PURPOSEFUL CULTURAL CHANGES AT AN ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL: A
CASE STUDY

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

    The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of

SYNTHIA LEE PARISH-DUEHN find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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A CASE STUDY

Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to record the process, events, and reactions that occurred when an administrator made purposeful changes to the culture of a toxic alternative high school. Consistent with the purpose, this study used qualitative case study design and methods. The principles of action research were also applied, because the researcher was also a participant. Participants' journals were the primary data sources for this study.

An alternative high school in a rural Washington state community was the site for this study. The journal data were analyzed and compiled to create a portrait of the cultural change process in the school during the period of one academic year. In this study, a narrative regarding cultural system changes and their impact was developed. The responses in the journals of the other participants were analyzed for descriptions of what did happen and their perceptions of the changes. The data were analyzed and sorted into themes from which a narrative was constructed. An attempt was made in the narrative to include the various voices of the participants in the writing.

The elements that contribute to a toxic school culture were explored. A case

study was conducted to record the experiences of the individuals involved with the school as the administrator made purposeful cultural changes to the school in order to create a positive school culture. Several conclusions were reached as a result of this study: (a) Chronological order of the changes made does matter; (b) it is not necessary to "gut" the staff of a building to retool the culture; (c) staff is more resistant to change than students; (d) a positive school culture increases emotional safety, student connectedness, and impacts student learning; (e) in a healthy culture you do not want to be complacent.

This study is significant in that it contributes knowledge regarding the process of purposeful cultural change at alternative high schools. Conclusions and implications resulting from this study may be useful to administrators at alternative high schools as they endeavor to retool a toxic school culture into a positive school culture.

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DEDICATION

"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

-Søren Kierkegaard

I dedicate this work to several people. A student of mine, Clint, who said to me, "There is a difference between being well-schooled and well-educated; I wish to be well educated." I also dedicate this work to my husband Bryce and my kids Jeremiah, Sarah, and Dakota; who kept me moving forward when I was tired and felt like quitting. I also need to thank my herd of horses, Hank and Scooby in particular--they helped me keep my sanity during this whole process. I would also like to thank my committee, with a special thanks to Dr. Furman for her patience and guidance. Finally, to my sixth grade teacher, Mr. Pratt, I hope he knows that I kept my promise.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This qualitative case study focuses on purposeful cultural changes at an alternative high school with a "toxic" culture. The primary purpose of the study is to address the question: What happens when an educational leader uses a "cultural" perspective to lead the process of purposeful change to the cultural system in a toxic, alternative high school? The data were collected and analyzed using qualitative research methods.

Background

School culture and school climate are terms that are often used interchangeably in educational literature, although there are differences in these concepts. Perry was the first educational leader to write explicitly about how school climate affects students and the process of learning (Perry, 1908). Since Perry's time, the systematic study of school climate grew out of organizational research and studies in school effectiveness (Anderson, 1982; Creemers & Reezigt; 1999: Kreft, 1993; Miller & Fredericks, 1990; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Although there is not one commonly accepted definition for school climate, the vast majority of researchers and scholars suggest that school climate, essentially, reflects subjective experiences in school (Cohen, 2006).

In contrast, Swindler (1998) states that culture consists of symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life. Swindler's definition of culture is consonant with the traditional anthropological concepts of culture (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). In this study the term culture reflects its

common usage in educational literature. Purkey and Smith (1982), for example, define the school's culture as "a structure, process and climate of values and norms that channel staff and students in the direction of successful teaching and learning" (pp. 64-69). Saphier and King (1985) cite twelve norms of school culture, which, if strong, contribute to the instructional effectiveness of a school. These norms are: collegiality; experimentation; high expectations; trust and confidence; tangible support; reaching out to the knowledge bases; appreciation and recognition; caring, celebration and humor; involvement in decision making; protection of what's important; traditions; and honest, open communication (pp. 67-74). Culture is the driving force behind everything that occurs at a school (Littky, 2004) and affects the school's climate.

Owens and Steinhoff (1988) have identified four distinctive school cultures:

1. Family Culture: The school has the feel of a family or a team. The most important element in a family school culture is concern for each other, and staff commitment to students and their culture is common.

2. Machine Culture: The school runs like a well-oiled machine. The focus in on precision rather than on nurturing learners.

3. Cabaret Culture: This is a circus-type culture. The relationships and status in the organization come from theatrical practices. These schools are "all show and no go."

4. Little Shop of Horrors: The school culture is viewed as unpredictable. Tension and stress abound. People view it as a prison. They have no choice but to function or try to escape.

Research related to "successful" schools emphasizes the importance of cultures based in professional learning communities. In professional learning communities, educators are attentive to developing the building blocks of improving the organization-- mission, vision, values, and goals. Schools functioning as professional learning communities are characterized by a shared mission, vision, and values; collective inquiry; collaborative teams; an orientation toward action; a willingness to experiment; commitment to continuous improvement; and a focus on results.

Perhaps the type of culture most damaging to a school's ability to meet the needs of students is a "toxic culture." A toxic culture, according to some analysts, hinders growth and learning (Deal & Peterson, 2002). In these schools, the spirit and focus is fractured and often hostile, the value of serving students is replaced by the goal of serving self, a sense of helplessness and despair predominates, and professional growth is not a prized activity. Staff members resist reform, publicly ridiculing those who want to try new things. A toxic culture can destroy motivation, dampen commitment, depress effort, and change the focus of the school. It can decrease learning, frustrate growth, hampers risk taking, and foster radical individualism rather than collegiality (Deal & Peterson, 1978).

Wagner (2004) informs us that it is easy to play the "Blame Game," instead of trying to solve the problems in a toxic culture. "If fish in the aquarium are sick-Don't blame the fish! Instead, check the water" (p. 10).

Making a conscious and purposeful effort to build and improve the school culture through a long-term, data-based, school improvement effort is supported by findings from the effective schools research. Identified in *Effective Schooling Practices: A*

Research Synthesis (Durian & Butler, 1984), the findings on conscious and purposeful effort to build and improve the school culture at the school level include: (a) Everyone emphasizes the importance of learning; (b) strong leadership guides the instructional program; (c) the curriculum is based on clear goals and objectives; (d) there are high expectations for quality instruction; (e) incentives and rewards are used to build strong motivation; (f) parents are invited to become involved; (g) teachers and administrators continually strive to improve instructional effectiveness; (h) there are pleasant conditions for learning. Stover (2005) points out the importance of the role of the school leader in efforts to change school culture stating, "In the final analysis, researchers say, any serious look at school climate and culture should lead policymakers to a simple--and challenging--conclusion: Almost everything depends on leadership. Attitudes and behaviors in a school are not going to change unless the principal understands how to work with the existing culture--and knows how to help it evolve into a healthier one" (p. 12). Principals send important cultural messages to staff and students with every decision, as well as with their interactions with central office and community leaders. This cultural message sending gives principals enormous opportunities to shape a school's culture (Richardson, 2001).

Why is it important to be concerned about the concept of culture? Organizational culture has been identified as critical to the successful improvement of teaching and learning. Culture is a key factor in determining whether improvement is possible (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The foundation for school improvement is the culture of the school (Purkey & Smith, 1982). A positive school culture has been linked to academic success (Constantino, 2003). Raywid (2001) points out that in small schools the school culture

plays a pivotal role in success. The personalized nature and small school setting of alternative schools means the culture of that school will have an amplified impact on the students (Duke, Griesdorn, & Kraft, 1998).

Although cultural change is well documented in the regular high school setting, there is very little extensive research on cultural change within alternative high schools. What is understood about alternative education is still dependent primarily on studies from the 1970s (Young & Clinchy, 1992). This research tended to focus on administrative organization (Duke, 1978), pedagogy (Deal & Nolan, 1978), the "new progressive movement" (Cremin, 1961), and academic rigor (Ravich, 1983 and Hirsch, 1987). While there is a wealth of evidence regarding the success of alternative education programs, there is very little research on cultural change in alternative high schools (Casserly, 1996).

<p style="text-align:center">Research Problem</p>

Culture is an important influence on everything that occurs at a school (Littky, 2004). According to Deal and Peterson (2002), while there is no one best culture for schools, recent research related to "successful" schools highlights the importance of cultures based in professional learning communities. Some schools however, have negative subcultures or "toxic" cultures that hinder growth and learning (Deal & Peterson, 2002). School culture is of vital importance and is often overlooked as education becomes more standards driven. The study and implementation of positive school culture is important (Dalin & Rolff, 1993).

Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is the need for research on purposeful changes to school culture in alternative high schools settings.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to describe and analyze the process of purposeful cultural change at an alternative high school which previously exhibited a "toxic" culture. The study explores participants' feelings, reactions, observations, and evaluation of the impact of this process. The primary question addressed in the study is: What happens when an educational leader uses a "cultural" perspective to lead the process of purposeful changes to the cultural system in a toxic alternative high school? The question is addressed through an in-depth, participant-observer case study. The researcher is the leader of this process of cultural change within this school setting.

Methods

This study employed qualitative case study methodology. Since a bounded system--the alternative high school--is the primary research target, case study methodology was deemed most applicable (Creswell, 1998). This study also reflects the principles of action research, because the researcher was also a participant in the study and was engaged in a change process with the participants (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Data were collected through participants' weekly entries in electronic journals that were kept for one academic year and anecdotal records.

Site for the Study

The site for this case study is an alternative high school located in a rural eastern Washington school district. According to anecdotal records, the site began to become observably toxic six years before this study was conducted. The symptoms of toxicity were exhibited in several ways: unprofessional conduct, issues of staff relationships, poor record keeping, lack of administrative presence, and student issues. During the 2005-

2006 school year a new school Dean (the researcher) began to implement a process of intentional changes with the goal of eliminating the toxic culture that permeated the school. This study chronicles and analyzes this process from the viewpoints of the participants.

Ethics

Ethical considerations are addressed in this study. Participants and school names, along with location, are kept confidential. Pseudonyms are used in the reporting of the study. Each participant was given a consent form to sign. This form explained the purpose of the study, the method for collection of data, that there is no anticipation of harm to participants, that they can withdraw at any time, and that identifying information will be kept confidential (see Appendix A).

Credibility

As a participant in this study, I needed to guard against potential bias. In addition, I was a member of the team that did a site visitation and evaluation in 2002 of the school site prior to working there, and I developed opinions about the school that could have biased the data analysis. To address these issues, I attempted to "bracket" these opinions to minimize their impact on data collection and analysis. Qualitative researchers use bracketing to improve rigor and to reduce bias in research. Parahoo (1997) defines bracketing as "suspension of the researcher's preconceptions, prejudices, and beliefs so that they do not interfere with or influence the participants' experience" (p. 45). Burns and Grove (2003) add that bracketing means that the researcher lays aside what he or she knows about the experience being studied (p. 308). Streubert and Carpenter (1999)

affirm that bracketing means not making judgment about what was observed or heard and remaining open to data as it is revealed.

I have spent ten years teaching in an alternative school setting. Additionally, two of my three children graduated from alternative schools. A further issue was my role as an administrator in this alternative school site. I had to ensure that participants in this study did not feel pressured to participate in this study, so I put safeguards in place to reduce the anxiety of the participants. I provided an "opt out" at any time for participants and did not collect the participants' journals until the end of the school year. At staff meetings, participants were encouraged to voice their concerns and opinions. I attempted to make clear to the participants that their roles were vitally important to the effective change process, which was more important that the research project.

Finally, to enhance credibility, I used a "critical colleague" to review the accuracy of the vignettes used in the research report. A critical colleague is an individual with background knowledge of a study who serves the role of reviewing and responding to the study. A critical colleague is basically "Devil's Advocate" during the research process. This person will not have say over what is contained in the research report, but will only double check for accuracy of the information presented.

Report of the Study

The report of this study consists of six chapters in a standard dissertation format. Chapter One has introduced the study, provided background information, identified the research problem, purpose of the study and research questions, highlighted the research methodology, provided information about the study site, addressed ethics and validity issues, and discussed the significance of the study. Chapter Two contains a review of the

literature on school culture/school climate, academic rigor or "press," professional learning communities, cultural/climate change and leadership roles, and alternative schools. Chapter Three describes the research methodology, design and methods, addresses the limitations of the study, and discusses issues surrounding research ethics and validity. Chapter Four describes the context of the study. In this chapter anecdotal information will be presented to paint a picture of a "toxic" alternative high school. Chapter Five is the narrative of the purposeful cultural changes made in the school by the building administrator during the period of study and the reasoning behind those changes. Chapter Five also describes and analyzes the experiences and opinions of the other study participants as they relate to the changes made at the building by the administrator. The analysis will be presented as themes and will use the participants own words whenever possible. Chapter Six will present the conclusions of the study and address implications for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of the literature will cover five specific areas: (a) School culture; (b) academic rigor or "press"; (c) professional learning community; (d) cultural change, school climate change, and leadership roles; and (e) alternative schools. These topics are being explored to provide a foundation for this case study of an alternative school that is making purposeful changes to its school culture.

School Culture

References to school culture began to appear in educational literature in the 1930's and expanded significantly during the 1990's. According to Swindler (1998), culture consists of symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life. Social processes of sharing, modes of behavior, and outlook in a community are filtered through these symbolic forms (Hannerz, 1969). This definition of culture captures much of the social interaction that occurs within schools. It is now known, for example, that tradition is an important aspect of culture in every educational setting (Peterson, 2002).

Hodgkinson (1978) states that school culture is a complex phenomenon that exists at three different levels. The first level is the transrational level wherein values are conceived as metaphysical, based on beliefs, ethical codes, and moral insights. The rational level is the second level, wherein values are seen as grounded within a social context of norms, customs, expectations and standards, and depend on collective

justification. The third level is the subrational level, wherein values are experienced as personal preferences and feelings, they are rooted in emotion; they are basic, direct, affective and behavioristic in character. They are basically asocial and amoral.

While there is no one best culture for schools, recent research related to "successful" schools highlights the importance of cultures based in professional learning communities. In these cultures, staff, students, and administrators value learning, work to enhance curriculum and instruction, and focus on students. In schools with professional learning communities, the culture possesses: (a) a widely shared sense of purpose and values (Stein, 1998); (b) norms of continuous learning and improvement (Lambert, 1998); (c) a commitment to and sense of responsibility for the learning of all students (Fullan, 2001); (d) collaborative, collegial relationships (DuFour & Eaker, 1998); and (e) opportunities for staff reflection, collective inquiry, and sharing personal practice (Hord, 1998). In addition, schools that are professional learning communities often have a common professional language, communal stories of success, extensive opportunities for quality professional development, and ceremonies that celebrate improvement, collaboration, and learning (Deal & Peterson, 2002). All of these elements build commitment, forge motivation, and foster learning for staff and students, according to Deal and Peterson (2002).

Some schools however, have the opposite--negative cultures with "toxic" norms and values that hinder growth and learning (Deal & Peterson, 2002). Toxic cultures form in the same manner as positive cultures, over time. Schools with toxic cultures lack a clear sense of purpose, have norms that reinforce inertia, blame students for lack of progress, discourage collaboration, and often have actively hostile relations among staff.

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These schools are not healthy for staff or students and discourage efforts to improve teaching or student achievement. In these schools the spirit and focus is fractured and often hostile, the value of serving students is replaced by the goal of serving self, a sense of helplessness and despair predominates, and professional growth is not a prized activity. Staff members resist reform, publicly ridiculing those who want to try new things. A toxic culture can destroy motivation, dampen commitment, depress effort, and change the focus of the school. It can decrease learning, frustrate growth, hampers risk taking, and foster radical individualism rather than collegiality (Deal & Peterson, 1978).

Other issues that can contribute to a negative school culture exist within any typical high school. A typical school culture, according to Deal and Peterson (2002), may exhibit many problems that need to be addressed. For example, gossip, while it is a habit that usually has very little effect on the community, may negatively impact staff cohesiveness and trust if it is constant and negative. Problem saturated conversation causes a negative drain of energy and is frequently seen in negative school cultures. Cliques can thwart diversity, handcuff creativity, and make it hard to feel a part of the "team." Resentment and negativity are two other problems that may be exhibited. Resentment occurs when a person feels slighted for some reason. This in turn often leads to negativity about the work environment and colleges. Roland Barth (2001) states, "The relationship among the adults in the schoolhouse has more impact on the quality and the character of the schoolhouse—and on the accomplishments of youngsters—than any other factor" (p.105).

Community disrespect arises from society's general dissatisfaction with the current education system and problem stories contributed by teachers. Another problem

is a rushed feeling and scarcity for time, this occurs when people act based on speed as opposed to acting based on their values or better judgment. Problems arise out of the fact that the hierarchy extends beyond the school building itself. Principals answer to the superintendent, who answers to the board, and staff becomes frustrated with what they view as arbitrary decision-making. Competition is usually not a problem, until carried to the extreme. By actively addressing the negativity and working to shape more positive cultures, staff and principals can turn around many of these schools. According to Peterson and Deal (2002), principals are key in addressing negativity and hostile relations.

The creation of the cultural system of a school cannot be left to chance according to Beaudoin and Taylor (2004). It requires that administrators and staff work together to create positive school environments. To set the environment for change, "externalizing" problems is an important step, according to Beaudoin and Taylor (2004). Externalizing conveys to people that problems are not representative of them, but of circumstances that need to be changed.

Culture is the driving force behind everything that occurs at a school. What the school feels is important needs to be part of the everyday school-life, not separated out in an artificial manner (Littky, 2004). The quality of that culture will affect the quality of the educational setting. The performance of students who care will be different from those who do not (Noddings, 2005). Healthy and sound school cultures correlate strongly with increased student achievement and motivation, and with teacher productivity and satisfaction (Stolp & Smith, 1995). In a survey of 4th, 6th, 8th, and 10th grade students

from 820 public schools in Illinois, researchers Fyans and Maehr (1990) found that students were more motivated to learn in schools with a strong positive culture.

Academic Rigor or "Press"

One aspect of a positive school culture is academic rigor. According to Exley (2002), academic rigor can be defined as the set of standards educators set for students and for themselves. Rigor also includes a basic philosophy of learning--that students are expected to demonstrate not only content mastery, but also applied skills and critical thinking about the disciplines being taught.

According to Darling-Hammond (2002), strategies to achieve rigorous academic instruction include several characteristics:

1. Academically rigorous schools treat all students as if they are college bound, setting high expectations for all students. The low-level, remedial-type sections of core classes are eliminated, sending the message that students cannot just get by doing unchallenging work. Academically rigorous schools do not just raise the bar; they also provide the supports necessary to ensure that all students can meet more stringent course and graduation requirements.

2. Schools can demand rigorous intellectual work from students only if they give up the goal of superficially covering as much content as possible. Depth over breadth becomes the standard for academically rigorous courses. Not only are course offerings scaled back, but topic lists within courses also are pruned to achieve focus and depth.

3. Integrating curriculum across content areas develops skills and knowledge while

expanding students' ability to understand conceptual relationships and think creatively and critically. Cross-curricular integration assumes a holistic, real-world approach to learning. Through cross-curricular integration, students develop durable skills and knowledge. Students gain what they need for a lifetime of decision-making and problem solving in a way that departmentalized subject matter cannot.

4. Curriculum maps document the topics and skills that have been planned, taught and learned, helping teachers determine interventions and next steps. Curriculum maps are useful in organizing and planning cross-curricular integration, because they outline areas of thematic overlap across disciplines.

5. Clear expectations define what students should know and be able to do. The bar for achievement is set according to the standards of the community--the knowledge and skills that colleges expect of high school graduates and that employers expect in a globally competitive workforce. By focusing on powerful teaching and learning, schools meet students where they are and help them bridge any gap to higher achievement.

Professional Learning Communities

Researchers, both inside and outside of education, have arrived at the same conclusions regarding a new model of operations for schools. This model requires schools to function as professional learning communities that are characterized by a shared mission, vision, and values (Stein, 1998); collective inquiry (Lambert, 1998); collaborative teams (DuFour & Eaker, 1998); an orientation toward action and a

willingness to experiment (Hord, 1998); commitment to continuous improvement (Krzyzewski, 2000); and a focus on results (Fullan, 2001).

How do we create schools where all members of the staff are learning, growing, and working to increase student achievement? This requires significant shifts in the education system--from unconnected thinking to systems thinking, moving from an environment of isolation to one of collegiality, from perceived reality to information-driven reality, and from individual autonomy to collective autonomy and collective accountability (Zmunda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004).

Intrinsic to a healthy school culture is continuous improvement. Continuous improvement does not have a fixed concept of success, but is a process, a constant striving to be better. The administrator needs to focus and coordinate the talents of the staff to create a coordinated effort of working toward a common goal--to deliver student academic achievement that satisfies the community and upper management (Krzyzewski, 2000). The six steps of continuous improvement according to Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) are: (a) Identifying core beliefs, (b) creating a shared vision, (c) using data to determine gaps between the current reality and the shared vision, (d) identifying the innovations that will most likely close the gaps, (e) developing and implementing an action plan, and (f) endorsing collective accountability. In recognizing each of these and addressing them, schools move closer to becoming environments that support good education (Lawrence Lightfoot, 1983).

Cultural Change, Climate Change, and Leadership Roles

Why is it important to be concerned about the concept of culture? We need to know what parts of the school culture may hinder change. The present school culture

should be able to meet the challenges of the current society. There are some changes in society that have major implications for school culture (Dalin & Rolff, 1993). The nature of the learning task is changing. Learning is being viewed in the broader context of personal growth, as well as cognitive development. The student population is also changing. The social capital that students enter with is low, healthy school cultures provide optimal learning conditions for these students. The value of group work is being recognized, because it is such an important element of everyday life and work. For small schools, school culture will be an important component of success (Raywid, 2001).

Studies of school change have identified the organizational culture as critical to the successful improvement of teaching and learning. Culture is a key factor in determining whether improvement is possible (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The foundation for school improvement is the culture of the school (Purkey & Smith, 1982). The heart of school culture is its mission and purpose--it is the focus of what people do and why they do it. Cultures wither and die without rituals and ceremony. Rituals are infused with deeper meaning (Deal & Peterson, 2002); they become significant annual events with special history. Ceremonies mark transitions in the school year. They bind the school population together and shape unwritten cultural values and rules. Rituals, traditions, and ceremonies make apparent what is important, valued, and significant in the school.

Teachers have mistakenly tried to solve the more fundamental cultural problems by superficial solutions grounded in improvements in curriculum content and personal relationships (Hargreaves, 1982). It is a difficult proposition to help students redirect their lives in a positive manner, but that is exactly what successful alternative schools do (Kellmayer, 1995). Schools create their own culture (Settles & Orwick, 2003); parts of

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that culture are intertwined with the community that it serves. When any part of a culture

feels ostracized or marginalized, the normal reaction is to opt out. It is vital that issues

that alienate the community be identified and addressed to prevent this opt out from

occurring. Littky (2004) states that teaching and learning are about problem solving and

that education is the process by which you put teachers and learners in the best possible

environment for them to do this together.

It stands to reason that if schools want better academic success, then they must

create positive school cultures in which students can thrive (Constantino, 2003).

Educational leadership is values driven, and therefore leaders should be cognizant of, and

act appropriately towards, the many ethical problems and issues presented by schooling

(Dempster, Freakley, & Parry, 1998). The practitioner engages with an element of the

client's life in order to bring about changes that are in the client's best interests. The

school principal is concerned with providing experiences for schoolchildren that will help

transform them into adults capable of living good lives (Dempster, Freakley, & Parry,

1998).

Cotton (2003) has found that educational leaders committed to cultural leadership

know the following: (a) Supporting positive school climate is one of the most

fundamentally important goals, (b) paying attention to rituals, ceremonies, and other

symbolic actions strengthens a sense of affiliation, (c) establishing commitment to shared

vision and goals is critical, (d) communicating and maintaining high expectations for

student achievement is a paramount concern, (e) communicating and interacting with the

school community on a continuous basis in order to build positive relationships, (f)

supporting risk taking among teachers improves student learning, and (g) maintaining

high visibility and accessibility is good for the school climate. These seven activities of cultural leaders have their basis in research. In order for change to be successful, the leader needs to incorporate these activities into their role in the change process.

School systems should embrace the notion that different people have different strengths, and that these strengths should be cultivated in an environment of caring, not of competition (Noddings, 2005). Effective leaders believe their people are competent, and that their jobs are important until proven otherwise. They put people in positions where they can excel and grow (Harari, 2002). Over time, the group develops a set of values and beliefs that are the glue that keeps it together. Oftentimes the culture is positive, nurturing, professional, and supportive of change and improvement. Sometimes, though, the culture has developed dysfunctional values and beliefs, negative traditions, and caustic ways of interacting. These are what Deal and Peterson (1999) have called "toxic cultures."

According to Deal and Peterson (1999), in toxic cultures the staff views students as the problem rather than as their valued clients. The staff is sometimes a part of negative subcultures that are hostile and critical of change. It is the view of the staff that they are doing the best they can and they do not search out new ideas. Staff will frequently share stories and historical perspectives on the school that are often negative, discouraging, and demoralizing. Toxic cultures will have a staff that will complain, criticize, and distrust any new ideas, approaches, or suggestions for improvement raised by planning committees. In toxic cultures, the staff will rarely share ideas, materials, or solutions to classroom problems. The school staff will have few ceremonies or school traditions that celebrate what is good and hopeful about their place of work. These

schools are not fun places to work in and seldom try to improve what is going on. Toxic

cultures inhibit and limit improvement efforts in several ways. In these cultures, staff are

afraid to offer suggestions or new ideas for fear of being attacked or criticized. With the

above problems and the fact that toxic school cultures are one of the main reasons for

student failure, it becomes imperative that school culture is created by design, not by

default.

How do schools deal with "toxicity" in their culture? Deal and Peterson (1999)

suggest several things educators can do including: (a) Confront negativity and hostility

head-on and work to redirect negative energies; (b) protect emergent sources of positive

focus and effort; (c) actively recruit more positive and constructive staff; (d) vigorously

celebrate the positive and the improving sides of the school; (e) ensure that improvement

efforts and plans are successful by supporting with time, energy, and resources; and (f)

reconnect staff to the mission of schools--to help all children learn and grow.

Culture is made up of the stable, underlying social meaning that shape beliefs and

behavior over a period of time. In order to understand the culture of a school the

educational leader needs to ask several questions (Deal & Peterson, 1999):

1. How long has the school existed?

2. Why was it built, and who were the first inhabitants?

3. Who has had a major influence on the school's direction?

4. What critical incidents occurred in the past, and how were they resolved, if at all?

5. What were the preceding principals, teachers, and students like?

6. What does the school's architecture convey? How is space arranged and used?

7. What subcultures exist inside and outside the school?

8. Who are the heroes and villains in the school?

9. What do people say when asked what the school stands for? What would they miss if they left?

10. What events are assigned special importance?

11. How is conflict typically defined? How is it handled?

12. What are the key ceremonies and stories of the school?

13. What do people wish for? Are there patterns to their individual dreams? (pp. 17-19)

Once the leader understands the information provided by these questions, they can begin to develop a plan to change the school culture in a thoughtful manner.

So where does change start? Culturally proficient leaders first develop a vision and then a mission that serves the needs of all students (Lindsey, Robbins, & Terrell, 2003). One of the most important and effective strategies for shaping school culture is celebration (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). This helps people link the past to the present, shows what behaviors are reinforced, what assumptions are at work, and what is valued. Rituals show us the unseen webs that tie a community together. Without ritual and ceremony, transitions are incomplete--life becomes an endless set of Wednesdays (Bolman & Deal, 1995).

Managing the process of change is necessary. The most common mistakes in the change process are: (a) Allowing too much complacency, (b) failing to create a sufficiently powerful guiding coalition, (c) underestimating the power of vision, (d) under communicating the vision by a power of 10, (e) permitting structural obstacles to block

the change process, (f) failing to create short-term wins, and (g) declaring victory too soon, (h) neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the culture (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Educational leaders must fill both symbolic and managerial roles during this process in order for change to hold. According to Deal and Peterson, (1999) school leaders take on eight major symbolic roles:

1. Historian: seeks to understand the social and normative past of the school.

2. Anthropological sleuth: analyzes and probes for the current set of norms, values, and beliefs that define the current culture.

3. Visionary: works with other leaders and the community to define a deeply value focused picture of the future for the school; has a constantly evolving vision.

4. Symbol: affirms values through dress, behavior, attention, routines

5. Potter: shapes and is shaped by the school's heroes, rituals, traditions, ceremonies, symbols; brings in staff who share core values.

6. Poet: uses language to reinforce values and sustains the school's best image of itself.

7. Actor: improvises in the school's inevitable dramas, comedies, and tragedies.

8. Healer: oversees transitions and change in the life of the school; heals the wounds of conflict and loss (pp. 87-88).

Educational leaders will need to deal with challenges when changing the culture of a school. Leaders need to understand the opportunities that change can bring. Change can occur without improvement but no improvement can occur without change. Conflict will be inevitable. Strategies for improving communication will help reduce harmful conflicts. Strategies for school renewal are crucial during this process (Glanz, 2006).

Change deals with changes in participants' attitudes and behavior, not just as individuals, but also as partners in a joint venture. Project management is important in the change process, and this task is primarily to influence organizational behavior. In order to deal with the change process, leaders need to deal with several perspectives of culture (Dalin & Rolff, 1993). The structural perspective deals with the structural and formal part of the organization; it is probably a less important perspective to consider. The human perspective deals with the ability to mobilize staff towards change objectives, to assist groups in developing their productivity, to assist in problem-solving and conflict resolutions, to be aware of formal and informal messages, and communicate well internally and externally. The political perspective deals with the reallocation of resources and priorities, along with the symbolic perspective, which deals with the perceptions of what our school is about, and the outward demonstrations of those perceptions.

In schools with toxic cultures, planning sessions led by the school improvement council or committee are often half-hearted due to the negativity and sense of hopelessness fostered by hostile staff who refuse to see that improvement is possible. New staff, who bring hope and a sense of possibility, are quickly squelched and resocialized into negative ways of thinking. Programs that are planned are poorly implemented, because the motivation and commitment to change is weak or nonexistent. Plans fail for lack of will. No one wants to work in these kinds of schools. It takes leadership, time, and focus to rebuild these festering institutions. Fortunately, most schools are not this negative, though many have some of these cultural patterns that make change problematic.

Principals send large cultural messages to staff and students with every decision regarding budgets, curriculum, instruction, as well as interactions with central office and community leaders. Principals also send hundreds of small cultural messages to students and teachers every day. In every interaction with a student or teacher, a principal telegraphs a message about his or her expectations for that school. That gives principals enormous opportunities to shape a school's culture–for good or ill (Richardson, 2001).

Change is a process, not an event. Shared visions are one of the most powerful forces in human affairs. Leaders get what they tolerate. Change is not required, but everyone has to have the conversation (Scott, 2002). Reeves (2006) asserts that when leaders focus exclusively on results, they fail to measure and understand the importance of their own actions. Pressure on leaders to get results can undermine the need to build a solid base structure for change to effectively occur. The complexity of building collective autonomy and implementing innovation is unavoidable. Effective school leadership is not a losing battle. Leadership teams can go beyond excuses--capitalizing on their strengths and reducing their weaknesses.

Alternative Schools

Alternative schools are often viewed as individualized opportunities designed to meet the educational needs for youth who have been identified as at-risk for school failure (Foley & Pang, 2006). Historically, alternative education has served a diverse group of students (Education Commission of the States, 2006). The alternative school is the result of the socio-cultural turmoil of the 1960s. Humanism in education, a zeal for social justice and resistance to what was perceived to be a dull and impersonal education laid fertile ground for the development of an alternative to standard education.

Alternative schools of the sixties respected the dignity of students and supported their journey into self-actualization and the possibilities of life (Neumann, 2003). There was often a dichotomy between the need to recognize the students' "free spirit" and the duty of educating students to live in a democratic society.

While the 1970s were a period of growth for the more traditional alternative programs, the middle 1960s saw the beginnings of a new movement in American education, the establishment of new institutions, first from outside the public school system and then from within the system itself. While alternatives to the public school have existed since the inception of the system, these schools were usually private or parochial schools that just provided the same type of education at a higher level and with more "style." The schools of the 1960s were different; they were the result of grass-root movements that were child centered. Students, teachers, and parents were given more access to decision making and had more influence than in the traditional public school (Deal & Nolan, 1978).

The roles of alternative education span a wide array of theories of practice. Alternative schools exist as simply smaller traditional schools, computer-based learning, distance learning, programs to deal with adjudicated youth, and project based, along with many variations in-between. Alternative education strives to develop rigorous programs and strategies in an effort to provide their students equal opportunities to learn (Anastos, 2003). The intent of every alternative program is to provide a quality education for students who, for whatever reason, are not able to negotiate the traditional school setting successfully. Without strong adult support and carefully planned settings, conditions could exist that exacerbate the circumstances that lead kids into the penal system.

Parent and community involvement are important to the success of any program (Aronson, 1995). The involvement of parents and community is often dependent on their perceptions of the worth of the program, and these perceptions in turn are initially formed in response to the cultural system that exists in the school setting (Settles & Orwick, 2003). Schools must be understood as moral communities. Once a school becomes a community, the moral voice is anchored in shared values, ideas, and purposes (Sergiovanni, 1996).

Proponents of alternative education claim that it dramatically improves the academic achievement and behavior of students (Bryant 1993; Kadel, 1994; Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center, 1995). Lange and Sletten (2002) found that alternative schools are generally characterized as having small enrollment, one-on-one interaction between teachers and students, supportive environments, opportunities and curriculum relevant to student interests, flexibility in structure, and emphasis on student decision-making.

The first alternative schools of the 1960s aimed to educate, while the purpose of many new alternative settings during the 1980s and early 1990s were "correctional" (Soleil, 1998). Whether disciplinary or therapeutic, the focus of most schools was frequently on the control of the behavior of the student, not on the development of the student. The bureaucratic model of organization of schools caused this; the instructional emphasis was placed on instruction to high-stakes tests rather than authentic teaching practices and the stimulation of intellectual growth.

The mid 1990s saw the paradigm shift to schools that are personal, collaborative, and participatory. They are concerned with a curriculum that connects to a world beyond

the four walls of the school (Furman, 2002). These schools reflect back on Dewey's philosophy of democratic education. The schools use the individual student's needs and experiences as a beginning point (personalization of education). The teacher takes on the role of advisor. The school is a social community with education seen as a social activity. Curriculums use active, rather than passive, learning. Schools employ a variety of learning resources, especially using those of the local community. Skills are viewed as a means, not an end, in the education process. Student participation occurs in at least some of the major decision making of the school. The individuality of both students and teachers is recognized and has value (Dewey, 1938).

In 1974, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) conducted a survey of over 300 alternative schools. This survey found that over 60 percent of the programs began during the previous three years, and that over 80 percent were less than five years old (Wolf, Walker & Mackin, 1975). On the average, six months was spent on planning the program before opening the doors. Most programs were small (less than 200 students), over 60 percent of the students enrolled came from urban areas, 64 percent of the students were white, and 36 percent were non-white. While the quantitative increase of alternative schools is documented, the essential characteristics and day-to-day operations still remained obscure. Research has shown that the evaluation systems and task emphasis in alternative schools differs from that of the traditional school according to Wolf, Walker and Mackin (1975). Further research has shown differences in the decision making process.

A recent survey conducted in the United Sates estimated that there were 10,900 alternative schools and programs in 2000-2001. Yet, even with this number of schools,

there is very little data on what alternative education is and its success at meeting the needs of the students it serves (Ahearn, 2004). In the United States, 48 out of 50 states have some type of alternative education programs (Lehr, Lanners, & Lange, 2003). In 2003, it was estimated that 3.8 million youth were not in school, did not have a diploma, and were not working. Little attention is being paid to this population of students and the need to reconnect them with an education that will prepare them for success in the future (Aron, 2006). At-risk students need access to high quality alternative education and training opportunities. Alternative schools should be a key component of any school district so that all students will have a fighting chance to succeed in school (Barr & Parrett, 1995). High school completion rates peaked at 77.1 percent in 1969, reducing to 69.9 percent in 2005. The effects of alternative education reaches beyond the years spent in school; graduates do tend to become productive citizens after graduation (Aaronson, 1995). Alternative schools exhibit a strong ethos and sense of community, which in turn leads to higher rates of post high school success in students. Alternative schools recognize that the school is the unit of change, according to Edgerton Conley (2002).

The biggest advantage of alternative schools is their personalized, diverse program and teaching. Most alternative schools are intentionally small so that students can have a personalized environment and close supervision (Duke, Griesdorn, & Kraft, 1998). Characteristics of many alternative schools include: (a) They are designed to meet a variety of needs including preventing students from dropping out of school, providing another educational option, and serving as a disciplinary consequence or providing academic/behavioral remediation; (b) they are primarily designed for high school-aged students, although many states have schools that are serving younger students; (c) they

are accessed by students in a variety of ways ranging from student choice (usually with some specified parameters) to mandatory placement; (d) they often have criteria for enrollment (e.g., students may be admitted as a result of suspension or expulsion or they must meet some form of at-risk criteria); (e) they serve students for varying amounts of time (e.g., short-term placement and transition back to traditional school or long-term commitment through graduation); and (f) offer educational programs that typically include one or more of the following: an emphasis on individual instruction, a focus on basic academic skills, social services (e.g., counseling or social skills instruction) and/or community or work-based learning (Neumann, 2003).These characteristics help form the academic culture of the school. While these characteristics are in constant flux or selectively applied, a stable academic culture cannot be built.

Summary

The review of literature in this chapter covered five specific areas: (a) School culture; (b) academic rigor or "press"; (c) professional learning community; (d) cultural change; school climate change, and leadership roles; and (e) alternative schools.

School culture maters, the impact on student/staff relationships, academic success, and retention of both students and staff, along with the ability to meet the challenges of the current society are dependent on the quality of the school culture. School culture has been discussed in educational literature as early as the 1930's. There are operational definitions of school culture, surveys designed to evaluate school culture, research on positive cultures, and limited research on toxic cultures. The research on retooling a toxic school culture into a positive school culture is very limited.

Academic rigor or "press" is one aspect of a positive school culture. Academic rigor incorporates the basic philosophy that a school holds about learning. It is important that the academic rigor be an accurate reflection of the standards that the school expects the students to attain.

Professional learning communities provide an environment where all staff members are learning, growing, and working together to increase student achievement. Continuous improvement is intrinsic to a healthy school culture. Professional learning communities encourage this continuous improvement.

The processes of cultural and climate change require management. If schools want better academic success then they must create positive school cultures where students can thrive. Educational leaders must be able to identify a toxic school culture and spearhead the changes necessary to create a positive school culture. Change can occur without improvement, but improvement can not occur without change. Change is necessary in order to see improvement in student learning.

Alternative schools appeared in the 1960's as a result of socio-cultural turmoil. Designed to address social issues while delivering an education, alternative schools have long been dealing directly with cultural issues. The biggest advantage of alternative schools is their personalized, diverse program and teaching, they are a setting that by their nature promotes academic/social success. If an alternative school is not dealing with a toxic school environment it will not allow students to succeed, in fact it may encourage students to disengage and drop-out.

This study seeks to understand the processes and perceptions that occur when an administrator at a toxic alternative high school endeavors to create a positive school

culture through purposeful interventions. The results of this study may be of use to other

alternative administrators in maintaining a positive school culture or in assisting them as

they retool a culture in need.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research design and the methods

used in this case study of purposeful cultural changes at an alternative high school.

According to Yin (2003) the selection of a research approach is dependent on the type of

problem and the purpose of the study. For this study, a combination of case study and

action research methodologies were appropriate.

Research Methodology

I chose to use qualitative case study methodology for this study. Since a

bounded system--the alternative high school--is the primary research target, case study

methodology was deemed most applicable (Creswell, 1998). In a case study the

researcher explores a "bounded system" or a case. Case studies are usually conducted

when there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of a contemporary phenomenon

in a real-life context. This methodology is preferred when questions like "how" and

"why" are posed. Yin (1989) suggests that six types of information be collected in a case

study: documentation of current circumstances, archival records, interviews, direct

observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. One important application

of case study methodology is in exploring situations where the intervention being

evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes argues Yin (2003).

This study also reflects the principles of action research, because the researcher is

also a participant in the study and a problem was being addressed in a specific school

setting (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Action research is research in which the study

participants themselves are either in control of the research or are participants in the

design and methodology of the research. Using this method allows the researcher access

to many people and a wide range of information, but the level of the information revealed

is controlled by the group being studied (Merriman, 1998). In addition, action research

addresses a concrete issue or problem in the setting. In the case of this study, the

researcher is a participant in the process, and the research focus is a change process

intended to address problems within the school environment.

<div align="center">Methods</div>

Site and Participant Selection

The selection of a site for a case study is usually criterion-based selection, that is,

a school was chosen based on specific characteristics. LeCompte and Preissle (1993)

state that in criterion-based selection you "create a list of the essential attributes" to your

study and then "proceed to find or locate a unit matching the list" (p.70). In order to

study purposeful cultural change within a toxic alternative high school setting, it was

necessary to identify a school that met that criterion. The essential attributes looked for

were: no or low expectations, little or no communication among stakeholders, resistance

to change, no ownership, little or no sense of community, disrespect/hostility, and

widespread low morale and distrust. These attributes and several other signs of toxicity

were present and active in the selected site. However, because this is an "action

research" study, in which I studied a process in my own school, site selection was also

predetermined.

The site is a small rural school located in Washington State. The school opened

for business in the fall of 1996 in a small trailer. The school serves juniors and seniors;

on occasion there is an exception made to allow freshman or sophomores to attend. The

school became observably toxic in the 1999-2000 school year the symptoms were:

Unprofessional conduct, issues of staff relationships, poor record keeping, lack of

administrative presence, and student issues. The site is fully described in chapter 4,

Context of the Study.

Participants were selected based on their employment at or their direct

involvement with the selected site. One week prior to the start-up of school each

employee at the site received a verbal request to participate in the study, participation was

optional. Employees were not coerced to participate and faced no sanctions for choosing

not to participate. Participants who had other types of direct involvement with the school

also received a verbal request to participate. The participants who were invited to

participate were: one teacher, two counselors, two paraprofessionals, one secretary, and

two district level administrators. Prospective participants were able to ask questions

regarding the study and were given two weeks to consider whether they wanted to

participate or not. All of the invited participants agreed to participate however, the

secretary and one teacher did not complete the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected through weekly entries in electronic journals for one

academic year. Each participant was asked to keep an electronic journal. I also kept a

journal that described my efforts toward cultural change, leadership actions and

decisions, and the rationale behind those decisions. Each week of the academic year, the

other participants were assigned a specific topic to be addressed in their journals; this

topic was drawn from my journal. The topic was posed in the form of an open-ended

question about cultural change efforts and their impact. Questions were similar to the following examples: (1) The expectations for student conduct have been changed; what have you noticed about this change (compare the current expectations to those of the past)? (2) Staff roles have been clarified and defined; how has this changed things and how do you feel about it? (3) The interior of the school has been rearranged and changed; what are your observations regarding the impact of the changes? The journaling occurred during the 2006-2007 school year. In addition, a debriefing is planned after the completion of the study. The purpose of this debriefing is to allow participants an opportunity to voice any questions or concerns they may have about the study, to share with each other their experiences during the study, and to allow the participants to finally lay the past to rest. This debriefing occurred in the Fall of 2008, a facilitator was brought in who specialized in polarity management and she worked with the entire group of participants.

Because of my administrative role at the study site, it was imperative that in the endeavor to get rich responses, there was not undue pressure (real or perceived) placed on the participants by me. To prevent this from occurring, I used automated computer reminders to remind the participants to respond in their weekly electronic journals. The journals were kept electronically in order to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. As a further measure to ensure confidentiality, at the end of the academic year, the participants' journals were printed off and sent to via United States Postal Service without identification of the individual participant. I did not have access to the other participants' journal responses until the close of the school year.

The type of data gathered was the text of participants' electronic journals. The journaling process (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996) was designed to gather information about the participants' experiences with the purposeful changes to the cultural system of an alternative school. The units of data were phrases, sentences, and multi-sentence segments provided by the participants. The journal data were analyzed and compiled to create a portrait of the cultural change process in the school during the period of one academic year.

<div align="center">Analysis</div>

The case study method lends itself to a variety of data analysis approaches. Holistic analysis of the entire case or an embedded analysis of a specific aspect of the case can be used, according to Yin (1989). Through the collection of data, a detailed description of the case emerges, as does an analysis of themes or issues and an interpretation or assertions about the case (Stake, 1995). Merriam (1988) states that the analysis of data should be rich in the context of the case or setting in which the case presents itself. This allows the researcher to narrate the experience that was observed. Lincoln and Guba (1985) mention that the researcher may also analyze the data for "lessons learned."

In this study, I developed a narrative regarding cultural system changes and their impact. I reviewed each leadership action in my journal. I made an analysis of reasons for the actions taken and the outcomes I hoped for. The responses in the journals of the other participants were analyzed for descriptions of what did happen and their perceptions of the changes. The data were analyzed and sorted into themes from which a

narrative was constructed. An attempt was made in the narrative to include the various

voices of the participants.

Research Ethics

Ethical considerations were addressed in this study. Participant and school

names, along with location, were kept confidential. Pseudonyms were used in the report

of the study. Each participant was given a consent form to sign. This form explains the

purpose of the study, the method for collection of data, that there is no anticipation of

harm to participants, that they can withdraw at any time, and that identifying information

will be kept confidential (see Appendix A). In addition, as mentioned above, I carefully

avoided creating the impression that I was coercing or expecting others to participate in

the study.

Limitations

Because this is a case study of one small school site, the findings cannot be

generalized in the traditional sense to other settings. However, it is hoped the results of

the study will be useful to educators in similar situations as they engage in and attempt to

understand the process of cultural change.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to describe the research methodology and

design used in this case study of purposeful cultural changes at an alternative high school.

How the site and the participants were selected was discussed, followed by a description

of the design and methods used in the case study. Finally the limitations of the study,

research ethics, and validity concerns were addressed. The discussion of the research

methodology and design within this chapter are essential to the understanding of the data

presented in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The site for this case study is Eagle High School (a pseudonym), an alternative high school located in Johnson School District (a pseudonym) in a rural Washington school district.

The town in which the school is located was officially incorporated in 1899, and presently has an agricultural economic base. As of 2007, the town's population is 13,386 people, with a median age of 31.7 (the U.S. median is 37.6). In July 2004, there were 1,697 households with a racial makeup of 79% White, 20% Hispanic, 1.0% other race. The unemployment rate is 4.30%, compared to a U.S. average of 4.60%.

The school district covers a large geographic area and serves 2,866 students (male 50.3%, female 49.7%, American Indian/Alaskan Native 0.5%, Asian 0.6%, Black 0.7%, Hispanic 47.9%, and White 49.8%). The district spends $5,511 per student while the average per student expenditure in the U.S. is $6,058. The district's student/teacher ratio is 20/1. The district is home to two high schools. One is a traditional high school and the other is the alternative high school, Eagle High School. Currently, the traditional high school serves 993 students in grades 9-12, while the alternative school provides services to 76 students in grades 11-12. Eagle High School met Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years; because of the small enrollment at the school, AYP was based on the dropout and graduation rate.

Eagle High School opened its doors in the fall of 1996 and is currently in its 11th year of operation. In the spring of 1996, the district applied for grant funds that the state was offering for innovative programs. Notification of the grant award was received at the end of July. A quick search for personnel to staff the new school was conducted, with positions being filled within a week. The original staffing of the school included two teachers and one secretary/paraprofessional. The staff then set about getting the building ready for students. With a shoe-string budget and a short amount of time, the school was cobbled together. In the rush to get the school open, there were important issues that were overlooked: mission of the school, rigor of the curriculum, expectations of staff, articulation between the two high schools in regards to process and procedure, student expectations, and the culture of the school. The school has continued to grow in student population, the number of graduates, and staff. In the spring of 1998, the school issued its first diploma.

During the 2005-2006 school year, Eagle High School operated with a part-time principal who was rarely in the building; one full-time lead teacher; one long-term substitute; three paraprofessionals; one full-time secretary; an art teacher one day a week; a counselor two days a week; and an intervention specialist one day per week. The staffing for the 2006-2007 school year consisted of one administrator/teacher; an art teacher who comes in once a week; two full-time paraprofessionals; one full-time secretary; a counselor who comes in two days a week; and an intervention specialist who spends one day per week at the site.

Eagle High School is housed in a building that was formerly a Jehovah's Witness church. There is one large instructional area, which includes a kitchen and a

dais. There is a large soundproof room in the back of the building and two small rooms

on either side of the front of the building. There is a staff restroom and separate

restrooms for male and female students.

Students who wish to attend the alternative school must apply to be accepted.

While the alternative school takes students who have been removed from the traditional

setting, its purpose is not to be a disciplinary placement, but rather to provide a different

option for students who are not able to participate successfully in the traditional high

school setting. A "typical" student is 12 credits short of where they should be, has

discipline and attendance issues, works at an outside job, reads at least 3 years below

grade level, and has various issues at home.

<div align="center">A Toxic School</div>

According to the data collected for this study, Eagle High School began to

become observably toxic six years before this study, in the 1999-2000 school year. The

symptoms of toxicity were exhibited in several ways: unprofessional conduct, issues of

staff relationships, poor record keeping, lack of administrative presence, and student

issues. Evidence of this "toxicity" follows, in the form of data excerpts and anecdotal

comments from students, staff, and community members. This information has been

gleaned from recorded conversations, written memos, and letters that were either from

individuals directly involved or those who witnessed the events recorded. To further

ensure accuracy in relation to these issues, the informants were shown the data presented

here and asked to verify its accuracy, which they did.

Students

- The teacher told us during senior seminar that he had a collection of pornography that was worth over $3000; he suggested to the boys that they save their pornographic magazines because later they would be worth money.

- A staff member used to stand on the stage and yell at us to be quiet because she was not able to concentrate.

- You could barter a deal with the teacher for a grade. I swapped chocolate milkshakes for grades several times.

- The teacher was always trying to look down girls' shirts.

- If you made the teacher or the secretary mad they would lose the paperwork that proved you had earned a grade.

- Some students could turn their outside hours in late or without outside signatures and it would be okay. It was the Mexican boys; the secretary and teacher were scared of them, or the girls who wore low shirts.

- The answers for our work were in our packets, so we all cheated. We also had a complete answer set for the unit tests. We traded those in the bathroom.

- The lead teacher and the secretary could give us grades, but none of the other teachers there could. I remember a new teacher grading a paper and the secretary yelled at her in front of everyone. "Only Mr. _____ or I grade the papers, you are to *never* issue a grade." We all wondered what the teacher was supposed to do.

- One day the teacher stood up at his desk and told us all he was God.

- One of the videos we were supposed to watch had been taped over with a cartoon. I told the teacher to come see the video and his reply was, "What is it? A porn?"

- A staff member would be drunk at work.

- The teacher used to stand up on the stage and tell us he was a genius, at least twice a day.

- When you would ask him for help, he would look to one side or the other and tell you to ask his invisible friend George first. He wouldn't help you until you had done that. It was embarrassing.

- During the morning announcements, the teacher would spend 30 minutes or more talking about himself. He would tell us what he had for dinner, about the TV he bought for a staff member's bedroom and how you could see it from the bed, his daughter's tattoos, all the money he had, and how he was the only reason this school wasn't shut down because we were a bunch of trouble-makers.

- I was having issues at home. I convinced the lead teacher to let my younger sister into school so I could keep an eye on her. I was worried about what happened before I got home. I finally decided to ask for help. I told both the principal and the lead teacher about it on several different occasions. They did nothing to help me, no matter how much I talked to them. The final straw came when the lead teacher stood up on the stage and announced to the entire class that I was stupid and would never be anything but breeding stock. I ran away shortly after that and got my education somewhere else. I had to leave my sister behind. The lead teacher and secretary made fun of her and she eventually dropped out of school.

Staff

- There were students who never showed up to school who managed to earn credit. These students were either children whose parents were friends of the teacher or

the building administrator, students that the teacher was afraid of, or students that they did not want in the building for some reason.

- The teacher favored one of the paraprofessionals. During that time she didn't have to work and was allowed to sit at her desk while the rest of us had to pull "double-duty."

- The secretary yelled at a paraprofessional and one of the teachers for parking in her spot, but there were no assigned parking places.

- The principal dinged a paraprofessional on evaluation for being a perfectionist. She was told that it made other people upset when they couldn't perform to the level she was performing at, so "Please just be like everyone else."

- I came in several times to find the secretary sitting in the lead teacher's lap.

- The teacher shoved me one day as he went by me, knocking me into a student.

- A staff member showed up at work with alcohol on her breath. The administration was called and did nothing about it.

- The secretary would miss days of work and not have to take sick leave, because the teacher would cover for her by saying she was running errands or working at home. The building principal would go for weeks and not check on the building, so she had no idea how much time the secretary was missing.

- We were written up on the same referral forms used for students. We were written up for things like: leaving during our lunch time and not telling him where we were going, drinking coffee in the room during our break, going to the bathroom without asking permission first, receiving phone calls, and speaking to another paraprofessional.

- I turned the lead teacher in twice for sexually harassing me. The last time I turned him in I was transferred to another building while the investigation was being done. When the investigation was over with I was moved back to Eagle High School and told that there was nothing they could do because I had not made it clear to the teacher that his attentions were unwanted.

- The teacher worked hard at putting a wedge between the other staff members. He wouldn't allow us to talk and had the counselor "spy" on us when we were outside with the students at break time. This is the same counselor who later lost his job for inappropriate conduct with students.

- The teacher told me I was like a daughter to him and then tried to kiss me soon afterwards.

- I received a card from the teacher after I canceled going to dinner with him. He was concerned that I was mad at him. I canceled going to dinner because he had told me another staff member would be going also. I found out that she was not going and had not been invited in the first place. I didn't want to put myself in an awkward position with him.

- The paraprofessionals were told they had to wear dresses or skirts with heels to work.

- The classrooms teacher's duties were to wash dishes, clean tables, and make copies. The classroom teacher was not allowed to grade papers or to teach, she would often be "shushed" when trying to help students.

- The teacher would sit up on the stage with his foot on his desk. He would have his shoes off and would be picking his toes or trimming his corns during class.

- The teacher's answer key for Geometry, Algebra I, and Algebra II was incorrect. When he was asked about it he shrugged it off saying, "I know who cheats then." He did not teach the students how to do the math and would eventually work out a "trade" with them for the answers.

- After recently hiring a staff member, the teacher informed her that she was lucky to have gotten the job because, "I usually only like to hire divorced women here. I only like to help those that need it."

- Food for the lead teacher and secretary was paid for with local requisitions. They would stock the fridge with pop and frozen dinners.

- The teacher brought blueberries in and was handing them out to the paraprofessionals saying, "Miss So and So do you want some blueberries? They are good for your sex drive." As he placed them in your hand he made sure to run his fingers across your palm. It felt like he was priming his harem, he would hand them out two or three at a time, and when those were gone he would ever so graciously (not) ask us if we wanted more.

- Paraprofessionals were not allowed to touch the school bought food or even the food that they had brought in for themselves that was stored in the fridge without permission. If we did either the lead teacher or the secretary would yell at us from across the room.

- The counselors at the traditional high school considered the site school "a joke" and said so at staff meetings.

- Several times during the day the secretary would leave the stage to go on a "reconnaissance mission". She was to collect all of the coffee cups from the

paraprofessionals and dump the coffee down the sink. We were not allowed to
have anything to drink at our work stations, yet they sat on their perch and had
pop, milkshakes, and coffee cups. It was demeaning to say the least.

- The teacher never left his desk on the stage. He never worked with students. He
  spent his day trying to get peeks down girls' shirts.

- The teacher had a parking sign posted in the public parking lot that said "Parking
  Reserved For Finns Only"; he thought it was funny. He would also get angry at
  anyone who parked in his spot, pointing out they were not the correct ethnic
  background.

- The first day I showed up to work I was so excited. I walked into the building
  and the principal, lead teacher, and secretary were all standing on the stage with
  their hands on hips. I walked up expecting to be welcomed, I reached my hand
  out to shake the secretary's hand. She made a hissing sound and pointed to the
  lead teacher. I approached him and was promptly told I was not to be up on the
  podium, because that was for the important people, I was directed to stand on the
  floor in front of the file cabinets. I found out after school, while I was being
  given my duties by the lead teacher, that the principal told him she had to move
  me because I was not wanted back by the teacher whose room I was working in. I
  was surprised to hear this when it was the principal who begged me to transfer to
  the alternative school and the teacher that I had been working for was very upset
  about my leaving her room. It made it hard for me to know what to believe and
  who to trust.

The following is a narrative received from an employee who worked in the building for three years:

I've been asked to share what it was like here. "Here" is the alternative high school where I worked as a long term substitute special ed. para. My first day as a para I was quickly put in my place during the morning announcements for not acknowledging that the "Leader" was speaking. That was my first of many more experiences of feeling the division between the staff on the floor and the staff on the pulpit. The lead teacher sat at the helm on the stage like everything and everyone in his eyesight was his. His queen was the secretary who sat just feet away, yet on the stage doing the king's bidding.

The stage or the pulpit of the old church the school occupies still was the division line of power. The two on the stage ruled and all of us below had no power except that which the leader gave moment by moment. Worse yet, I discovered that I had absolutely no authority over the kids unless he gave the thumbs up. The kids who brought him milkshakes could do whatever they wanted. The instability of power created an air of fear that drew those of us on the floor together. There were three of us paras and we would physically huddle together when we had to monitor students outside on their break. We however, did not get a break. When one of us left for our lunch break, we would feel the loss. We would even sneak in brief huddles between just two of us on the floor.

The lead teacher would either over-discipline or do nothing while the entire room of students would congregate, talk, and laugh out loud – until the secretary would stand up and yell "That's enough! It's too loud!" I'd never know if I was

then supposed to start getting the kids to be quiet. They knew I had no authority

and wouldn't listen, so why try. That was the day I realized how funny those two

really were and every time she screamed, I would just laugh and smile like all of

the kids were doing. Once in a while after she'd scream, two of us paras would

huddle in a corner and watch what would happen next. Either she would leave in

a huff or one student would be singled out and made an example of for all the rest

of us. I felt bad for the kids for a couple of months because of this, but I also

realized we could be their safety net. That alone was the only thing that kept

some of the students from joining in on the naughtiness.

Community Members

- The teacher used to write referrals on my son for smoking while he was downtown during lunch. He would drive around looking for students to get into trouble.

- I repeatedly asked to come into the school to see how it worked. I was told visitors were not allowed because it disrupted the educational process.

- My son was told that pornography was worth money, so save your magazines.

- The teacher used to call my daughter and talk to her for a long time on the phone, even on the days she had been at school.

- My kids skipped school a lot and no one ever called to let me know.

- My kids were told by the high school counselor that only pregnant girls, druggies, and gang-bangers went to the Eagle High School.

- If your kid "played the game" they could get away with anything, but if your kid was not one they liked there was nothing but trouble.

- I complained to the school board about the teacher but nothing ever happened. It was like they all thought he walked on water.

Given the issues at Eagle High School, the district administration decided to transfer the lead teacher to a different building. The position was filled by a long-term substitute for the remainder of the 2005-2006 school year. The staff was left to complete the school year as best they could. There were deep divisions over what had happened. Some staff felt betrayed, other staff wanted to place blame on anyone but the teacher who was removed. The building operated with a sense of mistrust and fear. The staff was told not to discuss what happened, which further led to the lack of a feeling of closure. The staff needed some form of acknowledgement of what they had dealt with, someone to tell them that what they experienced was real, and to let them air the feelings that the situation caused. By continuing to just "take the high road" there was a group of individuals who felt invalidated. Something had to be done or the school was going to implode.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROCESS OF PURPOSEFUL CULTURAL CHANGE-

PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

In August, 2005, I first walked through the doors of the building to which I had

asked to be transferred, and I was excited to get ready for the opening of school. I was

going back to teaching at an alternative high school; which is where my passion as an

educator lies. I was promptly ignored by the lead teacher and the secretary (the same

individuals described in chapter four). I was stunned at the disheveled state of the

building. Boxes were piles on top of cabinets, the windows were blocked by storage

units, the furniture tightly crowded the room making it hard to move even without

students, graffiti was everywhere, and the place was just plain dirty.

Soon I was assigned my desk and given my duties. It was apparent that I was not

going to be allowed to teach, but was to serve as an overpaid paraprofessional. I was to

wash the dishes, make copies, shush students, alphabetize assignments, and watch for

cheating. The only times I was talked to occurred when I was told where my desk was

and when the lead teacher said, "Mrs. Duehn, you are not to touch anything or turn this

room into a circus" while I was washing cabinet tops and placed a statue on my desk.

The rest of the day was spent huddled at my desk trying to figure out what to do. If I

asked a question I was not just ignored, but was subjected to listening to the lead teacher

and secretary discuss loudly how they are tired of being given staff members who have

no clue what to do. If I moved from my desk to look at the student packets and try to

figure out what I needed to do, the lead teacher would glare at me and loudly clear his

throat. I went home that first day crushed; after 24 years of teaching, I was reduced to tears in a matter of 6 hours.

When the students and the rest of the staff arrived the first day of class it was obvious that their experiences in this building were no different than mine. I could not believe what I was experiencing; it was like a nightmare, nothing had prepared me for what was happening. I set out to find an answer, to understand what was going on in this school. I wanted to understand how such a toxic school culture could exist, why a toxic school culture was allowed to continue existing without being addressed, and how it could be changed. Thus I set out to explore how toxic cultures grow and how they can be changed into positive cultures. It is a journey that has enriched my professional knowledge and had a profound effect on me personally.

In August 2006, the year after the lead teacher was transferred, I was promoted to the Dean of this school and told to "fix it" by the superintendent. This chapter highlights some of the changes I attempted to make in the school's culture, why they were made, what I perceived happened as a result of those changes, and other staff members' reactions to the changes. The implemented changes were updating the curriculum, reorganizing the layout of the school, changing/clarifying staff roles, addressing public relations, and changing student expectations. In the sections that follow, each of these changes will be described and participant's perceptions of these change efforts will be presented. These narratives are composites of the data drawn from diary entries, field notes, and electronic journal entries. I am presenting the changes in the chronological order in which they were implemented, not necessarily in the order of importance. The changes made in this school continue to be a dynamic, rather than a

static process; thus this report represents one phase in a continuing process of cultural change.

To protect the identity of the individuals at the school I will be using pseudonyms throughout this report. The pseudonyms for individuals are as follows:

- Jessica and Elizabeth—the school paraprofessionals.

- Alice--the building secretary.

- Curtis--the lead teacher who transferred out of the building.

- Mariah--the building administrator who retired.

- Steven and Fred--the school counselors.

- Anna--the art teacher.

Changes to the Curriculum

The Old Curriculum

Before 1998, Eagle High School used a curriculum based in the Portable Assisted Study Sequence (PASS program) packets. The PASS program originated in California in 1978 as part of the Secondary School Migrant Dropout Prevention Program, it was designed to allow migrant high school students to earn credits through the completion of self-directed courses as they moved with their families from one school district to another. Migrant Educators from other states soon learned of the program and its success. Arkansas and Washington started using PASS in 1981, Arizona and Oregon in 1983, and New York and Wisconsin in 1984. Today over twenty-five states are using PASS and Mini/PASS to serve Migrant Students.

In 1998, Eagle High School switched to a computer based curriculum called "Extra Learning." The Extra Learning system offers over 90 self-paced academic, career

and life skills courses; more than a thousand assignable skill modules; and extensive

system tools. As of 2006, this curriculum had not been updated with the supplied annual

update disks, since the school's original installation of the program in 1998. Thus, the

school was still using the 1998 version, missing out on upgrades provided by the

company to keep up with changing expectations of state requirements and the No Child

Left Behind Act (NCLB). There were administrative sections of the program that would

have made management easier which were never launched. The lack of updates

eventually caused the program to continually freeze or completely shut-down.

The Extra Learning curriculum was computer based and was accessible only at

the Eagle High School building; the core content was printed off from the computer

program. The students completed printed out packets for each course and assessments

that were on the computer. The answers for the questions in the packets were right in the

packet so students could cheat. There were two versions of each test, which allowed

students to retake the test often enough to get 100%. Over the years students had pooled

their correct answers to the tests and developed cheat sheets that were passed around.

The students were also able to open the coursework behind the test screen and look up

answers. Basically, students were on an "honor system" to learn the material and not

look up answers or cheat their way through a class. Students were able to complete a full

semester of coursework in one week and in many cases two days.

There were also computer based video clips that the students were to watch as

part of their coursework. Many of these videos had been renamed with lewd titles by the

students. Three of the videos had been replaced with cartoons and one video was a

pornography video; lead teacher Curtis had laughed this off, saying, "What we have here

is a bunch of trouble makers; at least this way I will know if they watched the videos or not." In addition to the computer based videos there was a suite of movies that the students had to watch. Students would spend up to three school days getting through one movie and answering questions. History courses often had up to five required videos and three movies for the students to watch.

The other issue with the curriculum was the fact that it was not aligned to and could not meet the state learning standards. Students were being issued diplomas that did not reflect their true level of learning. The reading material was at a sixth grade level, math was at a tenth grade level, and writing was nonexistent in this program. Students who went on to college had to take remedial courses just to bring their skills up enough to take basic coursework at a two year college. Eagle High students were being graduated from high school ill equipped to pursue higher education.

Eagle High School is a "contract based" program. Contract-based programs are usually limited to secondary students, and often used for credit retrieval or credit acceleration. Eagle High School had two class sessions a day. Instructional time was 2 ½ hours per day with 10-15 minute opening remarks by the lead teacher along with a 15-minute break, which often ended up expanding into 30 minutes by the time students came back in and settled down. Students were expected to earn a B in order to be given a grade--anything lower was not accepted. This decision was made in order to try to compensate for the lack of rigor in the curriculum. This expectation looked good on paper, but there were some serious problems in the application.

The school was viewed by Johnson School District students as a place to go and get a bunch of easy credits and leave. There was no respect for the program from the

students, the community, the school district, and even the building staff itself. The standard line among students at the traditional high school was, "You can always go to Eagle High School and earn a bunch of easy credit, then come back here to graduate-no big deal."

The New Curriculum

In the spring of 2006, the District Curriculum Director and the staff at Eagle High School made the decision to find another curriculum to use at the school. Several curricula were reviewed, and APEX Learning was selected to pilot. In September, 2006, I made the decision to completely replace the Extra Learning curriculum with APEX Learning. I felt this change was critical because students need to be prepared to pursue an education beyond high school when they graduate. While not all students will attend college or a trade school, it is the obligation of the high school to make sure to provide them the opportunities to gain the skills needed to do so if they choose.

The APEX curriculum was the brain-child of Paul Alan, designed to provide rural communities with little or no access to AP teachers a way to implement AP courses. The company found that many of the students entering the courses did not have the background needed to complete AP coursework, so the APEX core curriculum was developed. The APEX core curriculum is designed to prepare students for advance placement coursework. Designed to fully meet college preparatory requirements, the classes deliver a broad curriculum and in-depth learning experiences. Each course provides a complete scope and sequence with content that not only guides students in mastering critical skills and developing an understanding of key concepts, but encourages students to pursue knowledge independently.

While the APEX coursework was still computer based, it was now accessible to the students at home via the internet. Along with the raising of the rigor of the curriculum the decision to allow students to earn grades down to a D was also made, thus the need for inflated grades disappeared concurrent with raising the rigor of the content. There is a "closed book" feature with the new curriculum. This prevents the students from looking up answers while taking tests. There is also a randomization of the tests, so students are not able to repeat testing often enough to garner the correct answers. Each student is provided a study plan at the end of each exam, which allows the student to return to the curriculum for more study and skill improvement.

The curriculum is now aligned with Washington State learning goals, as embodied in the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EARLs), because the program was specifically designed to meet the Washington State learning goals by its developers. The curriculum was further expanded to include advance placement courses, remedial coursework, running start, off-site vocational training, and a wide variety of electives. In addition, instructional time was increased by 45 minutes; class time was raised to 3 hours per day with no break and the addition of a lunch period between the sessions.

During the 2006-2007 school year, seniors who started school at the alternative school were required to finish there. In the past, seniors would come over from the traditional high school, earn quick/easy credit, and then return to the traditional high to graduate. In the years prior to the 2006-2007 school year the transfers were supposed to be made at semester time only. It did not work-over 90% of the students who returned to the traditional high school for the second semester ended up not completing the

requirements for graduation. The lead teacher also made exceptions for students going

back at the semester; there were several instances where the seniors went back one week

before graduation with all their credit earned. In the 2006-2007 school year things

changed, there was no more "earn a bunch of credit and go back at semester."

In addition, the change in curriculum changed the perception of the school. The

traditional high school began to use the new Eagle High School curriculum during

summer school, and, once the staff and students saw what we expected of our students,

their attitudes changed. The standard line among students at the traditional high school

became, "You don't want to go there because it is too hard, it is easier here." The

school's reputation in the community shifted from being a school for "losers" to being

viewed as a school that offered a high quality education for students who needed

something different from the traditional school.

Perceptions of and Reactions to Curriculum Changes

According to one of the participants, "The old curriculum was just that, *old*. The

administrative aspect of the computer part of the system was antique and seldom worked.

Basically, it was a bunch of computerized worksheets and some old videos. Students

learned how to cheat the system and many thought the curriculum was a joke."

When the discussion of the need to change the curriculum first arose in the spring

of 2006, it caused quite a fervor. "The devil you know is often easier to live with than

the angel you don't," said one staff member. Staff was concerned with what their roles in

regard to the new curriculum would be, if the students could be successful, and if we

would even have students because the work would be too hard. There was also concern

over whether students could earn credit at a rate that would allow them to graduate on

time. However, several curricula were examined, and each had advantages and disadvantages, and the decision was made to implement the new model APEX model.

In the spring of 2006, the school piloted the program with a few students who were caught up on their credits. The students found the curriculum more rigorous, but still managed to earn credits. One student said, "All you have to do is study, just like a real school." However, some parents expressed concern that their child would not be able to earn the large amounts of credit that they had been able to in the past. In addition, the staff at the traditional high school was taken aback when they realized their students would no longer be able to attend summer school at Eagle and earn enough credit to allow them to return to the high school on-track with credits. One of the traditional high school counselors, who also happened to be the most boisterous about Eagle's lack of rigor said, "What do they think they are doing? It's not like they are a real school--they are supposed to catch kids up so we can graduate them here." It was hard for me to hear these sentiments, painful to understand that a quality education for *all* students was not a universal value held among my colleagues.

In June 2006, I opened the school to all high school students of Johnson School District for the summer credit retrieval program, just as it had been in the past, but implemented the new APEX curriculum across the board. Students enrolled, classes began, and it proved to be a challenge to undo the practices of the past. The first evening, one of the students showed up with a backpack, and sat down; when I assigned him classes he handed me three Snickers bars and said that should cover his credit. I stood there stunned; I had heard that credit could be bought for candy bars, milkshakes, and the infamous "peek" down a shirt, but I had never had to confront that particular past practice

in person. The student was serious, and when he was informed that credit was earned by completing his coursework he became very upset. Other students tried to broker deals also: a three-page report for a semester of science credit, doing all of the work at home and not attending class, reading a book about an historical event and writing a report for a semester of history credit. Now I could understand why the school had the reputation it had at the traditional high school; how could anyone take a program seriously when this type of behavior was going on?

The other thing that I did during the 2006 summer school was allow the traditional high school to use our program for their on-site credit retrieval. This proved to be an enlightening event for the people involved. The staff discovered that the new curriculum was rigorous, and they actually pared down the requirements for their students. The counselors saw the material first-hand and had a clearer view of what our students had to do to earn credit. This went a long way towards improving our standing as an equal educational partner with the high school. One participant stated, "I personally like the changes to the curriculum because it is definitely more rigorous, which is good for the students wanting to further their education at the next level. Also, it is good to hear the high school finally recognize that the curriculum at our school is up to par with the high school! From the previous years, I would have to say the curriculum was quite honestly a joke and was not educationally sound for the students. Furthermore it was hurting their chances to ever be successful in college."

The 2006-2007 school year at Eagle started out differently than any in the past. The first two weeks were spent in the instruction of the basic skills the students would need to be successful in the new curriculum. This curriculum is heavy in reading and

writing assignments. In the past students at Eagle were not expected to read books, to write essays, or even to answer questions using a paragraph response. It was a difficult transition for students who had been at the school under the old curriculum. Students had to be taught how to respond to a question that required an extended written response. Students also needed to learn how to interpret reading material. In the past, all of the reading was factual, aimed at specific recall responses by students. The students would also need to interpret historical events, look at cause and effect, and view history from the participants' perspectives. In addition, the students would need to learn note-taking skills, basic study skills, and time-management techniques.

Students were guided through the literature that was required for the English courses. Students needed to learn how to read, interpret, and respond to classical literature. Shakespeare became required reading for students who barely read the daily newspaper. I started "literary roundtables" for the reading material: pages were assigned to read, and the students would hold discussions on Wednesdays. I was pleased when I noticed the students actively participating in the discussions and actually looking forward to them.

Once the students were enrolled in classes, it was clear that things had changed. The students who had attended Eagle prior to my changes were angry and upset about the new curriculum and their inability to cheat. The secretary, Alice, said, "This school is going to hell!" when she saw the first D entered into the grading system. The secretary was further upset by the fact that she could no longer grade papers, she was not in charge of issuing final grades, and that she would no longer post the grades to the computer. She

felt that I was trying to get rid of her; she did not understand that I was just trying to clarify job roles.

I have to admit I was concerned at the time that the curriculum would prove to be our undoing. The students who had previously attended Eagle were not academically prepared to deal with the content of the curriculum, let alone the fact that they actually had to work for a grade. The students would no longer be "spoon fed" academic material. The main responsibility for their education fell squarely on their own shoulders, a frightening thought when these students had not been successful under the rigor of a traditional setting. It was hard to envision seniors who entered Eagle with only 6-12 credits graduating on time. I was concerned that when faced with the increased academic rigor, some students would simply drop out. "The curriculum from previous years had been easy to cheat on and cut corners in other ways. The students this year report boredom and complain that they have no break in the day. I perceive them as learning more and cheating less. Also, the addition of credit earning outside of the computer curriculum has appeared to be a good motivation for the students," commented a participant. I also felt bad for the students who had been at Eagle for most of their high school career. They had been betrayed by a system that failed them, and now they were poorly prepared to deal with the new curriculum. One participant observed, "The previous curriculum was outdated and was full of errors. It was not providing the students with the adequate skills needed in today's society. The new curriculum has better prepared our students for continuing on with jobs, college, and trade schools. The new program has helped in teaching not only academics, but independent learning. The staff is always around to assist students that need a little extra assistance. I have been

impressed with the writing classes that the Dean of the school has introduced as it amazes me of the kinds of things the kids write about. The school has introduced many new things this year along with a writing class, like the reading lab, physical education, and art. This year the school accommodated the kids that needed to take the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) test as the year before we did not participate and students had to go to the high school."

To address the new curriculum and other program changes, several changes needed to occur. The entire school environment had to express the belief that the students could be successful--that in fact it was expected that they would be successful. Academic successes were celebrated: an announcement was made every time a student earned a semester credit, along with posting the students' achievement to the "Dean's List," which is a display board designed to chart each student's progress. We attempted to create a nurturing environment that made our building "feel like home," according to students. A group of the "old-timer" students took to calling the female staff the Nazi Moms; they said it was because we were like the tough moms that made you get stuff done. At the end of the 2006-2007 school year we graduated 80% of the seniors who had started at Eagle in the fall. We had four students earn 11 credits, one student earn 15 credits; and one student earn 15.5 credits thus, it was still possible for the students to earn a lot of credit, but it required time and dedication on their part.

Graduation provided us proof that the curriculum change had been the right thing to do. We had a packed house, as 27 graduates walked across the stage of one of the community's historic theaters. Parents, family members, community members, and the students themselves kept commenting on how much this graduation meant to them. It

was the first time in the history of the school that the students had truly earned their diplomas, not just brokered deals to get one. It was the first time the school district superintendent actually delivered a speech; usually he would just stand and say congratulations. The local paper covered this graduation to the same extent as the traditional high school's graduation. Clearly, the change brought about by increasing the rigor of the curriculum had captured the attention of the community. Our graduates were able to say they had earned their diplomas, it had value to them, and it became a source of pride.

"The new curriculum is demanding, yet interesting for the students. It is no longer 'easy' to get credit. Students have to work and actually 'learn' to progress through the system. I'm sure they feel like they are actually benefiting from their studies." This statement made by one of the participants sums up nicely what we had hoped the curriculum change would achieve.

<div align="center">Changes to the Layout of the School</div>

The Old Layout

The second aspect of the school's culture that I chose to address was the physical layout of the rooms in the school. The building overall was dark, dirty, cluttered, and depressing; students felt isolated and often chose not to come to school because the atmosphere was depressing. Physical arrangements also can contribute to student feelings of isolation and alienation. These feelings of isolation and alienation by students contribute to dropping out of school according to Lawton, Leithwood, Batcher, Donaldson, and Stewart (1988).

The dais, which is raised 2 feet above the rest of the room, had been the location of the lead teacher's desk and building secretary's desk for 10 years. It was the first thing in the line of sight of anyone who entered the front door. It housed three desks, eight filing cabinets, two large printers, and three bookshelves. The building secretary, Alice, conducted all of the school's business from the dais, including confidential phone calls within earshot of students sitting near the front of the room. The lead teacher, Curtis, rarely left the dais except to use the restroom or to get his lunch; the rest of the time he sat at his desk working on his computer or directing the rest of the building staff.

The two small rooms located on either side of the dais were used for storage. One room held filing cabinets and office supplies and the other room housed extra furniture. Sometimes a student would use the room that housed the extra furniture for a quiet place to work, but more often than not, students using this room took the opportunity to sleep.

The soundproof room in the back of the building--which has large glass windows across the wall facing the main room--was the home of the students who didn't want to be at school; they were referred to as "the backroom boys". These students were allowed go sit in this room and do nothing other than visit, do some drug deals, or sleep. The surfaces of that room were covered with graffiti, the kids spat on the floor, and garbage was left everywhere.

The main portion of the building held twenty computers on ten rectangular tables with nine more rectangle tables for the students to work at, four staff desks, five large metal bookshelves with dittoes filed there lining one wall, two large printers, three large cabinets, ten TV/VCR machines, and a section for a kitchen. This section was difficult to traverse because it was overpopulated by furniture and suffered from poor arrangement.

There was no type of room decoration. Surfaces were stacked with papers, boxes of stuff, and office tools. Students had no respect for or pride in the facility and it showed in the manner in which they conducted themselves.

The New Layout

There were several reasons behind changing the layout of the school. One reason is that if a school appears to be dark and crowded it creates an oppressive feeling, which in turns dampens motivation of both staff and students. Eagle High School students were indeed difficult to motivate; they would often put their heads down and go to sleep. Fullan (1991) points out that students' attitudes are affected when the structure of the school contributes to their isolation and alienation. They were not allowed to move around, nor was there room to move around. They were not allowed to retrieve materials they needed to work--everything had to be handed to them. The building did not feel inviting; in fact, it felt and looked as if the students were not welcome.

The second reason for addressing the physical layout is what you believe to be important needs to be visible, celebrated, and reinforced if you want it to happen. The appearance of the school said that the students did not matter; the stuff in the building was what was important. Peterson (1988) points out that physical spaces can encourage the development of a school's unique personality and can be helpful in the support of the true work of the school, which is the development of an ethos characterized by authentic achievement and collaboration. Nowhere did the building encourage learning, graduation, or the students themselves. The third reason for addressing the physical layout was practical and obvious in light of promoting student learning. The old layout was simply not conducive to education. Students were sitting too close together with no

room to spread out papers and work. The tables were crowded, and students' backpacks on the floor caused several trips and falls. Students bumped into each other when moving about, causing arguments. The staff could not easily move around on the classroom floor to assist students or manage student behavior.

The first change to the layout was to pull staff down from the dais. The staff is not the most important thing in the building; students and learning are what is important. The dais was then turned into a library, something the school had never had. It features a waterfall, beanbag chairs, a desk for quiet work, and shelves of books. When people enter the front door of the building and look into the classroom they now see that knowledge and learning are valued here, rather than a few select staff.

The soundproof back room was turned into the office for the secretary. The office machines were moved there along with the filing cabinets that could not be placed in surplus. A small reception area was also set up in the room. An "office" sign was put up outside the office door, thus creating an entryway of sorts for the building. This change separates student records, confidential conversations, and other sensitive materials from the mainstream of the classroom.

The two small rooms on either side of the dais were converted into offices. One office is shared by Steven, the school counselor and Fred, the intervention specialist. Since they are here on different days this allows each of them to have a room in which to meet with students individually and to store their materials. The second office is used by the Dean of the school. It is set up for a group of three people for private meetings.

The main room was also rearranged to allow for a better use of space. The nine rectangle work tables were exchanged for six round tables. The tables that the computers

were on were rearranged to create sections within the room and allow for the addition of

eleven more computers. Filing cabinets, TV/VCR combinations, and storage cabinets,

along with any other furniture that was no longer needed was sent to surplus.

Educational and motivational posters were put up on the walls, student work was

displayed, pictures of past graduating classes were hung up, and live plants were added.

The look of the building is lighter, there is room to move, materials are accessible

to the students, and the building now has a welcoming feel to it.

Perceptions of and Reactions to the Changes to the Layout of the School

What havoc can be raised by the simply moving a chair! As the furniture

reshuffle began, so did the resistance to change. I knew it was necessary to create the

learning environment needed to support the cultural change that was happening. While I

understood the politics behind why things were located where they were, I never

understood how entrenched those politics were in people's minds until I moved the first

desk.

The politics of the building made it difficult to move furniture without offending

someone. All of the paraprofessionals watched to see who was going to be moved where.

The past inappropriate relationship between Curtis, the lead teacher, and Jessica, one of

the paraprofessionals, made the dynamics between the paraprofessionals volatile.

Previously, Jessica was given a desk to work at while the others, including Elizabeth,

were expected to stand behind her and wait to be directed as to what to do. When the

other two paraprofessionals were given desks, the question became, where were they

allowed to put their desks and when could they be at them? Originally, Jessica was up in

the front middle of the room turned sideways to the dais, where she was expected to

remain most of the day under the almost constant gaze of the lead teacher. She tried to hide by placing paper trays stacked nine high in his line of sight. The remaining two paraprofessionals had their desks along one wall facing out towards the students. If these two paraprofessionals sat, they were promptly scolded and told to get over to a student.

The new placement of the paraprofessional desks was going to be the making or breaking of the staff's support for the new arrangement in the building. I spent hours looking at the configuration of the main classroom trying to figure out how to move things so that one person did not seem more important than another. I also had to figure out how to find space for two paraprofessionals' desks and have a workstation on the floor for me. I chose the path of least resistance and set up a paraprofessional workstation across the back wall of the main classroom. This allowed each paraprofessional to keep her desk and computer, grouped them all together in the same area, and made no one seem more important than another. It was the first furniture move I made in the classroom, and I did it, with the help of my husband, in the evening so that the paraprofessionals would come in and see it done. I worried about what their response would be; concerned that someone would feel slighted. The morning came, both Jessica and Elizabeth arrived to find their desks in the new spot, with fresh flowers on each one, and they sat and visited for a bit. The response was good, they wondered why no one had thought of it sooner; this way they could work on things together and it actually felt like they were a team. I was relieved that we had passed the first large test; now it was time for the next one.

It was with great pleasure and excitement on most of our parts that we began the rest of the move. While Alice, the secretary, was so angry about it that she threatened to

quit, the rest of the staff was looking forward to getting the school ready for the new year. The most drastic part of the room rearrangement took place first--pulling the main office off of the dais and moving it into the soundproof room. This would allow Alice a quiet place to work, the ability to make confidential calls without students overhearing, and it put the office right at the main entrance to the building. Alice kept talking about how she would not be able to tell the students to be quiet or see what they were doing; I kept reminding her that she did not need to worry about those things. It was hard to get her to sort out what she needed and what she did not--how many printers does one person need! She started using passive/aggressive tactics to prevent any progress in setting up the office. She would yell at the movers, have something put in the office and then have it removed--repeating this with an item several times. She would say, "Why are you asking me where I want things and what do I want? I want my office left where it was--this is crap that I have to move. I have been in that spot for 10 years; just because you got rid of Curtis doesn't make you in charge. Who do you think you are?" It came down to the point where I had to start making the decisions about what would go into the office, what would remain in the classroom, and what would be stored or sent to surplus. It took two days to move the office to its new space, the secretary never did organize it or set it up to be a useable spot, and every time we offered to help she would get angry. She built herself a dark "cave" in the corner to work in and then arranged the rest of the office so you could not move through it. She was unhappy and it showed in her whole attitude about being at work. She was devastated that the lead teacher was gone; they had a close personal relationship that had spanned 10 years. Moving the office finalized the fact that her partner would not be coming back.

The next step was to tackle the two small offices. The one office was turned into

a space for Steven, the school counselor, and Fred, the intervention specialist. Before the

transitions, these two positions had desks located in the backroom of the school, where

the kids would try to hide out. They needed a permanent spot, one where they did not

have to move to deal with privacy issues. Two desks and office chairs were moved in,

along with a computer for each of them, a locking filing cabinet, bookshelf, and phone.

While both the counselors were pleased with their new space, they left it up to the

"ladies" of the building to decorate for them. The intervention specialist observed, "It

seemed that the space could have been used more efficiently. Last year, a great deal of

time was spent in setup and re-setup. It made it difficult last year to know where I would

be providing services from week to week. This past year has been much better in regard

to this, as I had one office all year. I think that it was very distracting to the students last

year with all of the regular changes."

The Dean's office was set up next. It was the second of the small rooms off of the

dais. Although it is not used much because I am on the main floor most of the time it is

important to have a separate area to deal with student issues and for private phone calls.

It also gave the presence of an authority, something the school had never had before,

because the principal was located in a separate building and was rarely seen.

The final step was to organize the student area. The long tables that students

worked at were replaced with round tables. While the tables are second-hand folding

tables and not too pretty, it was the best we could do at the time. The computers were

spread out for more room to work and better visibility. A library was created on the dais,

allowing the students a place to read and do research. According to one participant, "The

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physical layout has been changed periodically throughout the last couple of years, some

of which have worked and some of which have not made the grade. Our current layout is

decent; staff is able to see all students, however students are also able to see all students.

I still vote for the divider though it would make it harder for staff to see students. If we

could somehow get students in little pods or dividers then it would allow the classroom to

appear smaller and their concentration to grow. Also, for some of the small offices

confidentiality is almost impossible. It would be nice for a place that students could talk

about personal stuff without the rest of the class hearing. With that said, I think the

environment is pretty good considering what we have for a building."

     The organization of the student section was designed to emphasize learning and

collaboration, rather than the sense of isolation created by the former arrangement.

Another participant noted, "The school has changed dramatically in the physical

appearance of its interior space. The appearance of the school in the past was very much

unorganized and had a lot of furniture that was just taking up space. This year the school

is looking more like a computer lab with character. The computers are arranged to use

the space wisely along with tables in the middle of the room. Thanks to changes made by

the new Dean of our school we now have a library with a variety of books. In the

previous years the walls were bare and now the walls have educational as well as artistic

pictures and posters which make the room more inviting for students and staff. In

previous years the building secretary used a space in the room for an office--that is now

the library. The office is now located in its own room near the building entryway, which

makes it less complicated for guests to know where to go, on top of making the job of the

building secretary more functional."

The school is now clean, well organized, and well lit. It resembles a college study hall in looks and use. The changes have made it clear that this is a place for learning, not hiding and doing drug deals. One district administrator notes, "When you walk in the door at this school, you instantly notice that things are *different*. This starts with the look and feel of the building layout. The room used to look like a lunchtime detention room. It had a feeling of being cold and impersonal. At the far end of the room, the administrative nobility sat on a platform above the students and monitored behavior and read their email from this perch."

The building technology coordination states, "The new version of the school layout reminds me of a relaxed but focused college library setting. *All* students seem to be focused and working, either on the computer curriculum or circled around the staff. The room is open, airy, and oozes education. The students have taken a sense of pride in the school, it is not a dump anymore, and they are treating the facility with respect."

<div align="center">Changes/Clarification of Staff Roles</div>

Previous Staff Roles

The staff of this school had no clear roles or expectations laid out for them. There had been expectations laid out for the staff of the summer school program at the school, however these did not translate to the day-to-day operations during the regular school year. Exhibit 1 is a list of duties the lead teacher assigned for summer school:

The building administrator, Mariah, made an appearance in the building monthly, at which time she passed out goodies to the students. Discipline issues were very rarely addressed by her because the lead teacher chose to deal with most issues in-house. As a result, Mariah really had little idea what was occurring within the building. When Curtis,

the lead teacher, transferred from the building and Mariah had to become more active in the day-to-day operations, she was shocked by what had been going on. Her first response was that the secretary had never been absent as often as she was now. Upon speaking with the staff, she found out that the secretary was actually missing fewer days than before; it was just that the days she missed were now being reported. Mariah also thought that behavior problems had escalated until she was shown the in-house behavior logs; she found out that at least five students, out of an attending student population of sixty, were being sent home each day for misconduct. It was easy for things to be kept secret from her when she was rarely in the building and the two people running the school did not want anyone to know what was really happening.

Exhibit 1 List of Duties the Lead Teacher Assigned for Summer School

SUMMER 2004
Basic Duties
Teacher: Primary duty is to work directly with students enrolled in history, English, and science courses. Manage videos and keep copies of curriculum filed.
Para 1: Work primarily with recovery students enrolled in history and science courses, especially those who are here for the first time. Outside supervision before students arrive and during lunch break.
Para 2: Work primarily with recovery students enrolled in history and math courses, especially those who are here for the first time. Outside supervision before students arrive and during lunch break.
Para 3: Primary person copying booklets. Set-up students with materials for each new course beyond original ones. Keep material copied and in order, alphabetize and file student papers. Outside supervision before students arrive and during lunch break.
Secretary: Enter student tests and related data into notebooks; keep attendance, grade student worksheets, record grades, and post to transcript.
Lead teacher: Enroll Recovery students in courses beyond those assigned, assist wherever else needed.

Curtis treated teachers as highly paid paraprofessionals. The teachers were not allowed to issue grades for the courses they taught, had to perform the same copying and

filing duties as the paraprofessionals, and were not given any control over lessons or

classroom operations/discipline. The outline of what the second teacher in the building

was assigned to do can be seen in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2 Duties for the Second Teacher in the Building

Specific Duties for*******.
- Direct instruction of students in all academic courses.
- "Upfront" copying of lessons, monitoring testing, checking test answers, monitoring videos and CD's.
- Strong assist with discipline.
- Responsible for Arts and Crafts throughout the year, primarily per holiday.
- Assist in monitoring seating arrangement and that students are wearing name badges.
- Responsible for making student ID.
- Oversee the completion of student portfolios
- Do the Science portion of Sophomore Prep

While this was the description that was given of the second teacher's role it was

not what actually happened. If the teacher issued a grade, it was retracted by the lead

teacher and replaced by one that was issued by the lead teacher. Often the second teacher

was chastised in front of the students over doing something with which Curtis did not

agree or for performing a task that was not simply managerial. The second teacher

became so disheartened in the role that was laid out for her that she resigned. To this day

she will not return to the building even to substitute, and when asked why, she said, "I

was belittled and demeaned in that building, and nobody did anything to correct the

problem. Why would I return to a place that caused me so much pain?"

Curtis, the lead teacher sat at the dais and "directed traffic." Students were able to

barter for grades by doing reports, giving personal favors, or else by virtue of coming

from the "right" family. Curtis had total control over the building operations and budget.

He allowed no one from outside the building to come in to see what was going on. He also manipulated student population numbers, student credit, and student hours. Anyone who questioned him had complaints lodged against them and were subjected to a hostile work environment. Curtis would "lose" a course completed by a student if said student made him angry.

Alice, the secretary (a non-certificated employee), issued grades, and none of the staff was allowed to look in the books where student progress was being documented. Alice also did all the evaluation of student transcripts. She would also sometimes completely "lose" a course completed by a student if said student upset her or Curtis. Records were poorly maintained or not kept at all and occasionally falsified. The secretary would often be at work intoxicated. The secretary also missed numerous days of work because of her illness, most of which were never documented and were covered for by the lead teacher.

Paraprofessionals were treated with disdain. They were rarely spoken to; Curtis would just point at one of them and then point at a student. They were not allowed to talk to each other or any other adult in the building.

Exhibit 3 is the job description given to the paraprofessionals by Curtis in December of 2002, which was never subsequently updated during his tenure. The paraprofessionals were responsible for the majority of instruction, copying and filing, along with any other duties assigned to them.

The school counselor was not allowed to lay out the course of study for the students or to evaluate transcripts. This person basically sat in an office "killing time" or carried out the duties of a paraprofessional. Curtis and Alice would then sit in front of

the students and talk about how lazy and worthless the counselor was-even though this

person was not allowed to perform his job.

Exhibit 3 Paraeducator Duties

Position Title: Paraeducator
Education and Experience:
  1. High school diploma required
  2. Successful experience working with at risk youth
  3. Current CPR/First Aid cards required or willing to acquire
  4. Clerical/computer skills preferred
  5. Bilingual preferred
  6. Ability to work with a variety of students, staff members, and parents
  7. Ability to communicate effectively with at risk youth
  8. Ability to mentor and guide students with a positive attitude
  9. Ability to multi-task and shift from one assignment to another
Responsibilities:
  1. Assists as assigned with academic courses.
  2. Assist in maintaining curriculum folders and necessary paperwork associated
      with curriculum delivery
  3. Maintain video library
  4. Report to and meet with lead teacher and other staff on a regular basis
  5. Job duties may change as student population changes
  6. Supervision duties as assigned
  7. Assist other staff with student management
Other duties as assigned by Lead Teacher and Building Principal

New Staff Roles

It was clear that staff roles needed to be restructured and clarified after the lead

teacher transferred. With the loss of one teacher, one paraprofessional, and a half-time

administrator the existing staff faced the daunting task of not only performing their own

jobs, but also picking up additional duties to fill in for those missing positions, while the

setting was being restructured. Each role in a small school is vital and needs to be

performed by the person trained to perform the job. The tasks that needed to be carried

out were assigned to the person/job that was best suited to do those tasks.

The building secretary has a pivotal role within the school because of our size. It was important to pare down the tasks she was expected to accomplish to those clerical roles that she was originally hired for and qualified for. It was imperative that these tasks be completed in an accurate and timely manner. The Washington Administrative Codes (WACs) guiding Alternative Learning Environments have very specific criteria that need to be met in order to remain in compliance; this means that there is some very detailed information that must be kept on each student. Not only does this information need to be kept, it also needs to be clear and accessible.

The secretary's job was redesigned to reflect a more traditional role of a school secretary. She was no longer evaluating transcripts, assigning classes or grades, doing student discipline, and managing the school curriculum. What the role now entailed was the clerical duties surrounding student records and enrollment, monthly reports, truancy calls, ordering materials for the school, inventory, and receptionist duties.

With one teacher on staff, the paraprofessionals had to be partners in delivering educational services. Gone were the days of them acting as glorified teachers aides or babysitters. Paraprofessionals were going to have to move into a tutorial role, one they had never had before.

The paraprofessionals' role changed to one that involved more direct interaction with the students, in contrast to their former role of just a teacher's aide. Paraprofessionals were assigned specific courses, based on their personal strengths, which they were to help students with. In addition, each paraprofessional took on the management of curricular support as it was assigned. The teacher no longer orchestrated

the paraprofessionals in their duties, point and order; rather they were assigned their duties and allowed to carry them out independently.

The school counselors' roles were also changed, actually what occurred was the school counselors were allowed to do their jobs for the first time. The intervention specialist was given a room to hold groups in once a week. He was finally able to address the needs of students without having to include the teacher in every session. The other counselor was put in charge of evaluating transcripts, setting the course of study for each student, and doing individual counseling as needed.

The art teacher also had a clarification in roles. In the past students just went to art if and when they felt like it. During the 2006-2007 school year the students were assigned to art and expected to attend during their assigned period. The art teacher also was asked to issue grades, rather than just a pass or fail. In addition, she was expected to prepare lesson plans; there would be no more arriving at school on art day and deciding last minute what she would do.

Perceptions of and Reactions to Changes in Staff Roles

Changing staff roles was a difficult and painful process. The toxicity was not just in the building and the procedures; it had become entrenched in the psyche of the individuals who had been working in the building. While the staff wanted to move forward and build a positive culture within the building, old patterns of thought and behavior would emerge and temporarily cause set backs in progress. I knew this was to be expected, but was frustrated at times by the constant "dance" of one step forward and two steps back. In order to try to prevent staff from slipping into old patterns, I rewrote the job expectations for each position. One of the building employees stated, "Changes

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and clarifications of staff roles have become clearer during this year. In the previous years staff wasn't sure what responsibilities were theirs. This year the Dean has clarified what each staff member's job entails." The duties of the paraprofessionals were outlined (see in Exhibit 4) on September 13, 2006. A meeting was held with the paraprofessionals to review their duties, answer any questions, and address concerns that might have arisen.

Exhibit 4 Updated Paraprofessional Duties

Paraprofessional Duties
- General student supervision with curriculum, classroom management, fieldtrips, art class, P.E. class, and student records as assigned.
- Program assistance for WOIS and APEX as assigned.
- General duties
    1. assist in maintaining a clean room
    2. assist in maintaining computer capacity
    3. monitor outside at dismissal time
    4. Breakfast and lunch duties as assigned
There may be other duties not on the list that will be assigned as the need arises.

I believed that by giving the paraprofessionals a clear set of duties, the friction between them would be reduced and we would be able to continue to build a more cohesive team. I found that the description did help, but it also was a source of further friction. One of the paraprofessionals, Jessica, decided that the job description was to be followed to the letter and if a task was not on the list it was not their responsibility and they would not do it. The other paraprofessional, Elizabeth, is the type of person who steps in whenever and wherever she sees a need, even before she is asked. Elizabeth would actively seek out things to do and ways to help. This polarity in personalities and work ethic only served to cause more friction. Because the roles had been clarified, the fact that one paraprofessional was choosing to extend beyond the role boundaries became

even more evident. Jessica, who was abiding by the job description, felt that Elizabeth was trying to "show her up", while Elizabeth felt that she was doing the workhorse share of the duties and Jessica was just sliding by. Each one was coming to me complaining about the other one; they would not speak to each other, and there was an uncomfortable silence growing in the building.

There was a part of me that wished I had never made a list of duties; the friction it caused for a period of time came close to driving a permanent wedge between the two paraprofessionals. I held several meetings to clarify what I expected of them, I let them know that the duty list was a guideline and was not intended as a hard and fast rule. We discussed that being a "team" involved the ability to be flexible in your job role and giving the best you can when you are here.

Things went smoothly for about a week and then all heck broke out. Alice told Jessica that Elizabeth was telling her how lazy she was. Alice then told Elizabeth that Jessica was trying to get the students to like her by telling them how mean Elizabeth was to her. Alice was playing the two ladies against one another to keep the focus off of her and to impede the restructuring process. In the end both ladies got so angry with each other that one would not even acknowledge the other. It took me a week to get to the bottom of what was going on. I had the two ladies meet with me and we had a good old fashioned "clearing of the air". This meeting was one of the longest meetings in my life! I knew that if it went badly, everything we had built to this point would be ripped apart at the seams. While this was not the most pleasant task I had to do during the restructuring, it turned out to be the most productive. Through conversation and problem solving, Jessica and Elizabeth realized that many of their conflicts were the result of a third

party's manipulation. They set aside the past and for the benefit of the students, agreed to move forward with shared purpose. This left me the task of addressing Alice's behavior.

Alice had been having a difficult time with the changes being made. She was still angry that Curtis had been transferred. She could not come and go as she pleased, she could not fail to show up for work without anyone knowing, and with Curtis gone there was no one to cover for her with the administration. She was being expected to perform her role at a reasonably professional level. The tasks that belonged to a building secretary were not being performed by anyone else when she either would not or could not do them.

Alice was not computer literate, so the first thing I did was send her for training on the programs that were being used daily in the school. She received basic word processing and spreadsheet training from the district technology coordinator. I also had her work once a week with the lead secretary at the traditional high school. During these sessions she was shown how to organize an office and office tasks, given file organization techniques, was told what was needed in student files, what needed to be archived and for how long.

The first two weeks with the traditional high school secretary were rocky; Alice did not want to be "told" how to do her job. She left after 30 minutes and would spend the rest of the morning away from the building, returning after lunch. I did not realize she was leaving and the other secretary did not realize she was not coming back to the building. It was a phone call from the district office looking for her that uncovered what was going on. As a result, these opportunities for training were canceled by the administration at the district office.

I sent her to a two-day SchoolMaster training in October. SchoolMaster is the student management system used by the entire school district and had many features that weren't being used because Alice didn't know how to use them. After the training I sat down to talk to her about some of those features that I wanted to start using in the building. She seemed to not be aware of what I was talking about. I asked her how the drive was; she said the roads had been fine on the way to _____. I was taken aback because the town she mentioned had the training two weeks prior to the training I sent her to, which was in different town. I called the coordinator of the training that she was supposed to have attended and had them check to see if Alice actually had, but she had not attended any of the sessions. I was not amused. It was bad enough that she was not performing her job up to par, but to blow off an expensive training and lie about it was a slap in the face. I tried to be understanding; I encouraged her at every possible opportunity, I told her how much we valued her and depended on her, but nothing was working. I knew she was drinking more-- but there was no excuse for not attending and then fabricating a story about it. It turns out that this was only the beginning of a downward spiral.

Alice started missing days at work, some of them she did not notify us about. When she came back from missing work for the fifth time, she was called to the district office and reprimanded. Unfortunately, no matter how much the entire staff tried to support her, she continued to self-destruct. Alice quit completing monthly reports, refused to attend secretaries' meetings, and was rude to the staff and students. Finally, she missed one entire week and no one was able to locate her. When she called and asked if she could come back to work, I directed her to call the district office. She then

told me that she had been in the hospital; she had tried to commit suicide. I quickly

asked her if she really wanted me to know that information, I knew that as her direct

supervisor I would have to report anything she told me, and I reminded her of that, she

said that was fine she wanted me to know what was going on. Alice said that her

drinking problem had gotten out of control and that she had been in detox for two days. I

was crushed; we all cared so much for Alice and had done the best we could to support

her within the building setting, however we would not enable her, and without that she

could not function. I know there will always be a question in my mind about what we

could have done differently, but we do the best we can with what we know.

Exhibit 5 New Paraprofessional Expectations Given to Jessica

With the changes that are occurring at Eagle the need for clarification of expectations has
arisen. This is occurring to allow us to function effectively in our primary goal, which is
to deliver an education at the highest level for our students. We are all being asked to
step our performance up to meet the new expectations. This requires changes for us all
and we need to embrace the challenge.
The following behaviors are expected to be seen by any individual who enters Eagle High
School.
Paraprofessional:
1. Will be up and moving about the room addressing students directly.
2. When it is necessary to print off materials for a student a full view of the room is
    to be maintained while at the computer. Once printing is completed the para is to
    return to the floor.
3. The para will enforce classroom conduct expectations and maintain a
    professional relationship with the students.
4. The grading of papers will occur during periods of time when students are not
    present, during speaker presentations, or as otherwise directed by the supervisor.
5. Any counseling issues need to be referred to the Dean or the school counselor.
6. Lunch is to be taken at the assigned time.
7. With all the changes that are occurring it is necessary that an adult attitude is
    maintained at all times.
8. Staff concerns need to be addressed at the source.
9. Education is the task here.
To help assist us in improving our professionalism the use of a feedback form will be
implemented.

Alice was placed on administrative leave while things were sorted out, but she eventually resigned. This is something that will haunt me for a long time. I believe that Alice was doing the best she could; however, her illness handicapped her job performance. I also believe she was "betrayed" by a bureaucratic system; she was an alcoholic that had been showing signs of distress for years yet no one took any steps to help, in fact, several people went to a lot of effort to enable her by covering for her. With the resignation of the building secretary, several changes happened. One of the paraprofessionals, Elizabeth, took on the role of secretary until a replacement could be found. In addition, the role of the paraprofessional again took on a different look. On November 22, 2006, a meeting was held to discuss the new role and the expectations that went with it. Exhibit 5 shows the new expectations given to Jessica. The person who was hired to replace the secretary was given the expectations in exhibit 6.

Exhibit 6 Expectations for the Person Replacing Alice

Qualities that will be looked for in evaluation:
- Adaptable
- Tolerate interruptions
- Multi-tasking
- An eye for detail and accuracy
- Organized
- Time-management skills
- Technical skills: Excel, office machines, other office programs
- Comfortable working with technology
- Good people skills: listening
- Field difficult situations with parents
- Confidentiality
- Understanding of difficult students and teachers
- Maturity
- Uses proper channels for communication and problems: technical problems- Mr. _____ or _____, everything else is the building administrator
- Seeks out assistance when needed

Office is the priority-everything else in the building is secondary

The art teacher struggled with the changes; she had certain students that she didn't want to work with, the grading process stymied her, and classroom discipline was almost non-existent. I assigned the one remaining paraprofessional to be in the art class to serve as support. The paraprofessional recorded attendance, grades, and maintained discipline while the art teacher demonstrated what needed to be completed in class for the day. I worked individually with this teacher on lesson plan preparation and grading techniques. This was probably one of the most frustrating tasks for me personally. I had a difficult time with the fact that she did not like our students to begin with, she was only teaching at Eagle one day a week in order to keep a full-time contract.

The art teacher was trained for the elementary level and found high school students difficult, "I do not like these students, they are so difficult to motivate and do not have any fun in class. They do not even tell me what a great job I did on the models I made for them." The students knew she did not like them and behaved accordingly. At the end of the year, I held a staff meeting to review the year and to plan for what needed to be addressed for next year. At this meeting, she informed the entire staff, "The graduation ceremony was a joke, none of those students earned a diploma. I was embarrassed to be a part of it. I also want to let you know I have no intention of coming back here, I am asking the superintendent to not bring me back to Eagle. I do not like the students, they are rude and disrespectful to me. They are not fun for me to work with, and I feel my talents are being wasted." The entire staff just sat there dumbstruck. What can you possibly say to such a diatribe? The paraprofessional who had worked with her all year said, "How can you sit here and talk about our students like that? They worked

hard for their diplomas. If you do not like the way they treat you, it is because you treat

them like they are losers." I tried to have the meeting end on a more positive note by

asking the art teacher to let me know what she would need to make next year more

successful, she said she would think about it.

While the staff appeared to embrace the changes and the roles outlined for them,

there were problems. "Staff has pretty much stayed the same since I have been here,

minus a para educator. I think we could help these students out more if we did have

another staff member. Though the curriculum is self-taught, I feel sometime that if we

did put them in groups of what they were working on and then had an educator help them

through some of the material we would not leave out the student that does not understand

and therefore shuts down and quits working. Staff has clear roles and is fulfilling them;

however the lack of staff has resulted in less direct contact with students," observes one

participant. We were down one full-time staff member, which meant that people were

going to have to pick up extra tasks. They still watched to see if anyone was being

treated with favoritism, once again desks and workstations were at the top of the list with

the staff as a measure of equity. Staff also got nervous if they felt duties were being

taken away; there was concern that they might be "phased out" and lose their job. While

one participant comments on the need for more staff and the fine balance of roles, "It

seems that it would benefit the students to have more certified staff for assistance but the

classified staff do well. It seems that each staff member has and knows where his or her

place is, as does each of the other staff members, and they appear to live up to these

expectations with little blur in roles."

We held weekly meetings to cover operating procedures and any issues that might have come up during the week. I encouraged two-way dialogues with all the staff; we had to keep talking openly in order to keep moving forward in a productive manner. Comments made by a participant about the communications, "The Dean has opened up communication with staff that each person feels like they have a voice in decision-making. I have found that staff members are supportive of each other to see that the school runs as smoothly as it can."

Without direct support from the district office as we made changes, we were dependent on each other. This situation, while at times frustrating, caused the staff to work together as a team. Restructuring gave us a clean slate to start from, a common goal to work towards, and the smaller staff meant that we all had to work together to achieve a success.

<div align="center">Public Relations</div>

Previous Public Relations

Eagle High School was viewed as a setting for "losers, quitters, pregnant girls, gang bangers, druggies, and a place to go if you wanted easy credit," these were the descriptors used by the counselors at the traditional high school. Time after time, the staff of Eagle High School was confronted with these same sentiments being repeated by students, parents, and community members. It was disheartening for staff to have to continually defend the program that was being run, it was made doubly hard by the fact that the building's culture had become so toxic that some of the comments were true.

Several staff members had attended conferences out of district and when asked where they worked found themselves in an awkward position. One staff member actually

had the conference leader apologize to them and say it must be awful to be working there. Another member stated where they worked only to have several participants actually laugh and make comments about how the school was a joke.

The lead teacher, Curtis, had a "closed door" policy. He did not want "outside" people to come in the building, that included the district administration. You cannot keep secrets in public, so he insisted that everything about the school remain as private as possible. He went as far as attending school board meetings, speaking to board members privately about how horrible the students were that Eagle High School served, that he and the staff risked their personal safety to be in the building. With comments like that, no wonder people avoided the building like the plague. The lead teacher would attend conferences on alternative education and tell people how difficult the student population was that he had to deal with. These comments got out into the community and further damage the image of Eagle High School.

New Public Relations

An active campaign to "showcase" our students was begun. The school was opened up and the public was invited in. Newspaper stories featuring our students, staff, and changes being made were published. We made a conscious effort to place our students and program in the public eye in a positive manner.

There was a "stump speech" about the program that the staff would give when asked by people about what was going on. We had to work hard at getting out the message we wanted people to hear, it was the only way to beat the rumor mill.

We also set in place a concentrated effort to reach our parents. We had parent conferences, late nights, letters, and made lots of phone calls trying to engage a group that had been purposefully ignored in the past.

Perceptions of and Reactions to the Changes in Public Relations

I was at a state-level conference and found that people were very aware of what had been going on at Eagle High School. Many individuals thought it was perfectly acceptable to "quiz" me about the "dirty details", all the while telling me they just could not understand why I would want to work in such a horrible place. I found when I would not answer their questions and when I defended our program, I was viewed to be covering up. I had never worked in a place where I could not hold my head up proudly, I was embarrassed.

The first thing I did was "throw open the doors", I invited everyone I met to come in and see what we were doing. That simple change to an open-door policy made it clear that things were different and that we had nothing to hide. It also sent a message to the students that we were proud of what was going on in the building and we were proud of them. According to the district administrator in charge of school data, "There have been many changes in public relations during the 2006/2007 year. This year the school has welcomed a more positive feedback from parents and the community."

One participant notes, "This year parents were invited to Orientation and student conferences. Letters were sent home to keep parents informed of disciplinary actions taken and student progress." Four days before the first day of school, I held a parent orientation night. During the orientation, I talked about the changes that were made to the program and the new expectations. There was a good turnout, especially given that

this had never happened before, with approximately half of the parents in attendance. There were many questions from parents about the new curriculum and graduation requirements. Several parents of students who had attended Eagle High School in the past stayed after the meeting, they wanted to talk about the changes. While they were supportive of the changes, they had legitimate concerns about whether their students could be successful. I explained to them that with the new structure, success was built in for each and every student; I asked them to give us a month and then return if they thought there were issues that needed to be addressed.

Eagle High School held an open house in the fall. I changed the hours to later in the evening because many of our parents worked and they needed to be able to come late. I also had parent/teacher conferences twice a year. At those conferences we made sure to have two nights available for late meetings. Progress reports were sent home at the end of each month, along with attendance profiles and credit analysis. I wanted to make sure that parents were aware of how their student was doing. To assist us in our communication with parents I also developed a website. This site contained a brief explanation of our program, important upcoming events, a calendar, job information, college information, and pictures of daily activities. Our efforts with parents paid off. We did not have one single parent complaint for the entire year. I believe it was because the constant, clear communication prevented the parents from having to deal with any surprises surrounding their student and the school.

The entire staff worked on presenting a positive image to the local community. I asked them to not engage in conversations about the staff who were no longer working at the building. I also requested them to make sure that when they participated in a

conversation about Eagle High School that they emphasize the positive things going on and invite the person they were talking to in for a visit.

I had been asked by the company that developed our curriculum to go out and speak to schools about what we were doing. At first, I was a bit hesitant, I do not like leaving the building and my students, but then I realized this was one more opportunity to brag about what we were doing. As a result of these speaking engagements I received phone calls from other districts asking to come in and observe our program. With other districts coming in to observe, going back, and talking to people, I was soon invited to speak at a state conference about what we were doing. I felt like we had finally arrived! When I called the superintendent to let him know about the invitation I was disheartened when he said the district would not pick up the tab for me to go speak, I let him know that the expenses were being covered and he reluctantly agreed to let me go with the caveat not to embarrass the district. It was then that I realized that, while we had earned respect outside of our district, we were still fighting memories of what we once were in our own backyard. I needed to become more active in our public relations work at home. To this end I started speaking to local service clubs about our school and the students that attended. I asked for volunteers, encouraged site visits, and welcomed their involvement. This effort resulted in scholarships being offered to our students for the first time by the local service clubs.

One evening I had the students host the school board at our building, highlighting our program. With twenty students, the full school board, and several guests attending, the students explained our program in small groups. It was something to see one of our students working with an adult showing them how our program worked and answering

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questions. This was probably the most powerful event that occurred to change our public image. The adults left with not just a clear understanding of how the new program worked, but also a better appreciation for our students.

Steven, the school counselor, also started coordinating sporting activities with other schools for us. A study participant commented on the athletic events, "The school was involved in athletic events with other alternative schools this year; this seems to have been a very positive change. The staff has worked to build school esteem and camaraderie." By taking our students to other schools to compete in sporting activities the reputation that our students had was quickly shattered. Our teams won sportsmanship awards, along with two championships. By e-mailing everyone on the district e-mail server about our team successes, it allowed our students to be viewed as athletes in a town that puts a high value on athletic achievement. Another participant commented, "The students are invited to play sports as in basketball and softball along with being able to play sports at the traditional high school if grades are upheld. With the pushing by the Dean, the students are being welcomed to join the regular high school dance and senior activities including baccalaureate. Students this year for the first time are able to purchase an ASB." The students were not only participating with other alternative school students, but they were also returning to participate in activities at the traditional high school; showing how far they had come in building up their confidence. The coach for our athletic activities stated, "I think our public relations have also improved over the years from a school and community standpoint. Look at the people we had for our graduation and all of the thanks from parents that the staff receive. I think that this

school is very nurturing and caring to the students and that the community is aware of this. I also think the PR is higher because of our involvement in sports."

I knew that we had made an impact on our public image when our graduation received front-page coverage by the local paper, when we had not even asked them for coverage. "Graduation was held at a historical building downtown this year, giving it a great community feel," gushed one participant. When an anonymous donor paid to have the graduation held at a local historical building, I was so pleased. I also knew that things had changed when the superintendent actually gave a speech at our graduation, rather than the congratulatory sentence he usually gave.

I also knew we had changed our image the minute I could talk to people about where I worked and not be asked if I knew the old lead teacher. I also had people tell me how good they heard the program was and we had school district staff requesting that their children be allowed to attend our program.

<div align="center">Student Expectations</div>

Previous Student Expectations

Students attended school for two hours a day. The first twenty minutes of the day involved the flag salute and morning announcements. Students spent copious amounts of time eating. Cup-o-noodles were kept on site and sold by the secretary to the students, students would spend up to thirty minutes cooking and eating these. Students had a fifteen minute break that often extended into a half an hour, because when they came in they used the restroom and once again got food. Essentially, what should have been a two-hour instructional period turned out to be only one-hour long instructional period.

The only clear expectations for the students were that they had to earn one semester credit a month and keep current on their hours. While the students were aware of these requirements, they also knew that there were students not held to that standard. As a result of this inequity students skipped, treated the staff poorly, were more prone to cheating, and exhibited poor behavior at school.

Curtis and the students also had an "understanding" that if they left him alone, did not talk, and remained in their seats they could do what they wanted during class. The "backroom boys" were ignored; as long as they sat in the soundproof room and did not cause trouble the lead teacher had everyone leave them alone. As a result the room they occupied was covered in graffiti and had garbage strewn about the shelves and tables. The "cleavage club" was a group of young ladies that wore low-cut shirts and tight clothes. Curtis was quite enamored with them and they knew it. The ladies in this group would sit and visit, doing very little work, bartering with the lead teacher for grades.

Curtis and Alice would select a group of students that they would appear to be targeting. These students would get referrals for smoking downtown after school. Curtis had Alice drive around town during class time if a student was not present at school, and if they were sighted the police would be called.

New Student Expectations

Students at Eagle High School were given a clear set of in-class expectations. In addition to behavioral expectations, each student was given an individualized course of study designed to get them where they needed to be by the end of the year. The staff also presented a united front when dealing with issues. It was made very clear that gang behavior would not be tolerated in the building.

Grades were issued on merit, not by bartering deals. Credits had to be earned, not given for the sake of expediency. The building took on more of a "college study hall" atmosphere. The students were held to high standards of conduct and they rose to them.

Perceptions of and Reactions to the Changes in Student Expectations

The first thing that I did with the students was to lay out clear expectations for conduct. How could you expect students to behave if you did not tell them how you wanted them to behave? Each student was a set of expectations the first day of class (see Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7 Student Expectations

In order to make Eagle High School a productive and successful educational setting for <u>all</u> students the following guidelines will be followed by <u>all</u> students

Students are not to be in the building between the hours of 11:15 am and 12:15 pm. This time is for staff to have a duty free lunch and to prepare for the afternoon session. On Wednesday students are not to be on campus (including the outside area) between the hours of 11:00 am and 12:00 pm. This is time that will be used for weekly staff meetings.

- **Be on time**.
- **You will not be in your cars during break or at lunch time**
- **Be respectful to the staff**.
- **Comply with the district dress code**
- **You will sign in and out for yourself (not for others) with accurate times**
- **You will use table voices**
- **You will do your own work**
- **You will work while here**.
- **You will use appropriate language**
- **You will have notes at the computer for unit tests**
- **You will sit three to a table and in your assigned spot**
- **Vending machines are to be used 10:00-10:15 am, 2:00-2:15 pm (1:30-1:45 on Wednesday).**

Meals are served until 8:45 for breakfast and 12:45 for lunch; you are responsible for signing in and getting your lunch from Jessica.

I discussed the need for decorum and the importance of their education, allowed the students to question the expectations, asked them to live with the expectations for a month, and then we would revisit them. At the end of the month, when the expectations were reviewed, the majority of the students felt the expectations were fair and did not need amendment. The group of students who wanted the expectations changed was a small handful of the students who had been at Eagle High School for at least two years prior to the restructuring. A district administrator commented, "It's clear that students are now expected to learn! A snickers bar no longer gets you a higher grade. You actually have to earn it. In previous years, I hated walking into Eagle High School. Being a teacher for 25 years, I was uncomfortable with the way the staff behaved along with how students behaved and were being treated. Both seemed to be trying to "get away" with as much as possible. I do not think I ever went into the school and actually saw the administrator or teacher working with kids. Most of the time the teacher had his feet up on a desk and was talking at a student."

I also shut down use of the backroom by students when I turned it into the secretary's office. Without that room there was a group of ten young men who had to come out and join the rest of us. At first it was not very pleasant; they were angry and did their best to intimidate the staff. I took every opportunity I could to sit with these gentlemen and engage them in a conversation about what they were studying. I encouraged the rest of the staff to do the same thing; I wanted us to not allow these "puffer fish" to run the school anymore. It was interesting to watch these young men go from being resistant to participating with the adults in the building to actively seeking to engage with an adult. This group was easy, all they wanted was respect, and when they

realized that we respected all of our students they gave us the best effort they could. The

hardest group to reach was the "cleavage club".

The "cleavage club" was a group of young ladies that had, for the past two years,

managed to earn credit with minimal work along with having their grades raised by

flirting with the lead teacher. I was surprised the first time one leaned across my desk,

exposing a lot of cleavage, and tried to flirt her way out of taking the end of the semester

exam. She was none too happy when I told her to take the test, "Curtis would have let

me skip the test if I asked, and you are just being a bitch." Needless to say altering this

group of students' behaviors was a long, hard road. I was stumped for a bit on how to

explain to them that they deserved to be treated better, they deserved to be taken

seriously, and they definitely did not deserve to get grades because of their physical

assets and ability to flirt. I was disgusted to see that a person in a position of power had

used that power to elicit this type of behavior from girls he should have been protecting,

not exploiting. I had to find a way to change their pattern of behavior without making

them feel like they were wrong; after all, they were only doing what they had been

taught. I decided to draw from my experience with "natural horsemanship" (I intend no

disparaging comparison here between the girls and horses!). When you are training a

horse you need to make sure that your expectations are clear, ask the question (make

clear requests) in a manner the horse can understand, give it a hint, and then if nothing

happens just keep tapping until you get the response you want. The intent is to make it

more comfortable for the horse to do what you want than for it to keep doing what it had

been doing. Therefore, as a staff we had to be consistent, we had to make clear what we

expected from these young ladies; which was that they would work for a grade and credit.

We had to make clear requests (ask clear questions) related to the behaviors we wanted to see. We had to reward the wanted behavior and connect the unwanted behaviors to negative, but not harsh, responses from us. It took a good month before the ladies learned that the behaviors of the past would not work anymore.

Within the first week of school, or the first week of a student's enrollment, each student was given an individualized student learning plan. This plan was designed to catch juniors up to where they should be by the end of the year and to allow seniors the opportunity to complete the credits needed for graduation. The school counselor observes, "I think the expectation now of students is that they need to work harder if they want to graduate. I know in the past they could finish a boat load of credits quickly. That happened again for a few this year, however they had to work extremely hard to get there. I still think we need to set student expectations higher on their behavior. I know it is a different type of student that comes here, but they still need to know who the boss is." I created a "Dean's List" that had all the students' names on it, every time they earned a semester credit an announcement was made to the class and a sticker was put by their name for that month. It got to the point where students were asking to have their stickers to put up, they understood that credit was important, and they liked the little celebrations along the way. The staff expected the students to be successful, staff shared a vision of what success could look like, and the students bought into that vision making it a reality for themselves.

I believe the biggest change in expectations for the students was the simple fact that they were given a set of standards for academic performance and behavior. "Each student is held accountable for his or her own progress in education and approach.

Students have clear guidelines as to what is expected of them in every aspect of the school environment. Unlike previous years the students are required to follow rules as in dress code and conduct," notes a participant. Each month I held individual student conferences and we reviewed how they were doing. We discussed how the academics were going and if there needed to be a change in their individual student learning plan. We also talked about behavior, if there were any issues. However, these conferences were really an opportunity for me to congratulate them for a job well done.

I was pleased when a district administrator shared this comment with me, "The school was so far gone, I had doubts that it could ever be turned around. I actually had conversations with the superintendent, business manager, and curriculum director about what should be done and closing the school was discussed. The change this year is almost scary. The entire culture of the building has changed. The depressing mood has been replaced with the feeling of accomplishment and hope. I love visiting the school and watching staff and students focused on learning. It is obvious that the staff cares and the students know it. (Hmmm... that's probably the key to the awe-inspiring transformation!)." I felt that this comment showed that we had gotten it right; the school would not only survive, but would thrive along with its students.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the process of purposeful

cultural change at an alternative high school that had previously exhibited a "toxic"

culture. The study explored participants' feelings, reactions, observations, and evaluation

of the impact of the process. The primary question addressed in this study was: What

happens when an educational leader uses a "cultural" perspective to lead the process of

purposeful changes to the cultural system in a toxic high school?

Chapter Two reviewed the literature related to the study's topic, including school

culture/climate, academic rigor or "press," professional learning communities,

cultural/climate change and leadership roles, and alternative schools. Chapter three

presented the research methodology, design and methods. In chapter four, the context of

the study was described. Chapter five presented the analysis of data related to

participants' perceptions of and reactions to the changes being made in the school culture.

This chapter presents the conclusions of the study and implications of the study's

findings including specific implications for alternative schools with toxic cultures. The

chapter concludes with an epilogue which follows the continuation of cultural changes at

the school during the school year following the study.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis presented in chapter four, the conclusions of this study are:

(a) The chronological order of the cultural change efforts in a school matters; (b) it is not

necessary to "gut" the staff of a school to make significant changes in the culture; (c)

staff is resistant to change; (d) a positive school culture increases emotional safety and student connectedness and impacts student learning; and (e) a healthy culture must be proactively maintained. These conclusions are discussed in the following sections along with connections to the literature as appropriate.

Chronological Order of Cultural Change Efforts Matters

Research indicates that the process of choosing a change strategy is just as important as the strategy itself in regard to successful change (Hassel, Hassel, Arkin, Kowal, & Steiner, 2006). It is also important to look at the level of the change that is being made, in order to predict and prepare for possible resistance and problematic implementation issues that can arise. According to Condeluci (2002), a first order change is change that does not dramatically affect the system itself and which can be implemented with current knowledge. First order change does not challenge or contradict the established organizational system, thus people within the organization usually do not find first order changes to be threatening. A second order change is a change in the system itself. These changes intentionally challenge organizational assumptions and reframe the organization's social system. Second order changes can cause anxiety, frustration, paranoia, cynicism, and anger as well as temporary dysfunction. Often, first order changes can lead to second order changes. This phenomenon was demonstrated in this study when the layout of the school was changed, which then produced a change in the perception of what the school was about and in the behavior of the students. The students became more focused on their academics once the school had the "office" removed from the main floor and located in a separate room.

Without the day-to-day operations of the building being conducted within the classroom, students realized that class was for academics and not for socializing.

The timing of each change implemented was vitally important to the success of that change. While many of the changes were interdependent, there were changes that served as the foundation for other changes being made. In this study the changes were implemented in the following order: updating the curriculum, reorganizing the layout of the school, changing/clarifying staff roles, addressing public relations, and changing student expectations. What was found in the course of the study is that some of the changes needed to occur before other changes in order to support the success of the changes which followed. There were instances where a change was made prior to the one needed to support its success--the new curriculum was one example.

While the new curriculum was piloted the year prior to this study, the change did not yield the change in student behavior that was expected. It was not until the learning environment was changed, by changing the layout of the school, that visible and measurable changes occur in the students behavior and learning. Until the learning environment was set-up in a manner that was conducive to learning, the students would have continued to struggle with focusing on academics. There were too many distractions with the old layout preventing students from directing all of their attention towards their studies.

According to Purkey and Smith (1982), the foundation for school improvement is the school culture, which is critical to successful improvement of teaching and learning. Hargreaves (1982) found that all too often schools try to solve fundamental cultural problems with solutions grounded in curriculum content and personal relationships. This

case study supports Hargreaves contention. While the curriculum change was important it needed to occur later in the chronology of events, after other fundamental changes in the culture.

Decisions regarding what change to make first, along with the order of the changes that follow, need be thoughtfully made. Peterson (1999) points out that what is thriving in the present culture should be maintained. Some things need to remain the same while change is embraced and future improvements must be balanced with the status quo. When prioritizing the changes that will made in the culture of a school it is necessary to make sure to support the mission statement of the school in the process, since the mission statement is the guiding principle for the school (Blankstein, 2004). It is possible that the current mission statement of a school will need to be updated or rewritten to reflect the new vision for the school. In this study, once the cultural changes were completed, it was necessary to revise the school's mission statement to reflect the new direction that the school was taking. The original mission statement had little to do with student success, provided no clear direction, and did not provide an anchor for the future of the school. A "temporary" mission statement was put into place in order to keep the focus of the cultural changes on the students. The mission statement also provided a common reference point for the staff guide decisions.

Not Necessary to "Gut" the Staff of a School

One of the school restructuring options under NCLB is replacing the school staff, according to Hassel, Hassel, Arkin, Kowal, and Steiner (2006). While this is a step reserved for schools that are targeted for improvement due to failure to meet annual yearly progress (AYP), it is also a step that might be considered by district level

administrators when restructuring a failing school. One of the reasons for "gutting" the staff is the possibility that the existing staff will fight changes being made especially second order changes, thus obstructing the change process. To keep the existing staff the leadership must manage this issue.

In the case study school, the first instinct of most superintendents would have been to "gut" the staff of the school; replacing everyone, not just the administrator, in an attempt to eliminate the toxic culture that existed at the building. According to Kelleher and Levenson (2004), if culture deals with how people perform their work, then changes in culture must involve new patterns of work. To make these changes takes time and team building. The ability to maintain the original staff will depend largely on the ability of the educational leader to build trust and commitment in the staff. Lynn (1998) concluded in his paper delivered to the College of Alberta School Superintnedents, "Unless we change the structures in which people work, we will not be able to change the culture in which they work. The structures must be enabling. If we do not enable our personnel, then we are sowing the seeds of disillusionment." With this statement by Lynn (1998) in mind, my work in reculturing the school focused on working with the existing staff rather than replacing them.

Holly and Southworth (1989) point out that culture evolves as the outcome of group learning when people face a problem and work it out together, finding a solution that continues to work in future situations. Keeping the staff intact allowed the toxic culture to be rehabilitated without having to deal with the complications that would have arisen by having a new staff with no experience in the setting. While the staff had trust issues because of the past, they did have a relationship built out of adversity; this

relationship provided a basis for building a healthy, strong, committed staff. The existing staff knew the basic operations of the program, understood the students, and had a commitment to making the school healthy once more. This allowed the focus to remain on the changes needed to create a healthy culture, while putting supports in place to enable the staff to evolve with the culture.

Another facet that needed to be addressed in order to keep the existing staff was accountability. If no one knows what he or she is responsible for, then nothing gets accomplished. Accountability is an obligation to answer for the execution of one's assigned responsibilities. Lack of accountability also leads to the creation of a toxic culture. When there are no checks and balances people will often resort to behaviors that would not be exhibited if there were clear parameters in place. In the site school the lack of accountability on the part of the lead teacher lead to a toxic environment. Part of the lack of accountability could be attributed to the poor relationships between the individuals at the school. According to Easton (2008), relationships require some form of accountability. Prior to the study the lead teacher would not let staff speak to staff or students visit with each other or with staff, and would very rarely have a conversation with anyone other than the building secretary. The lack of personal relationships within the staff created an environment of secrecy and distrust, which in turn contributed to the toxicity of the school. In this study, jobs were redesigned and clarified in order to be able to build accountability in the staff and staff were provided with the tools and training needed to meet the new job expectations. Staff knew what they were expected to do and could not point at someone else when things were not done; claiming they did not know it was their responsibility. Most of the staff found this a relief; they no longer had to worry

about being blamed for something that was not their fault; however, there was one staff member who could not deal with being held accountable and eventually quit.

If the toxic culture is confronted head on, giving people a chance to vent and then begin to heal, then it is possible to retain a larger portion of the original staff. Deal and Peterson (1999) point out that there needs to be a conscious and direct focus on eradicating the negative and rebuilding the positive norms and beliefs. They also feel that staff that can not be successful in adjusting to the changes should be moved to a place where they can be successful and flourish. In this study the staff needed to deal with the past in order to be able to create a positive school culture. While staff meetings were designed to work on retooling the culture, it was soon obvious that without an opportunity to "bury" the past the development of a positive school culture could not happen. Allowing 15 minutes at each staff meeting to address the past allowed us to continue moving forward.

Staff is Resistant to Change

Change zealots tend to demonize resisters, but they are not really bad people. Like all of us, they are a product of their history. They have had experiences that have led to the adaptation of certain deeply ingrained behaviors and habits…The best solution is usually honest dialogue. (Kotter, 1996, pp. 112-113)

This quote from Kotter was something I held in my mind whenever resistance to changes arose from staff or students.

People tend to resist change because it is asking them to step out of their comfort zone. Change also produces resistance because it disrupts the momentum or the inertia of the organizational process (Block, 1981). Cultural change in the world around us is a

bottom-up phenomenon, while cultural change in organizations is a top-down process; thus individuals within organizations can be uneasy because they view the change as being out of their control. The students at Eagle High had been used to a top-down style of change; as youths they had spent most of their lives simply being told how things would be. The staff on the other hand was enjoying a sense of freedom after the lead teacher was transferred out of the school and was no longer around to dictate to them. The staff thus viewed actions that seemed to be telling them what to do as a return to the dictatorship of the bad teacher and would meet such actions with resistance.

Change is also met with resistance when the need for change has been ignored for an extended period of time (Maurer, 2002). It is difficult to get staff to realize that change is needed, especially when the organizational leaders are loath to step in and say change is needed (Duck, 2001). That was one of the circumstances that lead to the toxic culture at Eagle High School in the first place; the original administrator did not address many of the changes that needed to be made to the school culture in order to prevent it from turning into a toxic culture. Facing changes that need to be made is a difficult endeavor; individuals take the need for change personally, and there is a feeling of failure that is often tied to the need for change.

In this study, it was harder to get buy-in from the staff than from the students. Staff were the "tradition bearers" for the building, and no matter how bad things were, the need to keep things the way they had always been overrode the need to have a healthy school culture. Block (1981) pointed out that there is less resistance to change if the logical consistency of the changes fit the change strategy and the organization. This was one of the things I had to keep returning to whenever I dealt with resistance; was I being

logical in what I was doing? The staff was also more resistant because the changes that were made involved the altering and loss of some of the existing relationships, which in turn appeared to reduce the power the staff once had. Some of the staff also viewed the changes made as a threat to their livelihood; one staff member in particular thought she was being phased out of a job.

The students embraced the changes with more ease than the staff for several reasons. The staff had been functioning in a culture was known to them; even though it was toxic they understood how it operated. While the culture was not healthy, the predictability was oddly comforting for most of them. The staff spent more time in the toxic culture than the students had. I did find that some of the students who had been at the school for two or three years prior to the year of the study were as resistant to the changes as the staff was. These students felt their education threatened by the new expectations that were put in place; it resulted in the loss of three students who returned to the traditional high school.

Students did not have "personal" ownership in the school's organizational structure; they did not view themselves as being part of the core of operations. Students seemed to view themselves as passive consumers of the educational process, rather than active partners in their education. While these perceptions are not the ones that we would like to see, they were ones that allowed the students to be more adaptable to the cultural changes.

A Positive School Culture Increases Emotional Safety and Student Connectedness and Impacts Student Learning

School culture, positive or negative, affects students' sense of safety. Students thrive in a positive school culture, which helps them feel connected to the school. When students feel connected there is a drop in absenteeism, fighting, bullying, and vandalism. Increased student connection also promotes classroom engagement, academic performance, and increases school attendance and completion rates, according to Blum and Libbey (2004). In this study Eagle students had not been successful at the traditional high school for a variety of reasons; the most common reason stated by the students was, "They only care about the athletes, cheerleaders, and smart kids." The students who came to Eagle felt marginalized, not accepted, and ignored in the traditional schools they came from. It was necessary to build a connection to Eagle with these students; it was one of the most important things we did to keep them in school and successful.

Student achievement is impacted by school culture. Shaping culture in this regard is important because of the national focus on higher curriculum standards, assessments, and accountability. NCLB reforms attempt to align content, teaching, and assessment, but without a culture that supports and values these structural changes these reforms will fail (Peterson, 2002). If certain norms of school culture are strong, improvements in learning will in-turn be strong. Purkey and Smith (1982) state:

> We have argued that an academically effective school is distinguished by its culture: a structure, process, and climate of values and norms that channel staff and students in the direction of successful teaching and learning… The logic of the cultural model is such that it points to increasing the organizational

effectiveness of a school building and is neither grade-level nor curriculum specific. (p.68)

Caine and Caine (1991) state that for effective learning to occur students need to feel "relaxed sense of alertness" (p.65). This relaxed state occurs when a student experiences a sense of belonging to the group, caring by the teacher, acceptance by other students, and a lack of anger, tension, competition, or humiliation. In this study, many of the students had experienced negative educational experiences prior to enrolling at Eagle. They often appeared to have a "chip" on their shoulder, just waiting for the same treatment to occur that had in the past. It was important to ensure a relaxed environment for these students, which allowed them to connect with the school and begin building the relationships needed to lead to effective learning environment. Learning happens best in an environment conducive to it, and that is what culture is all about, according to Easton (2008).

Staff, administrators, and students in a positive school culture believe they have the ability to achieve their ambitions and the environment supports them in their attempt to do so (Peterson, 2002). The impact of a positive school culture was made apparent at the study site in several ways. The first was the evidence of the number of students who remained the entire year. In previous years there would be only between 15 and 20 students who remained enrolled in the school throughout the school year; during the study year 65 students remained enrolled throughout the school year. Another piece of evidence showing the importance of the more positive school culture was the amount of credit earned. During the study year a total of 921 semester credits were earned by 60 students, compared to 600 semester credits earned by 100 students the year before.

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A Healthy Culture Must be Proactively Maintained

Culture develops as a result of the environment; it can develop by default or it can develop through purposeful actions. A healthy culture is intentional and planned; it does not evolve by accident. A culture that is developed "accidentally" or elements of a school that are at odds with that culture will even work against it, eventually resulting in a toxic environment (Easton, 2008). Barth (2002) states that changing a toxic or dysfunctional school culture into a healthy school culture that inspires lifelong learning among students and adults is the greatest challenge of instructional leadership. This study showed that a toxic culture can be turned into a positive culture, but once the culture was changed work was required to maintain that culture. When facets of the culture were neglected at Eagle old patterns of behavior began to emerge. The fledgling culture had to be monitored and nurtured until it became "second nature" to the students and staff. This study also shows, via the epilogues at the end of this chapter, that culture continues to evolve making it necessary to continue focusing on purposeful actions that will maintain the health of the culture.

Building a positive school culture is not a project but a long-term commitment that must be continually monitored and adjusted to meet the needs of the students (Hassel, Hassel, Arkin, Kowal, & Steiner, 2006). Easton (2008) points out that culture is realized through a school's structure, governance, curriculum, instruction, assessment, events, and reinforcing behaviors. Duck (2001) points out when it is time to go "live with" the changes that are made, it is important to get commitment by the staff or you will get backsliding. To prevent the return to old patterns of behavior it is necessary to stay involved with the culture, and the culture needs to be monitored and nurtured.

Fullan (2001) points out that leaders can never become complacent; if we do it is easy for people to slip into superficial compliance or even subtle sabotage. According to Duck (2001), while the changes need to be maintained, it is also important not to let the culture become so rigid it cannot adapt to meet the needs of a changing population. There are six ways to do that, according to Duck (2001): (a) Do not make today's innovations into tomorrow's sacred cows, nothing should be exempt from scrutiny; (b) stay abreast of the external environment and be aware of what is happening outside of the school setting; (c) keep listening and communicating with your stakeholders and be prepared to adjust if needed; (d) recruit fresh staff; some of the staff may need a rest after going through the change process; (e) leverage your champions and let them take over leadership roles; (f) build skills of self-observation and correction; teach the staff to recognize what is happening and adjust accordingly.

<center>Epilogue: 2007-2008 School Year</center>

The changes made at the site school during the study continue to evolve. School culture is not static; it is a dynamic process that is impacted by the population, current events, economics, and a myriad of outside influences. To maintain a healthy culture requires vigilance and the ability to change when needed. The following section takes a look at the continuation of the purposeful changes in the school culture during the beginning of the school year following the study.

Changes in the Curriculum

The curriculum change has had a resounding effect on the school. In September, we were at enrollment capacity. Prior to the changes of the previous year, it would take until November to have enough students that we were not looking at cutting staff and

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until the end of January to be near capacity. Students are arriving early and staying late in order to work, and the classroom resembles a college study hall. Students understand the importance of not only earning credit, but earning the right kind of credit. They have their Individual Student Learning Plans in their binders, charting their progress toward their academic goals. Each credit earned is celebrated by the entire school. The focus has shifted to personal academic achievement, rather than shortcuts and cheating. Well respected members of the community are now demanding that their student be allowed to transfer to our school despite the protestations of the traditional high school's staff. The traditional high school used the program for summer school during the summer following the study and discovered it was too difficult for students to earn a semester credit in three weeks, so they are now looking for an easier option.

A parent partner night has been added to the monthly calendar. This night features a seminar style class with reading done prior to the class, activities done during class, with a follow-up assignment. Students and parents can work together to complete the seminar, which is worth an elective credit. The school counselor is also available that evening to meet with parents about student progress or any concerns they may need addressed.

Changes to the Layout of the School

When you walk in the school now the first thing you notice is the emphasis on academics. The library is in direct line of sight from the entryway. The main room looks like a college computer lab or a corporate work center. While looks aren't everything, the change has set a tone that is followed through on by the behavior of the students.

All of the computer monitors were replaced with flat screen panels; this has improved the visibility of the text for the students. The furniture was upgraded at the beginning of this new academic year, coordinated to match the school colors of blue and silver. The furniture upgrade takes away the "patched together" feeling that the school had. All the table surfaces are marbleized grey, and the student chairs are blue. The hand-me-down folding round tables were replaced with new sturdy tables; folding chairs were replaced by ergonomically correct rolling chairs. An overhead display camera was added to the classroom for large group instruction. The bulky 1930s storage cabinets, which came out of the old middle school that was torn down, were replaced by rolling cabinets that match the rest of the furniture. Computers are now located on "pods" that allow for a grouping of six students. This has encouraged collaboration and group discussions among students enrolled in the same class. There are also five small round tables with a computer on them for one student to work at, since not all students want to work in a group setting.

Changes/Clarification of Staff Roles

The new school year continues to see changes/clarifications of staff roles. The staff is made up of three full-time staff; the teacher/Dean, secretary, and paraprofessional. There are three part-time staff; an art teacher, school counselor, and an intervention specialist. While the staff continues to be small, they have formed an effective team that meets the needs of the students.

The Dean tries to address as many administrative duties as possible during hours when there are no students present. In instances where this cannot be prevented either the secretary, who used to be a paraprofessional at this school, or the school counselor, if on

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is available, move out into the classroom to assist the classroom paraprofessional. This has allowed for better continuity in instruction and less interruptions to the classroom.

The building secretary and paraprofessional each have clearly defined duties, this has aided in each working more efficiently. In addition each has received training specific to performing their duties. The other thing that has occurred is each has embraced using technology to support their roles, and they are working "smarter not harder", enabling each to complete tasks in an efficient manner.

The school counselor this year is actually counseling. While he continues to analyze transcripts in order to develop the course of study for each student, he now has time to meet with individual students. Again this has occurred through the use of technology to reduce the work load of analyzing transcripts and designing a course of study.

The intervention specialist is now able to focus on the students with dependency issues. Prior to this year he was often called on to do the individual counseling that the school counselor was not able to get to. The intervention specialist is now completing evaluations of students, then proceeding with the counseling that is indicated in the evaluation. The impact of this is clear in the classroom, where there are fewer students missing school or coming to school having used an inappropriate substance.

The art teacher is now teaching class off-campus, at the school where she works the other four days per week. This allows her to have access to all of her supplies and not have to shuttle things back and forth. Students are no longer required to take art; it is now a true elective course. Having art as an elective has reduced the number of students that the art teacher deals with, making the class more productive and manageable. The

art teacher has become re-energized with these simple changes and her passion for teaching has been reignited.

Public Relations

The positive changes to the school's public image continue to occur. The school was at capacity by the end of October. Local service clubs are contacting us and offering scholarships to the students attending Eagle High School. Students enrolled at Eagle continue to participate in sports at the traditional high school, and, for the first time, Eagle students are now allowed on varsity teams. In addition Eagle seniors were invited to participate in the senior activities organized by the parent committee at the traditional high school.

When the school district and community formed a task force and started working together to address local gang issues, Eagle students were not "targeted" as being the source of the majority of the problems, like they had been in the past. The task force was quick to realize that Eagle students are not causing trouble during the day and the "tagging" that is occurring is actually being done by the traditional high school students or individuals from out of district. Intervention methods being implemented at Eagle to address gang issues are in the process of being implemented at the other schools in Johnson School district.

The program being implemented at Eagle has been featured at two state level conferences this year. We continue to receive visitors and calls from other districts asking about our model and how they can set up the same thing in their own district.

Student expectations continue to develop in their rigor. All seniors are enrolled in

higher level math courses that extend beyond the graduation requirements. A greater

number of students are taking advantage of running start and off-campus vocational

programs. Each senior is now expected to fill out a Free Application for Federal Student

Aid (FASFA) and apply to at least one post secondary placement (any application fees

are paid for by Eagle). Students are also required to do a job shadow in their senior year;

this is designed to broaden their perspective of their options beyond high school.

Students have been using a "World Café" model (Brown & Isaacs, 2005) of

addressing social issues at school. The World Café is an innovative yet simple

methodology for hosting conversations about questions that matter. These conversations

link and build on each other as people move between groups, share ideas, and discover

new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, or

community. As a process, the World Café harnesses the collective intelligence of any

group, thus increasing people's capacity for effective action. The environment is set up

like a café; students sit four to a table and have a series of conversational rounds lasting

20 minutes about one or more questions which were selected by the entire class to be

discussed. At the end of each round, one person remains at each table as the host, while

each of the other three travel to separate tables. Table hosts welcome newcomers to their

tables and shares the table's conversation so far. The newcomers relate one piece of

information from their table -- and then the conversation continues, deepening as the

round progresses. At the end of the second round, participants move to another table for

and repeat the process. In subsequent rounds they go deeper into the original one. After

four rounds, the whole group gathers to share and explore emerging themes, insights, and learnings, which are captured on flipcharts so they can reflect on what is emerging in the room. At this point the Café then focuses on using the information gathered to make a plan to address the social issue that was discussed. Gone are the days of the teacher arbitrarily coming up with the solutions to problems in the classroom, students are now holding each other accountable for their behavior. Students are taking responsibility for their learning and conduct, and it is a long way from being irresponsible and blaming others for things not going right.

<p style="text-align:center">Implications of the Study</p>

The results of this study may have implications for policy and practice for administrators of alternative high schools. The following sections will discuss implications for policy, practice, and research based on the conclusions I drew from the study. Exhibit 8 represents a graphic organization of this discussion.

Chronological Order of Cultural Change Efforts Matters

When a cultural change needs to be addressed at a school it is important that the order of the changes be well thought out. The foundation for improvement in a school is the school's culture (Purkey & Smith, 1982), so changes to a school's culture require a thoughtful approach. This study suggests that administrators need to have an understanding of first and second order change. By understanding how a first order change can cause a second order change an administrator can avoid some of the resistance that arises when change occurs. Second order changes are a challenge to the system itself because these changes are "deep" changes, leading to anxiety and resistance.

If administrators have a clear understanding of the implication of these changes they will

be more successful in their change efforts.

Exhibit 8 Matrix for Implications Resulting From the Conclusions of the Study.

Conclusions	Administrators	Policy	Practice
Conclusion A: Chronological order of cultural change efforts matters.	Understanding of first and second order change	Guidelines for the development of a positive school culture	Implement guidelines and procedures
Conclusion B: It is not necessary to "gut" the staff of a school to make significant changes in the culture	Understand polarity management and staff development	Guidelines for targeted staff development	
Conclusion C: Staff is resistant to change.	Understand the dynamics of change	Guidelines for staff conduct	
Conclusion D: A positive school culture increases emotional safety and student connectedness and impacts student learning.	Understand the relationship between culture and success	Guidelines of characteristics of a positive school culture	
Conclusion E: A healthy culture must be proactively maintained.	Understand the role of an educational leader and the maintenance of a positive school culture	Procedures for monitoring school culture	

School districts and building administrators should consider outlining guidelines

for the development of a positive school culture. With the need to build new schools and

develop a culture for those schools, it would seem timely for there to be a "road map"

that the district has designed to achieve the culture that is desired in each of the districts'

schools. By creating a guideline for developing the desired culture for a school building

the administrator and building staff will have a clear vision of where they are going. This

allows for the implementation of a plan.

Not Necessary to "Gut" the Staff of a School

Staff is not a "disposable" commodity; they should not be arbitrarily tossed aside

when retooling a school culture. One tool that administrators might find helpful in this

process is polarity management (Johnson, 1996). Administrators need to be able to tell if

the difficulty is a problem that can be solved or a polarity that needs to be managed.

Some challenges are polarities to manage, rather than problems to solve. Polarities are

"positive opposites"—both sides are good and necessary, but they are in contradiction at

times. Both are important and you can not have one over the other. Polarity management

involves moving from focusing on one pole as the problem and the other as the solution

(either/or thinking), to valuing both poles (both/and thinking). Good polarity

management gets the best of both poles while avoiding the limits of either. This study

indicated that trying to manage polarities like problems was a contributing factor to the

toxicity of the building. To avoid that occurrence in a building trying to retain the

existing staff would be advisable for the administrator to have a clear understanding of

how to use this tool.

Staff development should be designed to address the polarities that exist, along

with developing the professional skills that the staff needs to be effective in the

developing culture of the school. This study suggests that staff not provided with the

training and skills needed to be effective in the new culture can, and sometimes do,

sabotage the changes being made. It is important that staff participate in the appropriate

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staff developments. This study also suggests that staff unable to be successful in the new

school culture be transferred to a setting where they can achieve success.

Staff is Resistant to Change

While students may balk at changes being made, they are less resistant to change

than the staff. The implication here is that administrators need to be aware of the

dynamics of change, or of what Duck (2001) calls the "Change Monster." Resistance is

an inevitable part of the change process, and administrators need to know how to manage

that resistance.

Duck (2001) studied the change process and created a scope and sequence of the

events that occur during that process. It is suggested that at the beginning of the change

process a guideline for conduct be created that individuals are held to. By creating this

guideline up front, resistance is recognized and expectations for appropriate behaviors are

made clear.

A Positive School Culture increases Emotional Safety and Student Connectedness and

Impacts Student Learning

School culture directly impacts emotional safety, student connectedness, and

student learning. In a world of standards and accountability the social/emotional aspect

of students is being put on the back burner. This study suggests that a positive school

culture impacts the social/emotional state of students, causing a rise in academic success.

With this in mind, administrators need to develop a clear vision of what a positive school

culture is and understand the impact it has on student success.

With the fact that a positive school culture has a positive effect on students, it

would be suggested that there be a reference list created within districts to identify the

markers of a positive school culture. The markers would then in turn be used to evaluate the culture of a school and identify strengths and weaknesses. This data would be used to guide the school improvement plan.

A Healthy Culture Must Be Proactively Maintained

Complacency is the enemy of progress. In this study it was shown that complacency lead to toxicity. A positive school needs to be monitored for any "backsliding." Building administrators need to understand their role in maintaining a positive school culture. In order to do this an administrator needs to understand how a professional learning community operates and how to be a strong cultural leader.

This study suggests using a survey as a tool to keep track of the culture of the school. A survey would allow for a quick evaluation of the culture, which in turn would allow the administrator and staff to address any issues that are arising before they become problems.

Implications for Further Study

Given the importance and impact that positive school culture has on both students and staff, additional study in the field of the purposeful building of school culture is suggested. It was demonstrated in my background research for this study that most often the small items that create the culture of the school are not intentionally thought of and addressed by the staff. It would be a benefit to follow new schools that are being set up and observe their process for creating a positive school culture. How is a positive culture created and nurtured? What was the decision or action that became the starting point, and was the sequence of events that followed? How was it maintained?

Additionally studies on what contributes to a school culture becoming toxic could be performed. "How did we get to this point?' was a question asked by several of the participants. The participants were at a loss of how the school culture had begun to become toxic; they knew something was not right, but they did not understand what it was or how to address it.

Another item for study would be resistance and resiliency, that is, how to overcome the fear of change. Change is an inevitable part of education. The changes in Federal mandates, employment opportunities, community expectations, and the students themselves force schools to be able to adapt to meet different outcomes. If the fear of change causes resistance, thus interfering with the ability of the school to change, it would be wise to investigate how to create resiliency in staff in order to overcome the fear of change.

It is hoped that this case study on purposeful cultural changes at an alternative high school will provide other alternative school administrators with insight into this process. It is hoped that this case study contributes useful information to a limited field of study.

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Appendix A

CONSENT FORM

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
CONSENT FORM
CASE STUDY

Researcher: Synthia Parish-Duehn, Graduate Student in the Department of Educational
             Leadership

             Phone Number: (509)882-1305

<u>Researcher's statement</u>

I am asking you to be in a research study. The participation in this study is voluntary.
The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you
decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask
questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible
risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this
form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you
want to be in the study or not. This process is called 'informed consent.' I will give you
a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS

   This is a proposal for a qualitative case study concerned with the experience staff

involved with an alternative school that is being restructured. Research has established a

connection between the cultural system and successful educational settings. The lack of a

cultural system has also been shown to lead to toxic environments. The purposed study

examines the effects of purposeful change in the cultural system of an alternative school.

This study expands on a limited field of existing research.

   Participants may experience benefits by participating in this study. Participants might

experience a cathartic effect in being able to write about the school's history. Society

will gain an understanding of the impacts of purposeful change of the cultural system.

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PROCEDURES

Participants will complete an electronic journal over the course of an academic year. These journals will be used to create a portrait of an alternative school undergoing purposeful change of the school culture. The school leader will keep a journal that explains the changes in culture being made, along with the rationale behind the change. The researcher will assign the school staff a specific topic each week, this topic will be drawn from the school leader's journal. This response will take the form of responding to an open-ended question about cultural changes that the school leader has made, along with commentary about the changes. Participants will mail a printed copy of their electronic journals, (in a postage paid envelope provided to them by the researcher) to the researcher after school is out. The reason for receiving the printed copies of the journals via mail is to further protect the identity of the participants.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Participants might experience some emotional distress when writing about the status of the school from a historical perspective. Participants may withdraw from the research at anytime. Participants will be offered a debriefing upon the completion of the data collection.

OTHER INFORMATION

Participants may choose to opt out at anytime. Participants will be kept confidential by the use of a pseudonym. The use of an electronic journal, mailed to the researcher will reduce the risk of participant identification. The data will be kept for five years after the completion of the researcher's final study.

Printed name of researcher   Signature of researcher   Date

<u>Subject's statement</u>

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have general questions about the research, I can ask the researcher listed above. If I have questions regarding my rights as a participant, I can call the WSU Institutional Review Board at (509)335-9661. This project has been reviewed and approved for human participation by the WSU IRB. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____

Printed name of subject   Signature of subject   Date