a continuous spirit to support one another in instructional needs. This resulted in students feeling valued, that they were the focal point of the school. The reason the school existed was because of the students. Parents in the community also conveyed this.

Amazing Elementary School viewed themselves as a continuous learning organization. The job of learning how to improve was never seen as a “done deal”. They were continuously asking what more can be done. They continually reviewed data and feedback to determine how better to instruct students and meet their individual needs. From this analyzes of formal and informal data they determined graphic organizers were needed to help students better organize their thoughts in writing.

Once students saw the effects of this shared learning and goals setting; they bought in the power of this shared learning responsibility. When they met with teachers to review their assessments results and then made goals and then met these goals, their sense of agency in their own learning increased. Realizing they did have power in the success of their own learning empowered them further and propelled them into accomplishing even bigger goals.

Summary

While these nine participants are representative of a cross sample of the schools' adult population; additionally many hours were spent observing whole staff and individual team meetings, parent meetings, daily office and hallway happenings and classroom instruction. While the majority of the findings come from the survey, there is also much to be gleaned from the information gathered from these observations.

Chapter Five: Results and Findings

Education is a social process. Education is growth. Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself. John Dewey

Eisner's Five Structural Dimensions

Elliot Eisner's Five Dimensions of Educational Connoisseurship and educational criticism were applied as a format to organize, observe, and discuss this qualitative case study. A framework was needed not only to design kinds of inquiry questions that would delve into the intricacies of Amazing Elementary School, and additionally serve as a guide to adequately view all aspects of an educational organization and determine the circumstances and situations that existed.

One can appreciate Eisner's intent in creating a method that accesses a comprehensive way to view, describe, interpret and evaluate an educational environment. I believe he is correct in that there is much to learn from all forms of art, including the visual arts, fine arts, performing arts and the art of education. This is not an idea I have subscribed to as a result of an early introduction to the arts or as having received early training, it is an idea that I have come to through my exposure to art and interactions with various aspects of education in my latter years. The idea that connoisseurship and criticism focus on qualities, can be applied to the various mediums in art. Through analysis of these qualities the researcher implies criticism, which functions as a conduit to perceptions. These perceptions allow us to define a given case.

In defining the environment of a school or as Eisner refers to as the ecology of a school, he has divided the ecology of a school into five dimensions: the intentional, the structural, the curricular, the pedagogical and the evaluative, (Eisner, 1991). The intentional dimension refers to the goals that have been explicitly stated, modeled and reinforced. While it is important to note that often the intention of a school or district is one thing and how it is interpreted and then conveyed down to the classroom level by the teacher and in the behaviors demonstrated can be two very different things. In analyzing this dimension it is critical to determine if the intended aims are indeed the outcomes at the classroom level. Research questions that targeted investigation in this area included topics of changes in roles, attitudes and relationships. Comparisons in what administrators viewed as goals and what other staff members and parents viewed as goals were critical in determining if indeed actions aligned with the intended goals. All of the five dimensions are equally important, but it seems that the subsequent four dimensions should support the first dimension if implemented correctly.

The second dimension in the ecology of a school is the organizational structure. “Understanding the influence of an organizational structure in schools provides a basis for considering its utilities and liabilities, its benefits and costs (Eisner, 1991). Research questions aimed at inquiring into this area included topics of communication, schedules, staff development, opportunities to collaborate, and administrative interactions. Many structures are common from school to school, such as students’ time in classrooms and movement from place to place within the building, the amount of time devoted to instruction, time for teachers to meet and plan, communication tools, etc. But how they

look and how they may be used varies greatly from school to school. The effectiveness and consistency of implementation also varies greatly. These structural aspects are critical to overall success or failure of a school and contribute greatly to the intended goals of the organization.

The third dimension addresses the curricular component of a school's environment. How does it help or hinder learning? While the Grade Level Essential Targets (GLETs) were developed and determined at the district level, how they are interpreted and implemented with fidelity at the school level are strictly the responsibility of the administration and staff. The support and resources available to ensure students meet those targets, the level of understanding of those targets by those who are instructing are all critical to the learning that takes place. Having a curriculum or a set of objectives to be taught is the easy part. Teachers need to understand fully what is to be taught, how to scaffold to reach that target, what resources may be acquired, how to determine gaps in student learning and how to fill those gaps. This is where collaboration is very important. Teams of teachers discussing content, student needs and resource materials can assist one another in understanding curriculum. Depth of understanding curriculum can enhance or hinder rigor. Rigor is needed in the implementation of curriculum if students are to become self-sufficient thinkers. Reeves asserts that a curriculum narrow in focus and deep in content is far more effective than one that is wide and shallow, (Reeves, 2004). It is important that the activities used as vehicles to teach the targets align conceptually. Is there alignment in curriculum, instruction and assessment? All of this goes into determining the effectiveness of curricula.

The fourth dimension is that of Pedagogy. Pedagogy refers to the way teachers mediate curricula. It can also be what is learned through indirect teaching. Dewey says “it is one of the greatest of educational fallacies to assume that children learn only what they are being taught...., (Dewey, 1938).

Teachers teach by example, by covert cues, by emphasizing some Aspects of content more than others, by rewarding students directly and indirectly, by the animation and excitement they display in class, by the level of affection they provide to students, by the clarity of their explanations, and more. Teachers teach by relying on illustrations, using metaphors, employing diagrams and maps, organizing discussions, lecturing, assigning projections, posing questions, (Eisner, 1991).

Pedagogy is very important. It also takes into account the degree of efficacy that exists within a teacher’s practice. Without a high degree of efficacy there cannot be effective instruction and true learning cannot take place. How much does the teacher understand the meaning of the curriculum and the needs of their students.

Eisner refers to the difficulty in assessing the pedagogy when observing instructional practices. Just like life, teaching is full of tradeoffs, (Eisner, 1991). An experienced teacher will approach a lesson much differently than a novice teacher. Class configurations play heavily into the teaching practices and different kinds of genre in teaching employed. One standardized and uniform observation tool will not provide adequate fodder for comparison purposes. Rather the analogy made of viewing a fine art form of one well-known artist to another would not be appropriate given that each has unique qualities that aim at representing life in different ways.

So it is true of teaching, to expect one teacher to teach in an identical way as another would be to deny the uniqueness needed to access a diverse population. While

types of genre in teaching, Socratic Seminars, lecturing, simulations, cooperative grouping activities, etc. may be common and have similar features it is unfair to judge teachers against one another. Rather than determining the pedagogical nature of a teacher, her unique qualities and circumstances must be variables considered as context in determining pedagogy.

The final dimension is the evaluative dimension. This area focuses on the ways evaluation and especially assessments play a role in how the student views their success. It encompasses feedback of any kind, reporting of student progress, value judgments, appraisal of student and teacher work. Sometimes the form of feedback can be verbal, non-verbal or in writing. Often tone of voice, facial expressions, and messages of support fall within the evaluative dimension.

Evaluation comes in many forms both formal and informal, intentional and unintentional. More than anything else in a school evaluation procedures affect the culture and climate of a school. Educational practices speak volumes to students, staff, parents and community about what a school values, (Eisner, 1991, p.81). What is evaluated, how it is evaluated and how results are communicated to constituents is crucial to a school's success.

Administrator summaries of five dimensions

Intentional

What is evident by the questions posed and the answers received in the intentional section is that the changes that have occurred at Amazing Elementary School were strategic and intentional. And the most profound focus for the administrators is the

focus of what will be done to move students. At the very core of every conversation is: What can we do to become better at addressing students' needs. Each conversation narrows down to an individual student and what they need to do to move up in performance.

Some of the changes were required by the district. This is the case with the school becoming an International Baccalaureate School in order to provide additional structure and focus on improving the behaviors needed to become proficient and advanced learners. Other changes were decided on by Linda; such as the decision to hold weekly data discussions to discuss individual students. They also discussed how curriculum was being implemented; what were the struggles and, what were the successes implemented. Linda facilitated and participated in these discussions.

I just tell them what to zero in on. We have targets and we review it, we talk about each child as a learner and how we can move that child. So there's no time to waste. I, by nature, have sense of urgency around our children's achievement, so that's what I bring to every meeting. We're a no-excuse staff. They used to make excuses, and some of them probably still do, but that's not when I'm in the room, (Linda, 2009).

Structural

Structural systems contribute enormously to the smooth operation of a school. One such structural system in place at Amazing Elementary School is accessing professional learning communities to examine data and determine further professional development. Each grade level decides among themselves which members will serve on the various teams; ELA (English Language Acquisition), Literacy, Math, RTI (Response to Intervention), PBS (Positive Behavior Support) and Culture and Climate. Each PLC (Professional Learning Community), meet every other week; when to meet is decided by

the members of the teams. With guidance from Linda each team analyzes data and decides what needs to address and how they will develop interventions. This year the literacy team analyzed the writing data and determined students needed more structure in the writing process. The PLC decided to develop graphic organizers and gather exemplars of writing for every genre at every grade level. They determined that the development of the graphic organizers would take them all year and decided to tackle the gathering of exemplars for the 2009/2010 school year.

Another structure in place is weekly faculty meetings as a format for the PLC's to present their information, findings and training. By holding a 25 minute weekly faculty meeting Amazing Elementary School staff were able to keep that focus alive and at the forefront of all decisions.

Administrators reported that the weekly Wednesday data discussions helped to keep the focus on "moving students". During these weekly meetings administrators felt that it was crucial to keeping the focus when teachers and administrators meet routinely to discuss the progress or lack of progress on specific students. The constant and persistent talk about students kept classroom teachers and administrators current on all students' progress as well as needs within each grade level. It also helped to promote the idea of these are all of our students. Teachers, coaches and administrators helped problem solve when students weren't progressing. Every week all participates would check back in on all students not moving. Administrators focused on those moving, as well as those not moving. A careful line of questioning from the administrators aimed at analyzing and determining what caused the growth for replication purposes.

Lastly, Linda reported that when she first came to Amazing Elementary School, not only did she analyze structural needs, she also evaluated the effectiveness of structures in place. Anything that was not conveying the focus of moving kids or took away energy from administrators or staff to move students was eliminated.

Curriculum

Administrators' role around curriculum was to enforce, promote and clarify it for the staff. While the curriculum was determined by the district, Linda and Tina's role was to help teachers understand how the materials and resources supported the curriculum or (GLETS) Grade Level Essential Targets. She also listened carefully at each meeting to determine if additional resources were needed so teachers could do their job.

Change is difficult for many people and yet it seems to be a constant in Education. Teachers want consistency and continuity. They want things to remain the same so they can practice and become proficient at implementing curriculum, concepts and the use of resources for implementation. Finessing newness is definitely a skill. Linda seems to have a gift for knowing how to introduce newness to her staff and have it embraced. When the district enthusiastically presented the new curriculum pacing, scope and sequence, the staff was less than enthusiastic. It is sort of a necessary evil. It takes a lot of working with the curriculum standards to really understand how they build upon one another and that it is necessary to plan all lessons beginning with them. A standard curriculum assists a school district where there is much transiency within the district from school to school. Linda decided to use her sense of humor with delivering these grade level targets:

...instead of sitting down with a huge document and going after the data, after data, after data, she made a bulls eye and spent hours making marshmallow shooter out of PVC pipe. So, we had a holder, all PVC pipe, it looks like a gun with a thing on the end, and literally. Then she brought us marshmallows, and you put them inside your little shooter and you blew. You were supposed to get them on the target and the inside of the target is the grade level essential learnings, (GLETS). We were supposed to hit the bull's eye on the GLETS. Instead of making it boring... Its little things like that that make you want to work more, (Melissa, 2009).

Pedagogical

Linda and Tina had a lot of work to do to create an atmosphere solely focused on academic achievement. They worked at eliminating extraneous distractions that detracted from this focus. Allowing teachers a single focus on instructing students so they could grow and promoting creative problem solving was the aim. "Because if you provide all of that, then that would take from the energy and focus of what your real job is" (Linda) But she did it in a way that allowed everyone to see that they could compromise, still accomplish a need, but keep the energy directed at academics and on students. Linda approached challenges and concerns with positive intent. No matter what the situation contained she presumed positive intentions. This attitude seemed to have gone a long way to establish trust and relationships with whomever she was dealing. The frequent conversations in the weekly faculty meetings and data discussions allowed her to listen to the teachers and understand the pedagogy that existed. When issues came up she would articulate the concern, ask for help in solving the problem and would present data to support what was observed.

Sometimes I'll say somebody shared with me that this process might not be working, what do you guys think? So, I won't use names necessarily. Sometimes I do, if that would make a bigger impact. I just share however it gives me the most information, (Linda, 2009).

Evaluative

The close conversations happening almost daily allow for close scrutiny of the kind of instruction that is taking place. It also allows teachers to ask for more effective ways to move a student in their academic progress. “I tried the motivational goal setting strategy. I use the thermometer. They see where the target is and like seeing their movement up the thermometer to the target”. (Amazing Elementary Teacher, 2nd grade)

One teacher had concerns about the scoring of her writing rubric and so she asked while Linda was sitting there about her scoring.

Feedback is constant at Amazing Elementary School because there are so many opportunities to meet and discuss happenings and feelings. Evaluation is an on-going process. Students receive feedback daily and weekly on assessments. Many students are given the dibbles assessment. This information is shared with the students. Students set targets and once met there is much celebrating. Linda comes to each data discussion with a folder for each grade level. Every student’s name is placed on a sticky. There are three columns. Each labeled Intervention, Strategic, and benchmark. Every she week asks the teachers where each and every student is functioning. When they move up she asks, “Why” and what was done to accomplish this. When teachers are having difficulty moving students she asks, “What more can we do?” The team brainstorms options. They also celebrate when students move.

In addition to the district appraisal process in which all teachers participate in a formal observation and feedback process regularly, the school as whole receives feedback from a parent survey administrated by the district. The 2007 results of this feedback

reveal that the parents in the Amazing School Community are very supportive of the school's direction. Of the 39 questions, parents assigned a rating of 90% or above to 32 of the questions asked. In fact two questions received a 100 percent approval rating; *The staff at my child's school respect differences in others, like race, culture, disabilities, etc. The administrators at my child's school are doing a good job, (School Accreditation Contract, 2007/2008).*

Staff at Amazing Elementary School also participates in a survey evaluating seven areas:

1. School Climate
2. Professional Development
3. Leadership
4. Curriculum and Instruction
5. Curriculum and Intervention
6. Parents
7. Central Administration

In fact in this area there are many questions in which the staff gave the school and/or administration a rating of 100%. These questions are as follows:

When educational issues arise, student learning considerations are the most important criteria used in decision making.

1. My teaching/leadership can have a significant impact upon my students' performance.
2. There is a clear, articulated mission of the school that is followed every day.
3. The principal understands and supports the implementation of the curriculum.

4. Our assessments measure what we want students to learn and be able to do.
5. The district curriculum design results in higher student achievement.
6. Our curriculum design is focused on continuity across grade levels and courses.
7. I support the use of computer-based instructional systems to improve student achievement.
8. I incorporate the use of student achievement data into lesson planning.
9. The instructional program at this school is challenging.
10. Our school has an action plan in place which can get us to our visions.
11. I love to teach.
12. Our curriculum design is focused on continuity and integration across grade levels and courses.

Feedback or evaluative dimensions of a school are extremely crucial to the school's growth and direction. It provides a picture of alignment and congruency. The administrators at Amazing Elementary use all the various forms of evaluation and feedback to determine if the implementation of structures, curriculum, focus and instructional practices are matching achievement. And judging by the results of the parent and staff survey there is a lot of agreement and trust in the direction, structures and decisions being made at Amazing Elementary School.

Teacher summaries of educational dimensions

Intentional

Overwhelmingly, the teachers at Amazing Elementary School feel that their goal or focus is to move the students along academically. All decisions and discussions center on how to tap the most learning potential of students. This is apparent from the result of

question 4.1 on the staff survey: *When educational issues arise, student learning considerations are the most important criteria used in decision making.* One-hundred percent of the staff either strongly agreed with this or agreed with it. Student learning is the focus and they go about systematically analyzing assessment results and determining what gaps exist in order to design and apply interventions. A secondary focus of writing was also mentioned as the academic area the school wanted to work on towards improvement. Douglas Reeves determined that frequent writing as an on-going assessment practice was effective in narrowing the achievement gap. Amazing Elementary School kept the focus on improvement of writing by selecting an area they determined as a weakness on the CSAP by their students. This area was organization. The writing team shared regularly with the staff ways to improve this in student writing. Creating graphic organizers assisted students to organize their thoughts, thus producing better quality writing in all content areas. Improving writing can have a profound effect on assessments scores in all area.

Structural

The administration here is really big on “self-sufficient management” (Melissa). Vertical teaming has allowed Amazing Elementary to build capacity, promote communication and collaboration. Teachers within a grade level select a team to be a member of; Literacy, Math, Science, Technology or ELL. Teams are responsible for reviewing data in that area, designing a plan of action to create improvement based on the area of needs, review literature and research, perhaps participate in a book study, collect samples and then guide the staff towards implementation. For example the literacy team

reviewed the data and decided that they needed more graphic organizers for students in writing and exemplars. They decided to focus on the graphic organizers this year and will focus on gathering exemplars next year. These professional learning communities have taken the place of the former leadership team. Differentiated staff development and being given choice when professional development activities arise has contributed to more harmony and targeted learning. Again, this focus on constantly analyzing data to determine student needs and then making adjustments in instruction is a quality found in effective schools, (Reeves, 2004).

An additional structure that has impacted Amazing Elementary School's ability to continually progress forward is the addition of the IB program. The key here is that there is a structure. (Susan) Initially, teachers were not enthused about becoming an IB school, buy-in was needed.

Each grade level had to plan six units that related to an underlying IB profile or attitude. So, working at that point was challenging. When we started these I was a first grade teacher, and so we established six units that we worked together to plan, pretty much using a backwards design with summative assessments started, and then went from there. It was just, they're incredible. (Tammy)

Through a lot of collaboration and dialog teachers began to sort through the current curriculum determining where they could embed the learner profiles and attitudes. This allowed two things to occur for the staff. First, it obligated them to really dig into their standards, understanding them deeply in order to align IB requirements, it also created a collaborative atmosphere where trust was established, and beliefs and philosophies were revealed. Once the school was approved as an IB school there was a

huge sense of accomplishment and confidence-building, which fed in the building of capacity.

Lastly, a structure that may not be as obvious of a factor in contributing to the increased sustained achievement at Amazing Elementary School is the various occasions for communicating the focus of student's growth. Communicating that focus continually must be an intentional structure. Weekly meetings and data conversations, plus PLC meetings, 6-8 times a year celebrating that success are ways to keep a conversation alive within an organization and all contribute to maintaining an eye on what is most valued and important..

Curricular

The implementation of the GLETS has brought about a more focused, and somewhat forced attention to plan more intentionally. At AES (Amazing Elementary School) there has always been a high level of collaboration and planning together. The new curriculum has made everyone work together and "make sure you're on the same page teaching." (Diane) It has also allowed conversation of regrouping in grade levels, which demands teachers pace together and collaborate to a deeper and greater degree. Diane says, "The GLETS calendar has helped, definitely." She laments that she wishes there were more time with teachers.

I think they've really made us driven. We have focus that's in our hands. When I started here, we had no reading series to drive our curriculum from math to reading. There was something, but it wasn't real good. I think it's made a world of difference, because we now have teachers, new teachers that come in and we can hand them this document that says, this is what you're teaching; these are the resources you have to teach with. (Tammy)

Pedagogy

The expectation to collaborate and hence share pacing, instructional strategies, problem-solving with regard to student needs and regrouping of students is evident in kindergarten as it is throughout the building. Teachers value this time together with their grade level peers and administration because it does lead to greater fidelity to instruction. Teachers can share experiences and ask questions about curriculum resources and how to apply their support to the GLETS (Grade Level Essential Targets), which are based on state standards. It is seen as a time to celebrate student movement and get answers to concerns around instruction. Diane feels this time together creates greater consistency. It serves as a form of professional development that is immediate, applicable and direct. Teachers can clarify for one another what instructional fidelity looks like. What instructional genres are appropriate for given essential targets according to classroom needs. They share ideas and strategies and often they regroup students within the grade level based on assessment results. “A lot of what we talk about in the weekly data meetings is the reading and that the Dibels data is important and curriculum is also talked about to see if people are in the same area, matching with the GLETS.” (Tammy)

Talking weekly about instruction, students results and teacher understanding of the GLETS assists teachers in constantly refining their skills and finding meaning in their work. All of which benefits the students. Putting many heads together to problem solve keeps the mantra alive of; “These are our kids”. Everyone shares the responsibility for student growth equally and no one feels isolated. (Reeves, 2000), dedicated collaborative time with peers was ranked as a top structure found in effective schools.

Evaluative

Kindergarten uses many tools to provide evaluation including the screening test to determine school readiness. Dibels is used to assess reading fluency. There are mixed feelings about the results of dibbles. There seems to be inefficient or inconclusive information around the comprehension area. Tracking of student progress is a constant. It starts with the kindergarten screening assessments, but is on- going weekly, it is tracked using checklists, graphs and antidotal records. “In kindergarten you’ve got to sit down one on one for most of the testing. I would say they (students) get tested 8 times a year.” (Diane). Diane had a TC (teacher candidate) which made these testing sessions much easier. The outcome of these assessments results in the regrouping of students and who will work with what groups according to their needs. From week to week not all students move toward the target or benchmark, but every week some students are moving from one category to another. One such additional intervention employed when students aren’t moving is the reading coach will conduct guided reading groups with the intensive kids 20-25 additional minutes a day until the student moves up to the strategic level. These students are assessed more frequently. Diane has two students who have been in this group all year, most have exited out, and some have exited and then gone back in for additional intervention.

Feedback is given to teachers in the form of walk-throughs. Administrators have checklists; they leave a copy in every teacher’s classroom. Specifically, they’re looking for implementation of the GLETs and they’re looking for the degree of student engagement. Prior to beginning the walk-throughs teachers were given a copy of the

form. They knew the expectations and then could aim for them. They are also alerted ahead of time about the time of the walk-throughs. A 4-point rubric is used to indicate degree of implementation. Averages across grade levels are shared with the staff at a faculty meeting.

I don't know if it was at the end of last year or the beginning of this year... they didn't say kindergarten got an average of 3.6, but as a building they kind of told us an average or told us certain areas that were low. Like most teachers need to work on having such and such posted, or whatever...(Diane).

The impact of the changes at Amazing Elementary School has been very positive. Teachers want to come to this school and no one wants to leave. One retired teacher, a friend of Diane's wishes she had stayed. Diana feels a personal sense of growth and accomplishment the more she teaches.

I tell my student teachers, you just get better, every year you get better. I said I wish I could write letters, or call my first year students, and say, "I am so sorry, come to my class now. Just because every year, I told them, every year if I can't take away something from a lesson from the morning (kindergarten) class that I'm going to do better for the P.M. class, and then I'm not doing my job. So, for me, I just feel like it's the opposite of those teachers—I feel like it's more passionate now. (Diane)

Classified and parent summaries of educational dimensions

Intentional

Mary and Sandra can't say enough about Amazing Elementary and their efforts to increase achievement student performance. The focus is on elevating each and every student every day.

Staff focus is on kids and working together. They care so much and do whatever it takes to have the kids learn. Singing or playing or just walking, or anything, it helps. And kids enjoy that. When the kids see that you've given them that attention, they just love it and it makes them want to learn more. And that's what they have here. (Mary)

During the past four years there has been an increase and focus on the implementation of the MAPs (Measurement of Academic Progress), rewards, compassion and encouragement to support new programs. As a health aide, Sandra wanted to implement some new initiatives; dental programs, chopper topper, sealant program, miles for smiles, dental mobile, etc. She was supported and encouraged.

Structural

The way the school is structured allows parents to easily convey concerns or gain clarification. Many parents feel that the key to students' future is an effective education. Many parents do their part by taking books home and reading with their children and doing their homework with them. One teacher told me she would correct her student's math homework and the parent's math homework too, so the parent could learn the math in order to help their child. A lot of parents come to Amazing Elementary School that do not live in the attendance area; they might live in nearby communities, but prefer to attend Amazing Elementary School. Mary says,

There are a lot of parents that talk Spanish and this helps them when the kids take their books home and the kids ask them to read with them, this helps them too. I know last year when I worked here all day, couple of kids would tell me that they would take their spelling list home, put it up on the fridge, and they would study and their parents would study with them...and they even learned how to spell words and how to say the (English) words. (Mary)

In addition to the way teachers accommodate for parents so they might engage their children at home; parents can find plenty of opportunities for communication with, and from the school. This includes the newsletter, flyers home weekly and sometimes more frequently. The communication comes through administration and the individual classrooms. Up-coming activities are communicated, as well as frequent up-

dates on student achievement. An auto-dialer system also keeps parents informed, mostly of emergencies, i.e., closures and health alerts. Mary also indicates the district channel 8 also helps her to stay informed since all four boys are at different levels in the system.

Parents can also get involved in the Partners in Education, which is the parent and community members support for the school. They meet one Tuesday night of the month. Parents also have the opportunity to volunteer and help with fund-raising. One project they under-took was Wednesday after school nachos. Parents organized, distributed and sold these after school to raise money for the school.

Furthermore, Mary has noticed a difference in the level of expectations since her first child went to Amazing Elementary School compared with her last son; presently in fifth grade. The rigor is there, where it wasn't before. "My fifth grader right now, he's like, (doing) geometry, algebra, he's spelling these big old words, it's changed extremely."

Pedagogy

Staff members and parents have a high degree of professionalism. Staff gets along well and works together all the time. "Morale of staff is really good". (Sandra) There seems to be no delineation between certified and classified. All have a high level of commitment to the improvement of students and meeting their needs. No one feels less or more important due to their role or classification. There are many occasions when the staff comes together to complete tasks; cleaning out rooms, providing special support and

treats during CSAP testing, having lunch together to just communicate... “Just have fun, joke and laugh and talk.”

Their commitment to teaching effectively and with fidelity is evidenced by the fact that they have made the No Child Left Behind, Adequately Yearly Progress rating in all areas for the last several years, (School Accreditation Contract, 2007/2008). “...the teachers, the staff gets together and they try to discuss how they are going to keep the kids learning.” (Mary) Through the on-going internal communication methods staff are constantly talking about curriculum, how to effectively implement it and the on-going assessment results of students.

Curriculum

Mary and Sandra’s familiarity with the curriculum is limited. As a special education para-professional and health aide, they primarily work with autistic students and high needs special education students. Mary states that as a parent, packets of work are frequently sent home for the students to complete. Some kids bring them back all completed and some don’t. Some bring them back half way completed. She feels the teachers are doing their jobs by finding other ways to impress the curriculum standards upon students.

However, it is clear that the focus for curriculum is to get all students at grade level or above and that each student is viewed individually. While parents were unable to describe exactly what processes, structures or strategies were being employed at Amazing Elementary School, they had one key piece of information to inform them of the school’s effectiveness; their children. Parents’ barometer of success is the degree to which their

children feel self-confident, happy, content and knowledgeable. Parents gauge the successfulness of a school based on these things. They also gauge the degree to which a school is effective by its responsiveness to parents. The staff at AES demonstrated its responsiveness in many ways; by taking additional time to tutor students or work with parents who needed additional help in understanding content and assisting parents in accessing outside resources. The staff stood ready to discuss any matter of concern at any time. Because of this attitude parents feel welcomed and positive about the direction of Amazing Elementary School.

Evaluative

There are many ways work is evaluated and feedback is expressed at Amazing Elementary School. Student work is often displayed in the bookcase in the front of the school or on bulletin boards. Student completed projects are hung up on walls in classrooms. Even pre-school and kindergarten projects are displayed and celebrated. Students are recognized for achievements. They can earn bicycles and certificates, pencils.

Students are also given immediate feedback through the SOAR slips. SOAR stands for:

S= Safety

O=Opportunity (open-minded, risk-taker, balanced and reflective)

A=Achievement (Thinker, Inquirer, principled, knowledgeable)

R= Respect (Communicator, Caring)

All of these traits are direct links to the IB profiles and attitudes. When a student is caught by a staff member acting in one of these ways either through academic, or social behaviors they are given a SOAR slip. The student must fill out the bottom of slip indicating what s/he did to deserve this recognition. Students are given a pencil right away and then may also be selected to be honored at one of 6 assemblies throughout the year. These are also kept as data and as additional feedback on student behaviors to teachers.

The parents at Amazing Elementary School have known the teachers for quite some time. The average years of experience at Amazing Elementary School are 10 years. More than three-fourths of the teachers have been teaching at the school for more than three years. So, parents primarily go through the classroom teacher when they have a need to communicate, but they also feel equally comfortable in contacting the administration if need be.

The parent survey feedback is an evaluative means for parents to express their views about Amazing Elementary School, parents feel the school has many ways to let them know how their children on doing. From Student led conferences in the spring; using IB portfolio body of evidence information to MAPS (Measurement of Academic Progress) graphs students are able to interpret these results to parents so they are aware of what their children on learning and to what degree. Parents also receive reports three times a year; attend parent conferences in the fall and many teachers call parents on a routine basis. There is also a great deal of communication through grade level

newsletters and a school newsletter. Ninety-seven percent of parents say, “I know how well my child is progressing in school,” (School Accountability Contract 2007/2008).

Summation of the Five Dimensions

Comparisons between the administrators, staff and parents at Amazing Elementary School found that when it came to the intentional dimension all three groups expressed that their goal was to increase students’ academic performance. The phrase “to move students” was used over and over and it was a mantra used every day. Indeed, from the administration down to the classroom level and even to the students this was stated and observed. Teachers’ conversations with one another modeled this; teachers’ conversation with students modeled this. Teachers demonstrated this through discussions about student performance on formative assessments every week. Results were not just handed out, but were discussed individually with students. Students would set goals based on these results for the next assessment the following week or so. The focus for students was also on moving them along the continuum of learning toward a specified target. When students achieved short-term goals there was recognition, celebration and incentive reinforcement to stay motivated and keep moving. This idea of “moving”, constantly “moving” along the learning continuum was reinforced daily, even hourly in all content areas. Students’ discussions in the classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, etc. were focused on this idea of constantly progressing toward a known goal. In line, on the way to lunch one day Sally said to her classmate, “I finally met my target in math, how did you do?”

I had the opportunity to be in the principal's office on an occasion right after some 5th grade students completed an assessment on the MAPs (Measurement of Academic Progress), they entered the office with their results in hand, sent down by their teacher. Immediately, the secretary recognizes their purpose for being in the office and sends them right in to the principal. The students approach the principal, with apprehensive smiles and giggles. They are Hispanic students, somewhat shy and yet an excitement pervades the atmosphere as they wave their graphs in hand to the anticipating eyes of the principal. She is bubbling with enthusiasm and delight. She congratulates them on their achievement and asks what their next goal will be. They know what their next goal will be and state their intended target of 110 on the next assessment which will put them on pace to achieve their longer range goal at the conclusion of the year in math.

Linda pats them on the back and concurs that they are well on their way. She then instructs them to select a book from a library of several hundred books to take away with them to keep.

The structural dimension refers to features in the organization which allow it to function effectively. It appears that there were many structures intentional and strategically put into place to facilitate the success of Amazing Elementary School. However, all of the structures put into place were done so with the very specific purpose of addressing a need lacking within the school and matched to dynamics of the staff within the building.

It is interesting to compare the administrator view point of structure to the teacher and classified staff point of view. While many of the structures implemented by the

administrator were put into place to maintain a focus on student achievement growth, they were also put into place with a great deal of trust and responsibility placed on the teachers and staff.

The first major structural change involved the application and implementation of the IB program. This was truly the first test of trust and leadership for Linda. She knew the staff was apprehensive, yet she gently and courageously nudged to push them. She listened to concerns, while persistently finding ways to support and reinforce their efforts. Through this transformation a collective strength grew, which prepared them for further structural changes.

Parents are aware of structural changes that mostly deal with communication to and from the school. The opportunities for parent participation don't seem to be as important to them as their access to and ability to communicate with their child's teacher and their strong desire to assist their child in the learning process.

In supporting the pedagogical nature within the classroom all three groups of subjects reported various supportive strategies to help maintain the focus on student academic growth. Administrators cleared the way for teachers to focus on learning and teaching using creative instructional methods to meet students' needs. They protected the time teachers needed to connect and compare how to meet students' needs while attending to the understanding and meaning of the GLETS (Grade Level Essential Targets). Administrators assisted in helping teachers understand pacing, analyzing and scaffolding in order to meet the GLETS. Furthermore Administrators viewed their roles

as supporters, providing information needed in analyzing data, reinforcing efforts with frequent celebrations and acknowledgements.

Teachers reported that their focus was on student growth, and having the time and resources to collaborate with fellow teachers helped refine their teaching and advanced their mastery of instructional practices at an accelerated rate. Much credit is given to the administration in providing this ability to use different instructional strategies, groupings and materials to provide the growth needed. Much evidence exists that teachers were also focused on empowering students to set academic goals and understand assessment results so they could set realistic goals.

Other staff saw their role as supporting teachers in providing student growth. Secretaries, health aids, and parents often took tasks off the plates of teachers so they could focus on being the best teachers possible. They provided lunches, snacks and took time to read with students. Many retired teachers came in to conduct smaller reading groups so students had more individual attention. All efforts were aimed at one thing: To accelerate student growth and target individual needs.

The curricular dimension also found that administrators and teachers focused on the new Grade Level Essential targets. At first there was resistance to the new essential learnings, mainly because it was yet another new thing to take on. Granted Amazing Elementary School has had a lot of new implementation in last four years. With the onset of the International Baccalaureate program, new reading series, Response to Intervention and Positive Behavior Support System, the addition of the new curriculum standards was received with less than enthusiastic applause. However, knowing that there was not a lot

choice in accepting the GLETS, Linda found ways to infuse humor and fun while weaving in ways to help teachers become familiar with the GLETS. At all grade level conversations she found ways to ask how teachers were doing in understanding the meaning of the essential learnings and how they paced themselves. When they did struggle, teachers and administrators discussed the learning targets what they actually meant, how they could scaffold learning so students could eventually grasp the targets.

While initially evaluation is seen as negative thing in most schools, Amazing Elementary school embraces evaluation. It is viewed as an opportunity for feedback, celebration and basis for setting goals. There is a tremendous amount of feedback happening all the time every day. It is true what Eisner says of “What a school values in assessment and feedback says a lot about the culture,” (Eisner, 1991). Students take tests every week and look forward to seeing their results. They are trained in what the results mean and what they must achieve to move to the next level. Students are acknowledged and rewarded with books when they reach their goal. Everyone is rooting for them, supporting them and cheering them on. Everyone on the staff knows how to read the MAPs results and the Dibbles test, so everyone speaks the same assessment language. In another culture; tests, and feedback are dreaded, but here at Amazing Elementary School is an integral part of the culture; a positive force that drives everyone forward ever seeking the next level of learning. Everyone is always looking forward toward the finish line, but the finish line is always moving too!

Chapter Six: Summary of Study

Whenever you let up before a job is done, critical momentum can be lost and regression may follow, (Kotter, 1996, p.133).

Introduction

This chapter presents a theoretical explanation on what components must exist in order for an at-risk school to produce sustained achievement over time. The explanation presents a story about the interactions of people, situations and challenges they faced.

Research Questions Addressed

This complex and extremely interwoven story unfolds according to one main question and five supporting sub-questions that guide this study.

Main question

What behaviors must exist by administrators, teachers and parents in order to increase student achievement and sustain continued growth over time in an at-risk school setting?

Sub-questions

1. What changes or phases occurred in order to reach improved achievement?
2. What obstacles were over-come?
3. What methods/strategies/structures were implemented to over-come these obstacles?
4. What are the elements that need to exist to create a more effective learning environment that produces continued increases in student achievement?

5. What areas, such as; culture, climate, leadership structures and professional development, have been affected by these changes?

The sub-questions were deliberately created to provide a scaffold with a natural progression leading to the main research question. The organization of this chapter follows this progression, concluding with the presentation of the case study summary which represents the theoretical explanation for the questions under investigation.

Sub-question #1: What changes or phases occurred in order to reach improved achievement?

Result: Through the lens of Michael Fullan's Six Secrets of Change; he determined the following must exist to provide sustainable change; appreciating and acknowledging employees, connecting peers with their purpose, capacity building, and embedding learning all of the time, transparency and systems learn from the combination of the aforementioned. The changes in behavior at Amazing Elementary School were examined through this lens. While all of the areas were present to some extent, what seemed to be most evident and found across all groups as being very predominant was appreciating and acknowledging employees and connecting peers with purpose. All groups mentioned various ways they felt appreciated for their efforts and how maintaining their focus on student growth was a daily constant at Amazing Elementary School. Maintaining a constant, collective focus was interpreted as connecting peers with purpose. Sending a repeated message of the purpose of their work was crucial.

Employees mentioned various examples of feeling appreciated that were both tangible and intangible. Linda found ways to acknowledge individuals and groups. Groups consisted of grade levels and various classified staff. She sent them notes when

she noticed specific ways they went out of their way to provide for the needs of students. She sent them Starbucks rewards as grade levels and individuals when students met their goals.

The administration found other ways to show appreciation towards the staff for the long hours teachers dedicated themselves to meeting their goals. Since she couldn't always necessarily pay them a stipend, she asked each staff member three preferences for being acknowledged. She used this information to show them gratitude. Some of the following are examples of how she acknowledged appreciation for her staff's efforts:

- Bringing the Latte Man for coffee in the morning a couple of times
- Sending her staff to Barnes and Nobel to select books; promoting a culture of literacy
- Empowering staff to take initiative; and creatively problem solve.

I brought these dental hygiene ideas to Linda and she said, "go with it"; chopper topper, sealant program, miles for smiles... 70% of the students here have been served. The dental mobile comes here two weeks at a time. She made me feel valued and supported. Over the years parents have spread the word. More parents have put in registration communication and more community, (Sandra L.).

- Stipend money for weekend or summer work completed
- Bringing in lunches and breakfasts
- Sending staff to trainings and IB learnings
- Sending her staff to share their expertise within and outside of the district

Linda was firm, positive, gentle and yet demanding of her staff.

More importantly whenever Amazing Elementary School was awarded special recognition Linda gave all the credit to the staff. When they were granted their IB approval status she congratulated the staff on their achievement. Additionally, Linda

showed she trusted the staff, by seeking out their input whenever questions arose and decisions had to be made. In turn there was a high degree of trust given to her. Not only was there a focus on celebrating staff achievements there was a high degree of focus on student achievement. Every time a student reached a goal or demonstrated behaviors associated with the SOAR (Safety, Opportunity, Achievement and respect) there was immediate attention and reinforcement provided. This came in the form of regular awards ceremonies as well as, individual daily recognition in the distribution of books for goals met. This transferred to teachers' wanting to recognize achievements within their individual classrooms. One teacher found a way to recognize her students' achievements, "I started a great job board to motivate my students to do more work. I use it as a show case to recognize student work. Kids like to point out their work on the bulletin board in the hallway. They will say, "...that's my brother's or that's mine", (Melissa).

What is significant in this study is that no structure strategically implemented resulted in an isolated affect. One structure invariably resulted in many consequences. In fact, in the area of focusing on recognizing and celebrating achievements this fed into keeping the focus on achievement. This was a change in behavior, because it provided consistency, instilled a positive intent and it connected peers to peers on a daily basis. Daily discussions focused on moving students along the continuum of learning and strategizing how to do this more effectively.

The vehicle through which this occurred was intentional communication about what their work was, with staff, parents and students. Weekly staff meetings, weekly

data discussions and daily celebrations, all of which embedded the purpose of their work: to grow students and analyze students' needs in order to meet their learning goals.

Not only changes in how often they met, but the way they met kept their focus on achievement. Teachers were always meeting; if not for planning instructionally, but for student intervention purposes. They met weekly in grade level data meetings with the administrators, at faculty meetings, vertical team meetings, Friday Response to Intervention meeting with parents, and tracking of student data for IB portfolios with the IB coordinator. Additionally, they met using the Dibels data and graphing of Maps results as a third point of reference. By meeting and always keeping their conversations around students academic growth the change in behavior around teachers meeting had definitely shifted to a more intentional and strategic effective structure.

Sub- question #2: What obstacles were over-come?

Results: Many obstacles were over-come to create not only the sustained achievement necessary to drive the student performance up-ward, but also to create a culture and climate centered on student growth. Student growth is the center of everything at Amazing Elementary School, but in order to do this many obstacles had to be either eliminated or overcome. A lack of trust, confidence, funds, resources, defined structures to communicate or collaborate, defined curriculum or learning behaviors for students and a unified purpose all had to be addressed. Emphasis on activities that detracted from the focus of students' growth had to be dealt with and eventually eliminated. A few traditions that did not support student academics and took time and

effort away from the focus had to be finessed so that the community did not feel devalued.

The first thing Linda tackled was building trust and eliminating anything that got in the way of teachers collaborating to address student achievement. Since the first challenge they faced together as a team was that of becoming approved as an IB school she needed to bring the teachers together so they could build their IB units around their already existing social studies and science curriculum. She recognized that in order for teachers to accept the new direction of the school in becoming an IB school she needed to find ways for them to adequately and effectively address the task before them. At first they doubted they could accomplish the task before them. It seemed so daunting. Linda assured them over and over again that they could do this. She discovered ways to encourage them forward and praise them for small gains. Linda found ways to pay groups of teachers to get together to build units of study that incorporated the IB learner profiles and attitudes while remaining loyal to the district curriculum. Sometimes she provided substitutes so they could finish the task and sometimes she paid them for getting together on weekends and during the summer. This was a hugely time consuming task. “Most teachers’ work 50 or more hours a week, 75% of what we do is focused on the classroom, but with our Professional Learning Communities work the other 25% of the time is focused on the building as a whole, (Diane).” But teachers don’t seem to mind. There is a high degree of efficacy and purpose to their work. Once teachers found that through effective and focused collaboration they could achieve goals and accomplish

tasks they took that newly found confidence and tackled other areas at Amazing Elementary School.

Linda took the time to find out what motivated her staff. She used this information to reinforce their efforts. In addition to finding the confidence to take on tough tasks they found the power in collaborating as teams. From this experience they found the power of working to problem solve and carried this over to weekly data discussions to monitor student work. Indeed, some time was taken away as individual planning time, but teachers saw the value in discussing student growth and needs.

Sub-question #3: What methods/strategies/structures were implemented to overcome these obstacles?

Results: All teachers are expected to participate in one the several teams that help run the organization. Amazing Elementary School no longer has one leadership team that makes all of the decisions at Amazing Elementary School. Rather teachers participated on various teams that address needs at the school. For example; the Climate Team focused on the environment and attitudes at Amazing Elementary School. The goal is to create an environment of academic focus. The team planned and implemented the SOAR slips to track student achievement and reinforce positive behavior. They decided on the 6 specific dates during the year to acknowledge and honor students. Amazing Elementary School staff, the IB coordinator, learning coach and administrators frequently recognize students in grades 2nd - 5th grade using the IB learner profiles. They have organized the awards assemblies held at each grading period to recognize students with significant improvements in academics, behavior and attendance.

The other teams; literacy, math, ELL, and RTI have similar tasks. Each has the vision that supports moving students academically. By having everyone involved at some level Amazing Elementary School continues the notion of building leadership capacity or connecting peers to purpose and therefore perpetuating the notion of these are everyone's kids. The entire organization takes on the responsibility of moving students and that it is not the sole responsibility of any one person or any one group to make this happen, but rather a collective and collaborative effort by many.

Teachers had high expectations for themselves because the administration had high expectations for them and as well modeled high expectations. The administration participated in the scoring of writing samples. As a matter of fact, the principal scored all of the 3rd-5th grade beginning writing assessments and provided specific feedback to each student and teacher.

The administration also routinely left feedback to students in the form of post its around the building on writing posted in the hallways. This was one of the various ways emphasizing the connection between Reading and writing was conveyed.

Sub-question #4: What were the elements that needed to exist to create a more effective learning environment that produces continued increases in student achievement?

Results: In creating a sustainable learning environment, recognizing successes and achievements, establishing trust, implementing collaborative structures, and having a positive attitude were all found to present at Amazing Elementary School. Providing frequent conversations around student data that utilized effective forms of measurement,

and a structured curriculum easily understood and implemented by staff were absolutely necessary. Hiring and maintaining a staff that is unified in its beliefs, philosophies and strong instructionally were all found to be elements to producing an effective learning environment of the 20 effective components that Reeves refers to as narrowing the achievement gap; Amazing Elementary School was found to have evidence of most, if not all of them.

There were multiple forms of assessments embedded and on-going. All were used as a body of evidence from which to judge students' performance, growth and continued needs.

On-going collaboration and modeling was observed on a daily and weekly basis. Mastery teachers modeled best practices for teacher candidates, coaches modeled for teachers, colleagues coached for one another, administrators modeled for teachers. Modeling and collaboration was embedded and part of an expected culture.

Teaching was focused around the Grade Level Essential Targets and lessons/units had already been created that incorporated the IB curricula. The teachers had buy-in to this since they created the lessons. Teaching focused on standards that lead to improvement, provided consistency and needed structure.

Writing became a focus for improvement at AES when the literacy team and principal disaggregated the CSAP data and were not satisfied with the writing results. The principal with the literacy team analyzed the writing strands and determined a deficient in the area of organization. The team addressed this by providing teachers with professional development on-going throughout the year in this area. The literacy used the

faculty meetings as a vehicle for training teachers on the implementation of student graphic organizers to help students plan and more effectively plan their writing projects.

By using this method of professional development writing needs were addressed, but it was authentic and had specific purpose for the staff. When Reeves, speaks of, “student work leads to improved achievement;” her refers to the agency by which students’ exhibit in their own learning, (Reeves, 2004). Students have to see that they truly have control and ownership of the success and failure of their learning. AES has created a nicely meshed process for this.

By utilizing general outcome measurements, that provide a prediction of one’s success in terms of a numeric result, and then sharing these results with the students; having students set a goal for improvement and finally assessing regularly after appropriate corrective instruction have lead to an effective recipe for success. Students are then recognized, celebrated and rewarded for their efforts. Teachers provide grades based on students’ meeting the grade level targets or standards. This provides consistency and allows students to be evaluated against a target goal rather than each other. These targets are clear expectations that are evident to all students. They are posted and explained so students know what they are aiming for.

These structures are all elements found in effective schools and these effective elements have functioned consistently well and have contributed to the sustainability of Amazing Elementary School over the last four years.

Sub-question #5: What areas, such as; culture, climate, leadership structures and professional development, were affected by these changes?

Results: The culture, climate, leadership structures and professional development have all been affected by the changes at Amazing Elementary School. The climate has changed to one of hopefulness and positiveness. Staff members feel the success of their endeavors and this has empowered them to believe in their work and that they do make a difference in the lives of their students. This fuels them onward to achieve more. They feel good about their work. There is a high sense of efficacy. There exists a culture of working hard, doing what it takes and helping each other so the students can grow. Everyone sees their defined role as ultimately leading to the improvement in student achievement.

Through their many successes they understand the hard work of collaborative planning, analyzing of student data and curriculum are necessary in developing the latent skills of each student.

All professional development has supported these goals. The IB professional development supported a more rigorous, enriched and encompassing curriculum targeted not just at content development, but at developing life-long academic and behavioral attributes that will transfer to all areas in their futures. In addition, professional development around the district GLETS was implemented with the purpose of providing understanding so teachers could access the GLETS to help refine and target instruction.

The professional development around implementing a Response to Intervention process further supported the focus of providing intensive assistance for those students

not moving along the learning continuum and requiring more intensive interventions.

Teachers had professional development around this in order to access this resource. All decisions, all professional development, all structures supported this focus.

Main Research Question Addressed: What behaviors must exist by administrator, teachers and parents in order to increase student achievement and sustain continued growth over time in an at-risk school setting?

Results:

- Determination-Everyone was relentless in their pursuit of assisting students to grow academically.
- Positive Intent-I found very little if any negativism at Amazing Elementary School. Almost everyone believed everyone was doing their best and that all actions and decisions were made with regard to the best interest of students.
- Persistence- I found time and time again an attitude of hope and perseverance. When and if faced with an obstacle they pursued until a solution was found.
- Trust- It was evident there was trust given and received between staff, administration and district office. Staff stated over and over their faith in the leadership at the school level and the school level administration was provided support for resources, with very little interference, although there may have existed a facilitation of the practices found at Amazing Elementary School.
- Strong Work Ethic (Efficacy)-Staff felt honored, appreciated and therefore worthy of their mission (to grow students) and therefore they worked tirelessly to accomplish this mission. They worked far beyond the required work day and school year, because they saw their effectiveness. Their work was appreciated and was effective.
- Sense of Team (Collaboration)- All conversations focused on growing students. Data was used to compare individual student growth. Instruction adjusted based on predictive measurements. Teams based their work on what effect their decisions would have on growing students academically and socially.

Major finding

You don't have to be ruthless to evoke change! A combination of very thoughtfully and carefully orchestrated structures, which when implemented in unison and orchestrated simultaneously can lead to sustainable change. It is not the feat of any one person, but rather the harmony in working together toward a common defined focus that has led to sustained achievement for Amazing Elementary School. It is the enthusiasm of everyone working toward the same goal and no one sabotaging the efforts of the community.

The dogged pursuit of one focus, with determined diligence to prohibit any distraction that deters from that focus, this is the major theme constant at Amazing Elementary School. This is a district dedicated to the belief that a determined and skilled administrator and staff can accomplish a desired feat when bureaucracy refrains from interjecting its desires that lead to derailment, and yet is supportive in its endeavors. Equal trust must be ebbing and flowing between district administration, building administration and school level staff.

Creating a clear vision and constantly conveying that vision while maintaining high energy through celebrations that recognize achievements is a major theme. In addition, creating systems that bring all staff together frequently and in different ways; providing applicable, embedded professional development also aided in AES's success. Utilizing predictive growth outcome assessments routinely, that are aligned with the mastery assessments and provide teachers with appropriate information to adjust instruction contributed to effective/prescriptive instruction. Addressing individual student

needs, hiring only those staff members that are indoctrinated with the same philosophies and skill sets congruent with school philosophy, while eliminating blockers, are all major findings found in existence at Amazing Elementary School.

What is in place at Amazing Elementary School according to Failure is Not an Option (Blankstein, 2004):

Common mission, vision, values and goals

- Our community is united in achieving these goals and a plan for monitoring the progress is in place.
- Our goals are strategic, measureable, attainable, results-oriented and time bound-
SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN AND DATA DISCUSSIONS
- All students set goals and can define their learning expectations and the steps they need to take to meet these expectations-STUDENTS HAVE BEEN TAUGHT TO INTERPRET THE MAPS AND DIBELS RESULTS
- Learning outcomes have been defined for each content and grade level-THE GLETS
- Teachers feel accountable for student successes, even for students who are not in their classroom
- The learning community shares very high expectations and standards for what our students can achieve-SOAR expectation which is the PBS component and the learner profiles found in the IB program

Ensuring Achievement for all students-systems for Prevention and Intervention in place

- As they begin to show signs that they are not meeting learning expectations- RTI
- The RTI teams regularly to assess student needs- EVERY FRIDAY
- Teachers exhibit the failure is not an option mentality when facing student
- Achievement challenges and have collectively built a pyramid of interventions

- We have targeted approaches to build confidence for underachieving students.

Collaborative Teaming Focused on Teaching and Learning

- Student learning is the focus of all team meetings
- There is time for collaboration and professional development each week.
- Leadership teams represent all stakeholders
- Our teachers participate in weekly professional conversations
- Our school has both vertical and horizontal teams focused on improvement
- Using data to guide decision-making and continuous improvement

Formative assessments of progress are frequently administered

- Teams collect and use data that is timely, relevant, disaggregated, multi-sourced and consistent over time to inform decisions
- Teachers meet regularly to effectively collaborate and align assessments
- There is consistent in grading among teachers
- Our school/district regularly analyzes assessment results to compare achievement
- Data has been collected and analyzed to create a baseline profile of the school
- Students and parents understand how academic growth is assessed
- Teachers use a variety of student assessments

Gaining active engagement from family and community

- Parents are often seen volunteering at the school
- When communicating with parents, a variety of tools are used
- Parents regularly receive personal notes on their child's progress

Building sustainable leadership capacity

- Everyone in Amazing Elementary School actively participates in seeking and sharing up-to-date research on instruction

- Classroom visitations occur regularly using specific protocols
- Our school offers sufficient professional development resources to encourage continuous improvement
- Our professional development is on-going, job embedded, aligned to student achievement

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

Nine tenths of education is encouragement
Anatole France

Implications

Many struggling schools across the country have found ways to address their challenges and obstacles preventing them from achieving increased student achievement, however few have been able to maintain this achievement over time. The time and resources required to turn around a school are immense. Therefore, if the additional time and resources dedicated to improving a schools' performance could be sustained the cost effectiveness would be realized. Amazing Elementary School serves as an island of hope.

The number of at-risk schools is increasing; with the increase of student diversity, and the decrease of economic stability, schools serving students of color and poverty are struggling to meet the federal mandates of accountability, while also meeting the requirements of serving these specific students.

It is true that over the years the original purpose of public education has shifted and become more complex than to simply prepare individuals for a democracy. Through the decades the added responsibilities layered upon public education has been significant, while almost nothing has been removed. The number of challenges within schools to overcome, as well as the number of schools struggling, has increased. If we are to regain

a foothold on effective education we must seek to apply education to those affected schools differently. We must treat each school uniquely and fund based on need.

Amazing Elementary School offers sustainable changes and promise for struggling schools. If the preceding elements are implemented and other distracters are removed sustained achievement can be attained. However, courageous conversations are needed to examine education differently, avoiding objections to the uniformity that is the status quo and often the modus operandi of larger more bureaucratic school systems.

This study has influenced my thinking in many ways. First, it has forced me to re-evaluate my thinking about Title I schools in terms of what teachers and students are capable of. In an effort to be sensitive to the struggles of Title I families and then the many additional duties Title I teachers encounter, often we inadvertently lower our expectations for learning. This unspoken lowering of expectations results in a learned helplessness or lack of drive, and relentless pursuit of learning, which conversely must exist in order for struggling students to achieve and become successful in this ever competitive and demanding society.

I have learned that it is not enough to create a vision, but is it the many different ways that vision is conveyed through action, word and deed. If we say we are to become an engaging learning environment then we need to analyze what it takes to become that. Have had a discussion of what engagement means with students and teachers? Have we created documents that evaluate how engaging our environment is? Have we given feedback to one another about our effectiveness around engagement? Have provided the opportunity for teachers to visit one another's classrooms so they can get a feel for the

organization as a whole? Have we conveyed this to parents? Do we call home and let parents know when their students are demonstrating engagement? There is so much we can do in promoting our vision, it is time intensive, but everyone can assist in ensuring the success of the vision implementation.

Additionally, I learned that in order for any implementation of change to occur there has to be 80-90% of the staff on board. When too many teachers are opposed to the change process the organization cannot move forward in an urgent manner. Success may be achieved, but it seems less likely without the majority of the staff fully committed to the changes.

Recommendations

District Administration

While this study did not focus on the district contributions to the success of Amazing Elementary School, it was apparent that the district did support the changes implemented and that it was through the district's direction that the Primary Years Program of the International Baccalaureate Program was implemented.

While districts need to support their schools struggling to meet the adequately yearly progress of No Child Left Behind, they may need to treat these schools differently from other schools in their districts. In order to accomplish a specified focus and keep that focus in the constant fore-front of all endeavors, district administrators may need to exempt struggling schools from attending to all the district mandates. Schools serve different populations, presenting different challenges, and therefore different needs. In

order to adequately address and over-come these challenges, needs and root causes should very carefully be examined.

Districts should work to eliminate that which is not related to the focus. Districts must decide what is absolutely necessary so schools are not derailed from their focus. The energy and time it takes to keep that focus is great. If other demands can be eliminated or minimized in order to maintain the focus, then it can help from deterring staff from their mission. Districts will need to stand ready to offer additional assistance in the form of resources, implementation of structures and an on-going transparent, inclusive dialogue.

Struggling schools need to be treated uniquely and that may also include distribution of resources. Funding and allocating resources according to need rather than by equal distribution across the district according to student numbers, may be needed as well. Equitable does not necessarily mean equal. Struggling schools cannot be expected to simultaneously increase achievement, while also implementing various district initiatives. Increasing student achievement in of itself is a lofty goal, achievable only through very strategic and intentional diligence. Often schools at-risk are dealing with higher than average numbers of discipline and attendance issues as well as the achievement focus. Anyone of these challenges requires tremendous amounts of labor intensive time to improve. It is therefore prudent of districts to consider carefully what is absolutely necessary and clearing all other demands from the agenda of struggling schools.

There is another phenomenon that occurs at At-risk schools that needs to be discussed and considered carefully. I will call this the Title I phenomenon. It is similar to the notion of “Often our strengths are our weaknesses”. An action intended to help can often go awry if not given careful consideration. When a school is struggling, it is often the beneficiary of additional state, or federal monetary assistance; which from the outset seems like a benefit, and is intended to be so. However, it should be noted that with these added resources; often in the form of grants, comes a fairly time intensive requirement of managing and accounting for these resources; all of which is a deterrent to the intended focus of helping teachers raise student performance. Often the requirements of the grants demand high accountability, which means attending additional meetings, collecting additional documentation and data. All of which adds up to more time needed to organize and maintain this information. Accountability is necessary, especially when documenting dollars and resource allocation.

Title I schools often are required to manage several budgets besides the building budget, attend many additional meetings which when added up take huge amounts of time on the part of the principal or leadership. Additional meetings take the principal away from the very important task of the day to day operations of the building. The more the leadership of the building is pulled away from the building focus, the more they become disconnected and out of touch with the needs of the building, all of which can derail the focus of growing students and moving them along the continuum of learning.

When considering additional resources, districts need to consider the amount of time needed to manage these resources rather than simply expecting principals and

building staff to take on yet other burdens if they are to focus on increasing student achievement. This is not to say these resources are not needed. However, they should be considered with the idea of additional personnel to oversee and manage these resources. This would allow the staff to maintain their focus of determining students' learning needs and determining how best to meet them. Districts should consider how they can provide support for the maintenance of these resources. Listening to the building leadership and staff requires commitment and trust. Districts can go a long way in promoting sustainability by implementing these suggestions. Transparency is crucial from district administration, as well as building staff.

Principals

Principals are the gate-keepers of their schools. They need to be able to decide what goes and what stays that aligns with their focus, mission and vision. They need to be clear about the focus of their school. Communicating this focus often, whenever possible seems to be crucial. Often, means daily, or several times a week; at meetings, gatherings, trainings, grade level collaboration, parent meetings. It should be the one thing that everyone can recite and knows above all else.

All decisions need to be based on the focus of the school. Considering carefully additional resources; that support the focus of the school and do not detract, are essential. Many offers can taunt the true answer to achieving improvement, but looking beyond the initial outlay to the accountability demands should be considered heavily before deciding upon a solution.

As with student behavior modification, positive reinforcement is far more effective than punitive measures. Principals should consider very strategically ways of acknowledging behavior that exemplifies the focus of the school.

Additionally, principals need to consider very carefully the kind of staff employed at schools with challenges. While staff need to exhibit a mired of attributes; the ones that stood out in this study suggest seeking out and hiring teachers who value a deep level of collaboration and have an unwavering dedication to do whatever it takes to help students grow along the learning continuum. This means meeting continuously to analyze data and discussing instructional strategies to address these needs. Teachers also need to have a positive, “can do” attitude that exhibits hopefulness. Administrators also need rely on frequent reliable assessments to determine student growth and needs. Assessments need to be easy to administer, score, and interpret with quick turn- around time for teachers. Assessments need to align with a well-defined curriculum understood by all. Finally, it is imperative that students understand their assessment results and set learning goals around these goals.

Teachers

The teachers in this study were the backbone of the school and driving force for the sustained success found at Amazing Elementary School. They were empowered by their administrator and therefore were able to achieve great things. It is imperative that the teachers in struggling schools see themselves as a collective force empowered to produce change and given the permission to think creatively to achieve such.

Teachers need to be strong of character and believe in their own strengths. Self-confidence and self-assurance are powerful forces needed to overcome much previous negativity which is toxic to achieving and maintaining success. Teachers at Amazing Elementary school were not only reinforced by their leadership, but they were reinforced daily by the mentoring they did with their Teacher Candidates. They believed they could move the school and they did.

Finally, as previously mentioned teachers need to have the mental picture of collaborating to solve challenges and plan for the future. Almost nothing was done in isolation, from planning lessons, to planning a students' educational plan. Groups were responsible for over-seeing the operations of the building, with the exception of hiring.

Parents

Today parents have many choices in where to send their children. There is much to consider when selecting an appropriate choice of school. It should never just be about the scores a school receives on its' state assessment results. Scores are not always the result of poor teaching. It is much more. Spending time getting to know the culture and climate of a school are very important, as it takes more than a curriculum and well-trained teachers to educate students.

It takes dedication to go beyond the "what is" to the "what could be". It takes courage to think creatively and often outside of the box, and often against current recommendations. There aren't many Title 1 schools that are also IB schools; however, in the last four years more Title I schools have become IB schools. This is an example of going against current recommended practices. It worked because there was a team of

teachers willing to work together to create the necessary units of study. Sustained achievement worked because after these teachers realized the power of collectively and collaboratively working together they knew the power of analyzing student needs and sharing ideas to meet these needs. Teachers have to be willing to see that time spent at school is a team effort and not an isolated endeavor. Parents need to also look for and support this as a regular practice. Schools that regularly team are successful schools. Parents need to ask about this and find out whether it is intentionally and strategically structured within the school day.

Additionally, parents need to be viewed as part of the support team and determine whether there is availability for them to participate in supporting the school in their achievement efforts.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Further research needs to be conducted regarding struggling schools that have sustained achievement and caused increased achievement because of these changes. Where are the courageous schools and districts that have dared to fund struggling schools based on need rather than on student count? Where are the courageous districts that have eliminated extraneous demands holding sacred a singular focus for these schools? Where are the districts courageous enough to speak up to federal and state departments of education who withhold funding as a punitive measure for non-compliance of mandates, that simply burden schools and take precious time and resources away from a singular focus?

Are there schools out there who have pared down their responsibilities in order to sustain a singular focus allowing for sustained achievement? Are there struggling schools that have thought creatively and been able to maintain achievement over time with supports in resources?

It is my unwavering belief that all struggling schools can attain up-ward advancement in performance, if treated differently without parameters that impede their advancement. While the majority of schools are well –intentioned, often they serve to hamper the growth of students due to the mandates placed upon them. When we stop making decisions based on what is right for everyone and what can only be done because of monetary limitations, we will see all schools succeed.

An additional suggestion for research is to compare the achievement growth of rural title 1 schools to the achievement growth of urban title 1 schools. It would be of interest to compare the layers of mandates found in larger school districts to those of smaller school districts. Determining whether there is a difference in the number of required programs implemented between the locations/sizes of districts as a deterrent to success would be valuable. Larger districts tend to have many more requirements that schools must attend to and these may present obstacles to achieving academic success.

Lastly, future research could focus on the effect of many of these implemented structures and practices in relationship to school success from the view point of the student. While students were not interviewed expressly for their opinions and feedback, much was gleaned through their comments in observations that does leave one wondering just how great of an impact these structures and practices had on their success and

attitude toward learning. Title I students often do not come to school with a sense of empowerment in their learning. Intentional and strategic instruction on how to be an effective learner seems warranted to accomplish this.

Reflection

My journey during the course of this case study has been long, arduous and complex, but extremely enlightening and exhilarating. I have learned more about the complexities of education and the struggles of students not always privileged to be enriched by birth. I have learned that political barricades within education often hinder the development of many students, often discouraging them before they have had a chance to blossom, but courageous administrators and educators can challenge these efforts for the sake of students and can make a difference.

For thirty years it has been my passion to help all students seek out opportunities that will develop their potential, regardless of social, economical or racial status. I have been witness to the greatness of those working together to provide just this. I have also witnessed the injustices administrators, teachers and schools often cause, denying educational accessibility. As a Nation, if we are to become what our forefathers envisioned, then we must re-think how we deliver education. The dynamics within our classroom walls are far more complex than were hundreds of years ago, and for that matter 10 years ago. The demands are great. Much of the societies' concerns, we are asked to address within the confines of the school day. This is virtually impossible to do with any degree of efficiency. There is a phenomenon that occurs when one is asked to do too many things in a small span of time. One reaches a level of efficiency for a time

and then ultimately a level of inefficiency occurs due to the quantity of demands and time limitations, it just can't all get done. And yet we just keep piling things on with no regard for effectiveness. How can a school drastically increase student achievement, when their reading achievement is low, free and reduced lunch status is above 80%, number of second language learners are above 65%, implement all of the other requirements schools' whose reading achievement is at or above expected targets, with the same amount of resources?

Studies conducted as far back at 1972 with 3rd graders identified four significant variables that had a 75% prediction rate of whether students would dropout or graduate. The variable with the highest predictive correlation was that of struggling in reading, (D. N. Lloyd, 1972). While 20 variables were examined among white males and females and black males and females; reading achievement stood out as the single most predictive indicator for dropout or graduation, followed by IQ score, retention rates in the first three grades, and grade point average. With this being said, it seems imperative that struggling schools avail to focus with a singular clarity of ensuring students read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade.

If struggling in reading is a strong predictor of dropping out and dropout rates lead to many other societal difficulties, then it seems logical that we as a society need to take a look at the impact of focusing on and solving the educational barriers that prevent struggling schools from implementing changes that lead to sustainable achievement.

A Definition of Wisdom

Myself, I must recreate, after all, what we really strive for is... "The ability to act with knowledge, while doubting what we know", (Pfeffer, J. & Sutton, R. I., 2006).

References

- Angelou, Maya (1970) I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, www.poemhunter.com
- Banks, J.A. and Banks, C.A. McGee (1995). Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster McMillan.
- Banks, J.A. (2002). An Introduction to Multi-cultural Education. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon a Pearson Education Company.
- Bolman, Lee G. and Deal, Terrence E. (2001). Leading With Soul: An Uncommon Journey of Spirit. New York, NY: Josey-Bass Publishers.
- Blankstein, A. (2004). Failure is Not an Option. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Closing the Achievement Gap 1/12/2008 <http://www.subnet.nga.org/educlear/achievement/index.html>,
- Bridging the Achievement Gap* New York Times, 2004. (Look up)
- Cecelski, David S. (1994). Along Freedom's Road: Hyde County North Carolina and the Fate of Black Schools in the South. Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Closing the Achievement Gap Section, (1998) Division of School North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, pg. 2.
- Collins, Jim (2001). Good to Great. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.
- Colorado Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap Report (2005).
- Conchas, Gilberto (2006). The Color of Success: Race and High-Achieving Urban Youth. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.
- Connell, J., Halpern-Felsher, B., Clifford, E., & Crichlow, W. (1995). Hanging in there: Behavioral, psychological, and contextual factors affecting whether African-American adolescents stay in high school. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 10(1), 41-63.
- Contreras, A. Reynaldo and Stephens, Jessica E. (February 1997). Forty Years After Brown: The Impact of Immigration Policy on Desegregation, *Education and Urban Society*, 29 (2), 182-191.
- Creswell, John W. (2003). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (Second Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *Doing what matters most: Investing in quality teaching*. New York: Commission on Teaching & America's Future.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1990). *Access to Knowledge: An Agenda for Our Nation's Schools*. New York: Teachers College Columbia University.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York, New York: Macmillan.
Dispelling the Myth: www.educationaltrust.org
- Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, (Dibels): <https://dibels.uoregon.edu>.
- DuFour, Richard, DuFour, Becky and Barth, Roland (2005). *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*. Bloomington, ID: The National Education Service.
- Eisner, Elliot W. (1988). The ecology of school improvement: Some lessons we have learned. *Educational Leadership*, 45(5) (February), 24-29.
- Eisner, Elliot W. (1991). *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice*. New York, New York: Macmillan.
- Esquith, Rafe (2007). *Teach Like Your Hair's on Fire: Methods and Madness Inside Room 56*. New York, NY: The Penguin Group.
- Fraser, James W. (2001). *The School In the United States: A Documentary History*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill Companies Inc.
- Fullan, Michael (2008). *The Six Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Glatthorn, Allan A. and Joyner, Randy L. (2005). *Writing the Winning Thesis or Dissertation: A step-by-step Guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Glesne, Corrine (1999). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction, Second Edition*. New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Goodchild, L., Green, K., Katz, E. and Kluever, R. (1997). *Rethinking the Dissertation Process: Tackling Personal and Institutional Obstacles*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Goodlad, John I., Mantle-Bromley, Corinne and Goodlad, Stephen John (2004). *Education for Everyone: Agenda for Education in Democracy*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Grant, C. A. and Sleeter, Christine E. (1996). *After The School Bell Rings*, Second Edition. Bristol, PA: Falmer Press, Taylor and Francis Inc.
- Hart, Chris (1998). *Doing a Literature Review*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press Inc.
- Haycock, Kati. (1998, summer). Good Teaching Matters.... A lot. *The Educational Trust*, 3(2), 3-14.
- Haycock, Kati (2001). Alums Making a Difference: Kati Haycock Director, The Education Trust. Graduate School of Education University of California, Berkeley, Vol. XIII, No.1.
- Haycock, Kati (2001). Closing the Achievement Gap. *Educational Leadership*, Volume 58 Number 6 March 2001.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2003, January 7). To close the gap, quality counts. *Education Week*, 7-18.
- Kaestle, Carl F. (1983). *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and the American Society 1780-1860*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang.
- Kaufman, Roger, Guerra, Ingrid and Platt, William A. (2006). *Practical Evaluation for Educators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Kochman, Thomas (1981). *Black and White Styles and Conflict*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Kidder, Tracy (1989). *Among School Children*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.
- Kohn, Alfie (April, 1998). Only for My Kid: How Privileged Parents Undermine School Reform, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 568-577.
- Kotter, John P. (1996) *Leading Change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Kozol, Jonathan (1995). *Amazing Grace*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.
- Kozol, Jonathan (2000). *Ordinary Resurrections: Children in the Years of Hope*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.
- Kozol, Jonathan (1991). *Savage Inequalities*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.
- Kozol, Jonathan (2005). *Shame of the Nation: Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*. New York, NY: Crown Publishers, Inc.

- Krueger, Richard A. & Casey, Mary Anne (2000). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide For Applied Research* (3rd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lewis, C., Perry, R. and Murata, A. (2006). How Should Research Contribute to Instructional Improvement? The Case of Lesson Study. *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 3-14.
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalist Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publication.
- Lloyd, D.N. and G. Bleach (1972). Prediction of High School Dropout or Graduation from 3rd Grade Data. *Educational and Psychological Measure*.
- Measurement of Academic Progress, (MAPs): <http://legacysupport.nwea.org>
- Meier, Deborah (1995). *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publications.
- Miles, Matthew B. and Huberman, A. Michael (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis Second Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Morse, Janice M., Richards, Lyn (2002). *Read Me First: For User's Guide to Qualitative Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Nazario, Sonia (2006). *Enrique's Journey*. New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks.
- Noguera, Pedro (2003). *City Schools and the American Dream*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Noguera, Pedro, Wing, Jean Yonemura (2006). *Unfinished Business: Closing the Racial Achievement Gap in Our Schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Ogbu, J. & Matute-Bianchi, M.E. (1986). Understanding Socio-cultural Factors: Knowledge, identity and school adjustments. In *Beyond Language: Social and Cultural Factors in Schooling Language Minority Students* (pp. 73-142). Sacramento, CA: State Department of Education Bilingual Education Office.
- Page, Reba (1987). Teachers' Perceptions of Students: A Link between Classrooms, School Cultures, and the Social Order. *Anthropology and Educational Quarterly*, Vol. 18, 77-99.

- Payne, R. (2005). *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Fourth Revised Edition. Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc.
- Payne, R. (2002). *Understanding Learning: The How the Why and the What*. Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc.
- Pfeffer, J., & Sutton, R. I. (2006). *Hard Facts, dangerous half-truths and total nonsense: Profiting from evidence-based management*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Reeves, Douglas (2004). *Accountability in Action: A Blueprint for Learning Organizations*(2nd ed.) Englewood, CO: Advanced Learning Press.
- Reeves, Douglas (2006). *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Reeves, Douglas B. (2008) *Reframing Teacher Leadership: To Improve Your School*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Reeves, Douglas B. (2008b) www.middleweb.com/MWLresources/acountaction.html
- Reeves, Douglas B. (2007) *Leading to Change/How Do You Sustain Excellence?* Educational Leadership November 2007/ Volume 65/ number 3 p. 86-87.
- Rose, Mike (1995). *Possible Lives: The Promise of Public Education in America*. New York, NY: The Penguin.
- Rothman, Robert (Winter, 2001/02). *Closing the Achievement Gap: How Schools Are Making It Happen*. *The Journal of the Annenberg Challenge*, 5 (2), 1-11.
- Riehl, Carolyn J. (Spring, 2000). *The Principal's Role in Creating Inclusive Schools for Diverse Students: A Review of Normative, Empirical and Critical Literature on the Practice of Educational Administration*. *University of North Carolina*, (70) 1, 55-81.
- Schmoker, M. (2006). *Results Now: How we can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Spring, Joel (2001). *The American Schools 1642-2000 Fifth Edition*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill Companies, inc.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- The Educational Trust. *EdTrust Releases Funding Gap 2006*.
<http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Press+Room/Funding+Gap+2006.htm>
- Thomas, L. (2004). A study of perceived traits of selected high-performing high-poverty public schools in Texas. *Dissertation Abstracts International*.
- Wallis, Claudia (2008). *How to Make Great Teachers: American public schools are struggling to attract and retain high quality teachers. Is it time we paid them for performance?* Time Magazine, February 25, 28-32.
- Wheatley, M. J. (2005). *Finding Our Way*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Wheatley, Margaret J. (2006). *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett- Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Wolcott, Harry F. (2001). *Writing Up Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- York-Barr, Jennifer, Sommers, William A., Ghere, Gail S. and Montie, Joe, (2001). *Reflective Practice to Improve Schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press Inc.
- Zemelman, Steven, and Daniels, Harvey and Hyde, Arthur (2005). *Best Practice: Today's Standards for Teaching & Learning in America's Schools*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann Press.

Appendix A

Teacher Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Please be open and honest in your responses. Your responses will be kept confidential. Even though I am the principal of Title I school, I am entering into this study as an objective researcher with no preconceptions and no judgments. I am here to listen and learn.

General

1. How and why did you become a teacher at your school?
2. What do you teach? What grade levels?
3. How long have you been teaching?
4. How long have you been teaching at Amazing School?
5. What additional leadership roles do you perform at Amazing School?
6. How have your feelings about teaching changed or been affected during the last 5 years?

Intentional

7. How has the attitude of your teaching changed over the last five years?
8. How have the relationships with your peers changed?
9. How has the relationship with your administrator changed?
10. What has been the response of the parents to the changes implemented over the last four years?
11. How have parents played a role in the changes that have occurred?

Structural

12. When is staff development activities scheduled?
13. What kinds of staff development activities are taking place during this time?
14. How was the staff development time chosen?
15. What is the administrator's role during this time?
16. How does the staff (teachers and administrator) maintain their focus?

Curricular

17. What is the focus for Amazing School?
18. How has the curriculum helped or hindered you in improving school achievement?
19. How much time is spent on writing during the day and in what ways?
20. How is student work displayed and recognized throughout the building?
21. How is student growth/achievement recognized and displayed?

Pedagogical

22. How is progress reported?
23. What assessments are currently being used to drive instruction?

24. How frequently are assessments given?
25. How often do teachers meet to discuss student progress? Describe what this looks like?
26. What teachers do the scoring of assessments? How are result/feedback communicated?
27. What is the outcome of progress or lack of progress made by students?
28. What have other teachers, parents, and students, administrators shared with you about the impact of the changes that have occurred during the last four years?

Evaluative

29. How does your staff provide feedback to the administrators about the effectiveness of the changes that have been implemented in last four years?
30. How is this information shared with the rest of the staff?
31. What impact do you feel the changes have made on your school?
32. How has this affected you or your attitude about your work as professional educator?
33. What has allowed you to sustain/maintain the growth during the last four years?

What else would you like to share with me regarding the changes that have led to the increased student achievement over the last four years?

Appendix B

Interview Parent Guide

General

1. How many children do you have attending Amazing Elementary School?
2. What grades are they in?
3. How long have you had children attending Amazing Elementary School?
4. What ways have you been involved at Amazing Elementary School?
5. How have your feelings about education changed since your children have been attending Amazing Elementary School?

Intentional

6. How has the attitude of your education changed over the last five years?
7. How have the relationships with your child(ren)'s teachers changed?
8. How has the relationship with your administrator changed?
9. How have other parents responded to the changes at Amazing Elementary School over the last five years?
10. How have parents played a role in the changes that have occurred?

Structural

11. What structures have you noticed changed over the last five years or more?
12. How is communication with parents handled?
13. How has the learning of your children changed over the last five years?
14. What is the administrator's role during this time?
15. How do you feel staff get along with each other?
16. How do you feel staff and administration get along with each other?

Curricular

17. What is the focus for Amazing School?
18. How has the curriculum helped or hindered your child(ren) in improving school achievement?
19. How much time is spent on writing and how has your child(ren)'s writing changed over the last five years?
20. How is student work displayed and recognized throughout the building?
21. How is student growth/achievement recognized and displayed?

Pedagogical

22. How is progress reported to parents and how often?
23. What assessments are currently being used to drive instruction?
24. How frequently are assessments given?
25. How often do teachers meet to discuss student progress? Describe what this looks like?
26. How are results/feedback communicated?

27. What happens when students struggle in a subject area?
28. What have other teachers, parents, and students, administrators shared with you about the impact of the changes that have occurred during the last four years?

Evaluative

29. How do parents provide feedback to the administrators about the effectiveness of the changes that have been implemented in last four years?
30. How is this information shared with the rest of the staff?
31. What impact do you feel the changes have made on your child's academic achievements?
32. How has this affected you or your attitude about education?
33. What do you feel has allowed Amazing Elementary School to sustain/maintain the growth during the last four years?

What else would you like to share with me regarding the changes that have led to the increased student achievement over the last four years?

Appendix C

Interview Questions (Administrator)

General

1. How and why did you become an Administrator at your school?
2. What motivated you to take on the challenges of a Title I school?
3. What were your previous experiences?
4. How long have you been an administrator?
5. How long have you been an administrator at Amazing School?
6. What additional leadership roles did you have previous to arriving at Amazing School?
7. How have your feelings about education changed or been affected during the last four years?

Intentional

8. How has the attitude of your leadership skills changed over the last five years?
9. How have the relationships with your staff changed?
10. How has the relationship with your parents changed?
11. What has been the response of the parents to the changes implemented over the last four years?
12. How have parents played a role in the changes that have occurred?

Structural

13. When is staff development activities scheduled?
14. What kinds of staff development activities are taking place during this time?
15. How was the staff development time chosen?
16. What is the administrator's role during this time?
17. How does the staff (teachers and administrator) maintain their focus? What specific strategies are place to help maintain urgency?

Curricular

18. What is the focus for Amazing School?
19. How has the curriculum helped or hindered you in improving school achievement?
20. How much time is spent on writing during the day and in what ways?
21. How is student work displayed and recognized throughout the building?
22. How is student growth/achievement recognized and displayed?
23. How do you as an administrator support all of this?

Pedagogical

24. How is progress reported?
25. What assessments are currently being used to drive instruction?
26. How frequently are assessments given?

27. How often do teachers meet to discuss student progress? Describe what this looks like?
28. Who does the scoring of assessments? Why? How are result/feedback communicated?
29. What is the outcome of progress or lack of progress made by students?
30. What have other teachers, parents, and students, administrators shared with you about the impact of the changes that have occurred during the last four years?

Evaluative

31. How does your staff provide feedback to the administrators about the effectiveness of the changes that have been implemented in last four years?
32. How is this information shared with the rest of the staff?
33. What impact do you feel the changes have made on your school?
34. How has this affected you or your attitude about your work as professional educator?
35. What has allowed you to sustain/maintain the growth during the last four years?

What else would you like to share with me regarding the changes that have led to the increased student achievement over the last four years?

Additional Questions for Administrators:

1. How did you go about establishing your focus/need for change?
2. How did you create a leadership team/committee to communicate your focus?
3. In what ways did you celebrate your progress? Did you implement periodic reinforcement?
4. In what ways did you communicate changes? How often?
5. How did you go about creating your vision?
6. In what ways did you empower your staff?
7. How did you make your changes become a part of your culture/traditions and routines?

Appendix D

Change Research Questions

Dissertation Research Questions
Topic and issue questions
Adapted from (The Six Secrets of Change, Fullan, 2008)

1. How does the administration find ways to love their staff? (list 3)

How is this viewed by the staff?

How does showing love towards your employees led to productivity and affecting of the status quo?
2. How does the administration and the staff at Amazing Elementary School connect peers to their purpose on a regular basis?

What is done to avoid burn out, stress or passion fatigue?
3. How does the administration build capacity in the staff at Amazing Elementary School?

How does this affect the amount of time staff contribute?

What purposeful and intentional practices help to promote capacity within the staff?

What criteria is used to determine who is capable and will be successful at additional leadership responsibilities?

What is done to motivate individuals to want to grow and take on more leadership?
4. How is continuous learning infused in your work?

How do you daily keep the focus on learning attached to what you are doing?

How do you handle or what do you do when staff become weary of the continual energy needed to keep learning, in order to improve practice?
5. What are the various ways transparency is demonstrated? How important is this to the work in your organization?

What are the drawbacks to being so transparent?

What have been some of staff's reactions to transparency?

What have been the positives?

6. How is leadership manifested at different levels within your organization?

Think back to some initiatives; in what ways have you seen all of the previous five ingredients come together to achieve the desired affect?

How has this been developed and sustained over time?

Has there been resistance to others wanting to take on leadership roles, if so how has this been addressed?

How have staff been prepared and supported to lead?

Has lack of confidence been a concern and if so, how has this been addressed?

How do you help staff see the whole picture that Amazing Elementary School students and staff are part of a greater picture and yet interdependent on so many other systems, influences and variables; the whole idea of "Plan big, but focus small"?

Do you think your staff sees the effects of their efforts well- past the present and into the future? If so, how do you help them to see this and sustain this idea?

What evidence exists that indicates the staff has taken ownership in the mission/vision?

What else would you like to share with me regarding the changes that have led to the increased student achievement over the last four years?